

Posthuman Gothic

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Posthuman Gothic takes a critical look at how many forms of media reflect and discuss the changing concept of what it means to be ‘human’ in a post-modern society. It does so by showing modern portrayals of the ‘other’ such as monsters, werewolves, vampires, zombies, aliens, A.I. and animals. It builds upon the scholarship of Halberstam, Levingston, Wolfe, Hebrechter, Callus and Nayyar, taking the discussion to many forms of media and seeing new avenues of approach. It is textually engineered for specialists but even undergraduates can follow the arguments and discussions as most essays show how they are taking the topics from earlier scholarly starting points.

The tone of the book is set off in the beginning by Heis-von der Lippe’s allusion to *Frankenstein* (1818) as ‘both Gothic meta-text and emerging science fiction narrative:’ the book is a patchwork of the scientific and monstrous within and without, created largely by the angst of post-Enlightenment rationality. Perhaps it is fitting to begin with Shelley’s novel, which is alluded to throughout by many of the authors and the critics they cite. *Frankenstein*, born in that liminal state of dream-like waking, keeps a foot within both the gothic and scientific, the ghoul and the new Prometheus.

This collection of thirteen essays is made up of four sections. ‘Organic’ comprises three essays that examine the problematic nature of personal over collective identity, anthropological discourses in portrayals of utopian/dystopian narratives and economic ideologies. Michael Sean Bolton’s chapter shows the liminal category of what constitutes human identity and essence,

complicating discourses on individuality or group identification. It looks at the role of humanism and the scientist's manipulation of biology as problematic in the portrayal of the zombie in film and books. Antonia Perikou's chapter builds upon the individual to look at how the gothic posthuman can elucidate problems on a societal and anthropological scale present in Atwood's *MaddAddam* (2003-13) trilogy. Lar Schmeink's chapter continues these debates to an extent but gives a strong interpretation of how the vampire's status can be viewed as a critical look at fascism, consumerism and capitalism in that most essential fluid: blood.

'Undead' may hint to a binary opposition but it is precisely by the 'undead' that the 'organic' sees its discursive reflection. It comprises four essays that further delineate the problematic nature of humanism as tied to narratology, social norms of bonding, and authoritative discourses of patriarchy. Chris Koenig-Woodyard's chapter looks at the scenario of the replacement of humanity and role-reversal in Richard Matheson's *I am Legend* (1954) through textual constructs of rhetoric (chiasmus), ellipsis, the role of letters, books and etymology to question ontological boundaries. In Chapter 5, Erica McCrystal looks at the role of the opposite scenario in *True Blood* (2008-14): a posthuman utopia exemplified through the role of hospitality through a sharing of domestic space, ritual and even blood between people and other creatures such as vampires and fairies. Maria Alberto takes a further look at the role of language and appearance in *In the Flesh* (2013-14) as an ideological construct to police normality and identity in a world threatened by both zombies and former zombies. In Chapter 7, Maria Marino-Faza looks at the role of the doppelganger in *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-17) through the characters of Elena Gilbert and Katherine Piers to show the blending of stereotypical female roles in a patriarchal construct. She also ties this to the culture industry, connecting these patriarchal constructs to consumerism and the concept of eternal youth.

Part three, 'Evolving,' continues this theme by looking closely at the ramifications of Gothic posthumanism for the female body and identity. In Chapter 8, Ashman and Taylor examine the binary roles of the noble savage/humanoid and civilization/animality in two female protagonists, Tui and Robin, in the TV series *Top of the Lake* (2013-2014), who slowly undermine patriarchal, colonial narratives in the backdrop of society in an all-women commune called 'Paradise.' In Chapter 9, Dawn Stobbart looks at how the video game series *Portal* (2007) and *Portal 2* (2011) portray both patriarchal narratives, gamer 1st person play, and female self-

surveillance. The essay also addresses the body/soul dichotomy of female identity in the hybrid computer/human consciousness character of GLaDOS and her interaction with female protagonist, Chell, through traditional Gothic tropes. Donna Mitchell looks at the role of patriarchal discourses, genetic manipulation, body identity and female self-surveillance in *Only Ever Yours* (2015) and the Shelleyan hypertext *Patchwork Girl* (1995) through the characters of Freida and Everywoman respectively, as they grapple with their identity as tied to their bodies.

The final section, 'Reimagined', contends to take the discussion beyond its present discursive borders and bodies by new looking anew at narratives of reproduced reality, space, cyberspace, and transhumanism. In Chapter 11, Dennis Yao examines the "planes of reality divided by a screen" (201) in *The Truman Show* (1998), calling into question authenticity, virtual existence and the inversion of the Gothic monster in the character, Truman. Evan Hayles Gledhill offers insight on how the cyborg and alien are used in *Star Trek* (1996-) and the *Alien* (1979-2017) films to narratively protect the idea of humanism and fear of hyper-rationality and sensuality. Apasia Stephanou offers a new take on how to approach posthumanism, Prometheanism, transhumanism and the advancement of technology, arguing for a progressive politics to counteract possible neo-liberal dominance of discourse and material itself. It looks at the inherent analogy of body and machine in comparison to new technologies, which on a second look, can be viewed as extensions of the natural world as is portrayed in many books, films and video games. There is no inherent need to deny one at the expense of the other, or "Other."

Posthuman Gothic is a book full of prefixes, hyphens, suffixes attached to the concept and noun 'human', adding and/or subtracting to its humanist conception like a discursive prosthetic to help an ideology gain a hold. Like Victor's creature, they reflect the angst of the changing discourse of ontology stitched/being slowly unstitched to the word 'human.' It is the role of the adjective and genre 'Gothic' that animates the discussions throughout or exists as a ghost in the machine that will not let any ontological construct rest, a latent virus neither dead nor living that makes itself known under the right conditions of knowing something is not right with us. This book is a black mirror where Victor, author, gamer and reader look within and sees the Monster in their reflection.