



Murdering to Dissect: Graverobbing, Frankenstein, and the Anatomy Literature

Tim Marshall

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When "Frankenstein" appeared in 1818 it was well known that the medical profession lent silent support to the grave-robbing gangs who regularly sold the surgeons newly-buried bodies for dissection. This "resurrection trade" led to the sensational Burke and Hare case, which revealed that the bodies of murder victims had been passed to the Edinburgh surgeon Dr Robert Knox with his connivance. This work demonstrates that the third edition of "Frankenstein", appearing in 1831, acquires a remarkable range of new meanings from these developments. Marshall's particular historical focus is the Anatomy Act of 1832, which ended the grave-robbing trade by permitting the use of unclaimed pauper bodies for dissection. He argues that "Frankenstein" and the Anatomy Act can be seen as twins, one in the world of the imagination, the other in the realms of legislation. "Frankenstein" and a range of affiliated literature is read alongside accounts of medical, legal and political/social history. Drawing on work by Ruth Richardson, Elias Canetti and Karl Polyani, Marshall assembles the early-19th century's fictional commentary on the changing and troubled status of the medical profession.

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