

Gothic Things: Dark Enchantment and Anthropocene Anxiety* by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock*New York: Fordham University Press (2023)****ISBN 978-1-5315-0342-0****£25.99****Aoife Sutton-Butler**

The Gothic genre and culture seem to be as popular now in the 21st century as its inception in the 18th century. With a recognisable aesthetic, the genre often elicits feelings of dread, anxiety, and can be unsettling to enthusiastic consumers of Gothic content. *Gothic Things: Dark Enchantment and Anthropocene Anxiety* by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (2023) lends its attention to the exploration of the Gothic genre, with a narrative focusing on the ‘role of the human amid a universe of uncanny things’ (Weinstock 2023: 14). Weinstock considers ‘Thing Theory’ – i.e., contemporary theoretical approaches such as New Materialism – in his approach to Gothic materiality. That is not to say that Weinstock defends ‘Thing Theory’ or tries to adopt such frameworks, but rather uses them to discuss the Gothic and the role of objects, the body, and the relationship between them. The Gothic, according to the author, has been making the same claims since well before ‘Thing Theory’. Despite the academic tone of the book, an excellent introduction allows the reader to get to grips with the preface of the book and creates groundwork that enriches the subsequent chapters.

Early in the text, Weinstock outlines the Gothic ‘formula’ that exists in the genre, which has been previously outlined by Sedgwick (1986) and Groom (2012). Allowing for an ‘atmosphere of dread’ (Weinstock 1), the obscurities listed are meteorological events (mist, storms, darkness, gloominess, fog), topography (forests, mountains, chasms etc.),

architectural features (such as castles, tombs, crypts, mazes), materials (i.e., masks, veils, tapestries), text (folklore, inscriptions, stories, riddles), spiritual features (magic, occult, witchcraft, ritual, religion), and a psychological element (such as dreams, hallucinations, ghostly presences, death, hauntings). These obscurities are woven throughout the discussion by Weinstock in considering the role of matter in the Gothic, and how it relates to the human experience.

The book comprises of six chapters, as well as an introduction and epilogue entitled 'The Ominous Matter of One's Ordinary Life'. Chapter 1: Gothic Thing Theory explores the Gothic rhetoric of so called 'Thing Theory'. Weinstock discusses the 'three master tropes' of the discourse on the Gothic – including spectrality, monstrosity, and apocalypse (Weinstock 20). The objects from 'Thing Theory' are interacted with by human bodies, with those bodies in some instances becoming objects themselves. The author argues that the Gothic is all about embodiment and materiality.

Chapter 2: Dark Enchantment and Gothic Materialism considers the enchantment narrative in the Gothic suggested by Nelson (2001) and Saler (2012). The author goes on to discuss three categories of Gothic objects: cursed objects (e.g. the cursed Aztec gold from *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (Verbinski 2003)), conduits (e.g. the Ouija board in *Paranormal Activity* (Peli 2009)), and inspirited (e.g. the one ring from *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 1954)), before looking to the work of David Lynch and Stephen King as larger case studies.

Chapter 3: Body-as-Thing explores the centrality of the human body as thing in the Gothic. Weinstock emphasises that frequently in the Gothic, the body is put into positions of danger, and that often the 'body-as-thing' category means human bodies are treated as tools or

vessels. Transformation also exists in the Gothic, with the body sometimes being transformed into 'thing'. Weinstock gives the example of Victor Frankenstein, who collected materials from 'the dissecting room and slaughterhouse' to create the living monster (Weinstock 77). The body also becomes 'thing' in its loss of control in examples of possession – here, the example of Regan in *The Exorcist* (Blatty 1971) is discussed by the author, including how her identity is essentially erased by the demon Pazuzu.

Chapter 4: Thing-as-Body considers animate representations of the body. Zombies, for example, are considered animate objects by the author, as they are corpses with uncanny life. Here, one could consider the discussion of personhood attached to the dead body, and whether we can *actually* consider the reanimated corpse as object. However, Weinstock also discusses reanimated objects such as dolls and puppets, and the 'haunted' moving portraits found in Disney's Haunted Mansion.

Chapter 5: Book: How to Do Things with Words discusses the book as another class of object in the Gothic genre, including manuscripts, grimoires, spell books, scrolls etc. One famous example the author discusses is the Sanderson Sisters' spell book from *Hocus Pocus* (Ortega 1993). The 'living book' is often present in the genre, with the Sanderson sisters' spell book needing to be roused from sleep with an eye on the cover, similar to the Monster Book of Monsters from *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling 1999) which needs its spine stroked to open.

Chapter 6: Building: Bigger on the Inside allows the author to shift his attention from bodies and objects to buildings, considering the space that creates haunting conditions. Weinstock does not just examine the ghost present in the house, but rather the scale, architectural features, and the often-traumatic history that comes with such buildings. Some famous

examples discussed by the author include the Overlook Hotel from *The Shining* (King 1977), and the cabin from *The Evil Dead* (Raimi 1981). These examples provide different scales but still a 'haunted' settings, nonetheless.

Finally, Weinstock concludes by stating that the Gothic shows us 'the thing-power and place-power of the world' (Weinstock 171). Ominous matter associated with the genre allows for a powerful response from the human consumer. This book can be considered an essential read for those interested in the Gothic genre, allowing for an examination of when objects become animate and when humans become decentred by external forces. The Gothic is all about unsettlement and human anxieties, and the inclusion of contemporary examples by Weinstock allows this to be illustrated vividly. This book is particularly successful in considering the nonhuman elements in the Gothic genre, and the importance of 'thing' equally to 'human'. Due to the rich content and intellectual rigour, it would be especially useful for post-graduate and post- doctoral research of the Gothic genre (in film, literature, art etc.) and those studying New Materialist approaches.