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The Animal Within: Masculinity and the Gothic

Cyndy Hendershot

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As Cyndy Hendershot demonstrates, the Gothic is more a mode than a rigid historical period, an "invasive" tendency that reveals the imaginative limits of social realities and literary techniques far beyond its origins in late eighteenth century Britain. And as she demonstrates in this first scholarly treatment of its kind, one of the continuing obsessions of the Gothic mode is masculinity. Masculinity is in some sense a Gothic castle of the imagination, haunted by fears of the body, science, and angry colonial subjects.
The book's keen critical insight, meticulous close readings and cross-cultural comparisons interrogate the historically situated function of masculinity in texts and films that range across the two-hundred year history of the Gothic. Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* is compared to Philip Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* to reveal the "hauntedness" of the male body. Hawthorne's short story "The Birthmark" is juxtaposed with J. S. Le Fanu's "Green Tea" to ground the fantastic qualities of the scientific imagination. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* converses with Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* about the nature of imperialism. And Jane Campion's film *The Piano* is figured as an imaginative foray into new forms of masculinity. Utilizing the insights of Lacanian theory, Hendershot demonstrates how the Gothic realm of ghosts, demons, and hidden passages continues to suggest alternative realities to claustrophobic cultural imaginations.
"*Masculinity and the Gothic* combines solid literary critical insight and close readings in a detailed and lively survey of various manifestations of the gothic within British and American cultural traditions, and admirably explores the connections between various cultural discourses. It will make a fine complement to the numerous recent publications of issues of femininity in the gothic." --Sharon Willis, University of Rochester
Cyndy Hendershot is Assistant Professor of English, Arkansas State University.

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