

contingent, the “deflection” of colonial projects there occurs within a much more coherent architectural expression of domination. Crinson has nothing to say about the building of Empire in North America, Australia, and New Zealand, although I imagine that this might provide interesting parallels with the orientalist moment. For instance the climatic determinations claimed by Bishop Webber as significant in the choice of style for the Crimea Memorial Church were also crucial in the same Bishop’s brief for St John’s Cathedral in Brisbane. Though it would be unfair to blame Crinson for not extending his book, the absence of a contextualising chapter on other colonial spheres leaves the reader with some uncertainty. Is Crinson claiming particular conceptual importance for the colonial architecture of the Near East on account of Islam’s rival patrimony of the classical origins of architecture in the Mediterranean? Similarly, is he implying that the “informal” imperialism of Eastern Mediterranean through banking and trade concessions is a more convenient site to examine architectural ideology, or is it rather that this is a form of colonialism more like the problems which confront us in the twentieth century? Answers to such questions are beyond simple clarification. We must wait on further studies able to match and extend Crinson’s exemplary grasp of historical detail and his verve for argument.

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***The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle*, by Kelly Hurley. Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 8. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.**

The revival of the Gothic novel in late nineteenth-century Britain is a well-known datum of literary history, generally represented in critical accounts by reference to a handful of fictions such as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Dracula*. Kelly Hurley’s *The Gothic Body* makes clear the hitherto largely ignored extensiveness and popularity of the Gothic revival, bringing under serious critical consideration an impressive number of fascinating-sounding texts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by such relatively unfamiliar names as Arthur Machen, Richard Marsh and William Hope Hodgson, as well as treating the fictions of better known writers like Stevenson, Wells, Conan Doyle and Le Fanu. Hurley contends that the resurgence and modification of the Gothic after its virtual disappearance in the middle of the nineteenth century is explained by the genre’s capacity to negotiate anxieties about the nature of human identity generated by *fin-de-siècle* scientific discourses. Her organising principle for her investigations of these texts is “the abhuman,” a term she borrows from the horror writer William Hope Hodgson to denote the possibilities of “the ruination of traditional constructs of human identity” as autonomous and discrete and “the modeling of new ones” made available by developments in the biomedical and biological sciences (5). More graphic and visceral in its representations than before, the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic “manifests a new set of generic strategies . . . which function maximally to enact the defamiliarisation and

violent reconstitution of the human subject" (4). In these texts the human body is unstable, perennially liable to morphic disorganisation and reorganisation.

Hurley divides her argument into three sections, each oriented by a particular aspect of late nineteenth-century science, and each exploring the ideological effects of both scientific and fictional texts. "The Gothic Material World" traces the relation of Gothic representations to materialist sciences and philosophies which argued for the priority of matter over form, thus rendering attempts to stabilise the meaning of human identity provisional at best. Hurley considers the Gothic's preoccupation with "Thingness": the transformation of humans into nauseating and ineffable exemplars of the fluctuability of matter described by nineteenth-century biologists. "Gothic Bodies" situates Gothic fictions within a range of evolutionist discourses including Darwinism, criminal anthropology and theories of social and individual degeneration. Gothic writers' imaginative engagement with these discourses resulted in representations of the human body as always-already in a state of species indifferenciation, or undergoing metamorphoses into monstrously hybrid forms (slug-men, snake-women). "Gothic Sexualities" demonstrates how these texts, even as they were engaged in anxious attempts to maintain the binarism of gender, tended to "invert and more radically admix gender and sexual attributes within a variety of abhuman bodies," thus "exploding the construct of 'the human' from within" (11). In this way the Gothic is analogous to an emergent sexology "which could only identify a normative sexuality by itemising the numerous instances of 'perversion' against which it was defined" (11).

As Hurley points out, the concept of "the abhuman" resonates with Julia Kristeva's formulation of "abjection" in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Kristeva argues that the human subject is ambivalently caught between, on the one hand, the desire to maintain an autonomous and discrete identity and, on the other hand, acquiescence in events which cast the subject into an indifferenciation which may be nauseating but also an experience of *jouissance*. Hurley traces a similar ambivalence in the Gothic. She notes that the prefix "ab-" signals both a movement away from and a movement towards, both the loss of a known condition of being-human and the threat or promise of a new, unknown condition of being: the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic is "convulsed by nostalgia for the 'fully human' subject whose undoing it accomplishes so resolutely, and yet aroused by the prospect of a monstrous becoming" (4). The ambivalence of the Gothic is manifested in the affect of compounded nausea and pleasure which it characteristically generates, as Hurley deftly argues in her second chapter, utilising accounts both of contemporary reader response and of her own reactions to these texts.

Hurley's historicising argument is a sophisticated one. While she sees the late nineteenth-century Gothic as an attempt to manage the disturbing possibilities raised by science, she does not regard the genre as simply a symptom of a "general malaise occasioned by the sciences" (5). Attending in some detail to the rhetorical texture and affect of contemporary scientific writing, she also argues for the "gothicity" of science at this time, its "indebtedness, however subtle, to a 'Gothic sensibility' newly available in the nineteenth century despite the relative attenuation of the genre for fifty years" (6). Moreover, Hurley argues, the Gothic, which explicitly or implicitly works with the logics of science (for instance deploying Darwinian evolutionism to instate a "seemingly endless procession of admixed embodiments" [6]) should itself be regarded as "a fundamentally speculative, even theoretical, genre" (7). Hurley's insistence on the productiveness of the Gothic genre is extended in her contention that the juxtaposition

of *fin-de-siècle* fiction and postmodern theory may be of benefit to both. Thus she argues that while Kristeva can help make sense of abhuman representations, Kristeva's own putatively transhistorical model of the human subject and its potential abjection "could not have been conceived without benefit of *fin-de-siècle* models of the abhuman subject" (11). The correlation of late nineteenth-century and postmodern conceptions of the embodiment and subjectivity of abhumanness and abjection is perhaps made most arrestingly apparent in a discussion of the prevalence of slime in Gothic texts in the first section. Our contemporary horror texts—cinematic and novelistic—are also characterised by a superabundance of slime. The similarity indicates a continuity between Gothic texts of the two *fins-de-siècle*, something also gestured towards by Hurley in her reference in the introduction to the resonance of late nineteenth-century representations of the abhuman with contemporary representations of the "posthuman," a preoccupation of recent cinematic science fantasy, as well as a concern of cultural theorists like Donna Haraway. *The Gothic Body* should prove useful for those interested in investigating contemporary fantastic representations of the transfigured human body.

While Hurley's emphasis on the imbrication of turn-of-the-century Gothic with scientific discourse certainly seems merited by the textual evidence, perhaps some further consideration of the other cultural materials deployed in examples of the genre would have made for a more comprehensive account of its place in late-Victorian and Edwardian culture. As it is, while Hurley ranges across diverse scientific texts and offers extended close readings of several novels—H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* and *The Island of Dr Moreau*, Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* and Arthur Machen's *The Three Impostors*—her argument is rather repetitive, tracing the disintegration of bodily specificity and integrity several times over, reproducing at the level of analysis the iterative structure of the narratives, their "obsessive staging and restaging of the spectacle of abhumanness" (4). Hurley's introduction of the discourses of Orientalism and imperialism into her reading of *The Beetle*—a narrative centred around a malevolent Egyptian of ambiguous gender, sexuality and even species who intrudes upon contemporary London—indicates one aspect of what might have been politically at stake in individual texts' representations of the abhuman, beyond an anxiety over the desuetude of what Hurley perhaps too uncritically refers to as "human identity." As Judith Butler has pointed out in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* in a discussion of abjection rather different from that of Kristeva, the very definition of subjectivity or "human identity" always depends on the simultaneous constitution of "uninhabitable" zones of sociality: an abjected "outside" which produces a constitutive limit for subjectivity. In general, however, *The Gothic Body* offers a stimulating introduction to a body of literature on which I suspect other equally interesting work will be done in future.

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