



Human Remains: Dissection and Its Histories

Helen MacDonald

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Until 1832, when an Act of Parliament began to regulate the use of bodies for anatomy in Britain, public dissection was regularly-and legally-carried out on the bodies of murderers, and a shortage of cadavers gave rise to the infamous murders committed by Burke and Hare to supply dissection subjects to Dr. Robert Knox, the anatomist. This book tells the scandalous story of how medical men obtained the corpses upon which they worked before the use of human remains was regulated. Helen MacDonald looks particularly at the activities of British surgeons in nineteenth-century Van Diemen's Land, a penal colony in which a ready supply of bodies was available. Not only convicted murderers, but also Aborigines and the unfortunate poor who died in hospitals were routinely turned over to the surgeons. This sensitive but searing account shows how abuses happen even within the conventions adopted by civilized societies. It reveals how, from Burke and Hare to today's televised dissections by German anatomist Dr. Gunther von Hagens, some people's bodies become other people's entertainment.

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