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F. Gonzalez-Crussi

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F. Gonzalez-Crussi : The Day of the Dead: And Other Mortal Reflections 1st edition by Gonzalez-Crussi, Frank (1993) Hardcover before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Day of the Dead: And Other Mortal Reflections 1st edition by Gonzalez-Crussi, Frank (1993) Hardcover:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Wide-ranging and learned essays on the subject of death By R. M. Peterson Frank Gonzalez-Crussi is a pathologist and a professor of pathology in Chicago. He also has written at least ten books, one of which is this collection of six essays on death. The book was prompted by a BBC documentary film that was centered on the work of Gonzalez-Crussi as a pathologist. Among the scenes were a visit to a funeral home in working-class Chicago, the observance of El Dia de los Muertos in Mexico City (from where Gonzalez-Crussi hails), and the autopsy of a nine-year-old boy who had contracted AIDS across the placenta from his drug-addicted mother. Off and on Gonzalez-Crussi reports on aspects of the filmmaking, but for the most part the essays consist of rather scholarly meditations on the subject of death, drawing on a variety of perspectives: medical/pathological, historical, literary, cultural, and philosophical. Among the matters discussed at some length are the saga of the corpse of Eva Peron, calavera (the smirking skeletons of Mexican folk art), the Aztec practice of human sacrifice and the beliefs underlying it, the misnomer embedded in the last word of the phrase "cardio-pulmonary resuscitation", and the dance macabre. It is a wide-ranging and erudite book and, of course, a rather sobering one. Initially, the writing came across as somewhat stilted, in part because Gonzalez-Crussi is fond of using fifty-cent words (for example, "the

caudacity of life", "cadaveric lividities", and "kermis-like"). I soon became accustomed to the moderately florid style, however, and well before the end I no longer found it off-putting. I even welcomed the occasional trips to the dictionary, since the esoteric words were almost always so apt. Strange as it might seem, I enjoyed THE DAY OF THE DEAD. And what is the purpose of the subtitle "and Other Mortal Reflections"? To acknowledge, I think, the paradox embodied in the book. "It is impossible for death to be the object of a thinking subject, since a thinking subject is always a living subject. * * * If the paradoxes of the Eleatics were like coiled snakes that bit their own tail in closing a circular loop, death is the loop of a scorpion's tail, which turns back to destroy the thinking subject that posits it." 3 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Interesting stories, banal reflections
By Harry Eagar
There are some interesting stories in "The Day of the Dead," but I almost didn't get to them. The writing is so affectedly literary and clunky that at page 15 I was debating whether to continue. I am moderately glad to have pressed on. The framework concerns a BBC documentary about dead people in which Frank Gonzalez-Crussi, a Chicago pathologist born in Mexico, was a participant. Each essay was set off by an episode in the filming, but the book is not about the documentary. A Mexican was a natural subject, since that country's attitude toward the dead is distinctive. The Day of the Dead (All Soul's Day) has a long European heritage, but nowhere today is it marked with such vigor as in Mexico. Each essay is marked by Gonzalez-Crussi's ruminations about the mystery and permanence of death, and these are banal. The stories, though, are baroque and fascinating. And true. In the first, a president of Argentina is tortured to death to make him reveal the whereabouts of the embalmed corpse of Eva Peron. The second explains how Aztecs ripped out hearts from living victims. The third reviews the history of anatomical specimens. The fourth, and most interesting, sends 9-year-old Gonzalez-Crussi on a school field trip to view the rotting body of a small child. The fifth recounts the autopsy of a child who died of AIDS, and the nervousness of the participants. This one resonated deeply with me, since the week I read it our esteemed county medical examiner died of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (which in our obituary we delicately did not call mad cow disease), which he possibly got while doing an autopsy. Despite agitation to the contrary, AIDS is not the trivial infection some would have, and concerns about inadvertent transmission have not been misplaced. On the other hand, the courage of medical professionals should not be scouted, and Gonzalez-Crussi gives a good discussion of the moral, as well as mortal, reflections of encounters with implacable diseases. Regrettably, he follows with a last essay about death and the visual arts that is not merely banal but misinformed. He contends that "works of art never instantiate the aesthetics of death. Works of art are rather the exclusion of death. For art truly to represent death, it would have to include death's reality as part and parcel of the work." I don't understand what that means, but death as reality in art was demonstrated at a Berlin gallery a few years ago. A woman jumped off the building and landed at the entrance. Art aficionados stepped nonchalantly around her corpse, under the impression that it was part of the "installation," although one wonders if they were not surprised by the attention to detail, so unusual in modern art.