

Renee Fox, *The Necromantics: Reanimation, The Historical Imagination, and Victorian British and Irish Literature*. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2023. x+ 267 pp. ISBN 9780814215494

The Victorian imagination, replete with its intellectual fervour and curiosity, often displays in its representative writings a desire to explore the subject of human beings who are capable of unending possibilities but, unfortunately, circumscribed by their own mortality. *The Necromantics* by Renee Fox, in this respect, is an interesting comprehensive examination of some major Victorian texts, and the concomitant political and aesthetic contexts, of Irish literature, construed as a companion to, rather than a derivative tradition from, the British canon. The book brings to the forefront the invention and usage of electricity not simply as a convenience but rather as a metaphor (according to the author) so as to inspect with a theoretical lens notions related to science, body, mankind, and the oppression of nature due to the technological advancements of the time. The concept of the over-reacher resonates in the reader's mind as one is reminded of the Victorians' widespread and optimistic curiosity in search of tools and knowledge that can offer a possibility of overcoming death. This point gets further supported from the beginning of the book by the author's delving into the history of this 'galvanic power' (Fox 2) and its effect on literary imagination. Here, reanimation becomes a methodological reading tool to make the past relevant for the present.

The book is divided into five chapters along with an Introduction and Epilogue, and uses the perspective of nineteenth-century Gothic and Victorian prose and poetry to investigate a historical imagination that can shed light on contemporary vulnerabilities and sensibilities as well. Even if the book uses English textual references, Fox points out that "the dead body of the Irish nation lies buried at its center" (3). Through its study of selected Irish texts, the book negotiates the particular genre through a detailed investigation of the Irish past through an imperial lens, decoding and reinvigorating the history and the political forces that shaped it. The introduction gives a holistic view of the historical context and draws attention to Lady Wilde's statement that writers have resuscitative powers. Accordingly, the author thus declares that her book is "preoccupied with the possibilities and perils of bringing the dead to life" (4) and this, according to her, is the genre of necromantic literature. Fox also cites Standish O'Grady's *History of Ireland* (1878-81) as a connection between the English and Irish necromantic imaginations. His book remains a model for Fox for reading the nineteenth-century resuscitative imagination as she highlights "...his practice of looking forward from England to Ireland and backward from Ireland to England, arguing that the Irish Literary Revival is both the apotheosis of 19th century necromantic literature and the critical origin point ...that shaped necromantic literature" (23).

Each chapter records a different feature of necromancy, tracing its historical growth and, with the analysis of selected prose and poetry, attempts to make the past pertinent to the present. Each explores a major writer and scrutinizes the concept of reanimation in accordance with contemporary critical methodology. It is a bold attempt on the part of the author to analyse major writers on whom much research already exists. Prominent authors like Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*), Charles Dickens (*Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*), Robert Browning (*The Ring and the Book*), W. B. Yeats (*The Wanderings of Oisín*), and Bram Stoker (*The Jewel of Seven Stars*) are part of this study. Nevertheless, this book does bring in a fresh perspective and provides the readers with an exciting involvement with the serious political and aesthetic debates across the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The cultural myth of reanimation that *Frankenstein* has come to stand in for becomes a major archetype in this study and the author analyses and explores important concepts like resuscitation, revival and reanimation to understand modernity's relationship to them, and sees *Frankenstein* and

Dracula as foundational necromantic texts. Interestingly, the epilogue looks at the afterlives (in the form of zombies, mummies and vampires) that contemporary writers have imagined of the canonical nineteenth-century novels and reaffirms the fact that literature has resuscitative powers.

The book presents an engaging discussion wherein readings of necromantic literature can offer culturally transformative experiences. The author is also inspired by Rita Felski's 'postcritical'/ reflective reading that brings in a vibrant interaction between reader and text. Reading, hence, becomes a process of creative remaking and can liberate these nineteenth-century texts from being confined to a particular history and circumstance. There is much emphasis on the revival of the Irish past and on Irish literature as a canon on its own rather than as a branch of the British canon. Fox argues that the reanimated characters of late nineteenth-century Irish writing explore a systemic necromantic impulse threading its way from British Romanticism to Victorian realism. The study also distinguishes between necromantic stories and ghost stories and states that they do not operate as synonyms for one another. Moreover, the Irish writers taken for study postdate the English writers but as Fox reminds her readers, the English writers analysed in the first three chapters are studied for the sake of creating an Irish national mythos, and ultimately so that she can deploy Yeats and Stoker in her last two chapters to explore a historical imagination more central to the Irish tradition. Issues of gender are not central to the book, but many re-readings expose and unsettle the assumptions about masculine power. The book is theoretically sound and thorough in its coverage of secondary references. Thus it is an invaluable addition to scholarly studies in this genre and will be of value for both research and teaching.

Neepa Sarkar