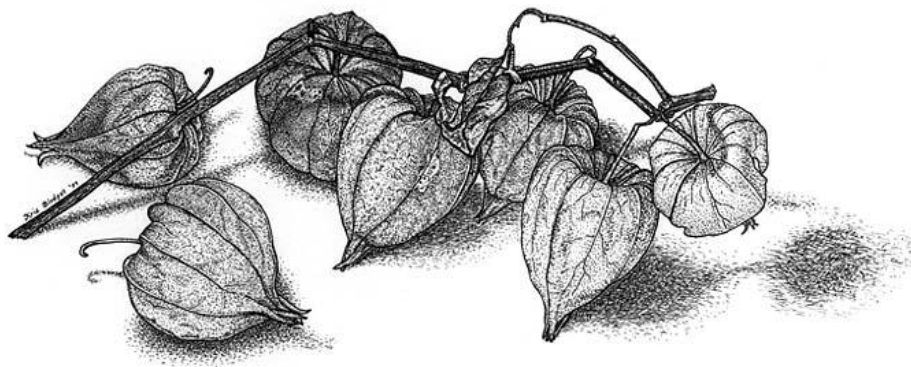


# **GOTHIC NATURE II: NEW DIRECTIONS IN ECOHORROR AND THE ECOGOTHIC**

## **Journal Launch and Symposium**

The University of Roehampton, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019



## **ABSTRACTS AND BIOS**

### **KEYNOTE**

**Andrew Smith**

Abstract: 'Arthur Machen's Gothic Ecologies'

This paper begins by examining how Machen's liminal landscapes, caught between the modern and the pagan, correspond to Heidegger's notion of 'dwelling' and Timothy's Morton's model of 'environmentality', which sees place as freighted by ideas of becoming. Machen's landscapes are in a state of flux, as witnessed by the different representations of wood in *A Fragment of Life* (1904), but he also asks questions about what it means to be a person (notably in *The Great God Pan* [1894]). Machen's First World War writings, 'The Bowman' (1914), *The Great Return* (1915), and *The Terror* (1917), bring together a view of the environment and metaphysics. These later texts articulate a vegetarian sensibility in which people are seen as meat (often by other animals) which suggests that how the human 'dwells' in the world needs to be radically revised. The paper explores Machen as a test case for current ecocritical thinking.

### Biography:

Andrew Smith is Professor of Nineteenth-Century English Literature at the University of Sheffield. His 20 published books include *Gothic Death 1740-1914: A Literary History* (2016), *The Ghost Story 1840-1920: A Cultural History* (2010), *Gothic Literature* (2007, revised 2013), *Victorian Demons* (2004) and *Gothic Radicalism* (2000). He is the co-editor, with William Hughes, of *EcoGothic* (2013). With Benjamin Fisher he edits the award winning series 'Gothic Literary Studies' and 'Gothic Authors: Critical Revisions', published by the University of Wales Press. He is a past president of the International Gothic Association.

## PANEL 1

### Anna Kirsch

#### Abstract: 'The Ghost Animal as Environmental Imagination: The Return of the Gothic Wild in Tana French's *In the Woods* and *Broken Harbor*'

This paper examines the gothic wild Tana French's crime novels *In the Woods* and *Broken Harbor*. It analyzes French's deployment of spectral animal encounters to illuminate how these encounters shape their narratives by exploring the boundaries between the genre conventions of the police procedural and a more speculative gothic mode of narrative. This paper asks how the presence, or absence, of the non-human within narrative fuels an environmental imagination prompting new interpretations of human/nature relations and the return of a speculative, slightly gothic nature. Nature here being just a bit gothic and dark waving between being and becoming- a reality that is not always direct and explicable.

Although French fulfils the crime writer's bargain by providing solutions to her murders, she simultaneously leaves things, like the panther-like animal which stalks *In the Woods* and the animal infestation that provoked homicide in *Broken Harbor*, as unexplained spectral influences, an expected hallmark of the gothic genre which has always acknowledged the deep uncanniness of nature. French uses the spectral animal to signal the blending between crime fiction and the gothic genre as well as the categories nature and culture.

By expanding Timothy Morton's interpretation of spectrality as an expression of the non-human as well as the non-human within humanity from his book *HumanKind: Solidarity with Non-Human People* as well as Stacy Alaimo's exploration of alternative versions of the home in *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* the paper considers the ghost animal as an entity in its own right as well as a symbolic psychological metaphor for ecological and economic anxiety. It considers how the space of the home can be redefined as a living interface containing human and non-human and how the ghost animal is a symbolic representation of the fear of the unknown that blending the categories nature and culture produces.

### Biography:

Anna Kirsch completed her English Studies MA at Durham University and is currently continuing her Ph.D. studies supervised by Professor Timothy Clark and Dr Samuel

Thomas. Her work focuses on environmental ethics and morality in genre fiction, and more specifically, crime fiction. Additionally, she has served as story consultant on three environmental documentaries: *Trading on Thin Air*, *Breath of Life*, and *Living in the Future's Past*. *Living in the Future's Past* was produced and narrated by Academy Award Winner Jeff Bridges.

## Jimmy Packham

Abstract: "So Human in Sound, So Devilish in Suggestion": Parleying with Panthers in American frontier Gothic

At the end of Ambrose Bierce's 'were-panther' tale, 'The Eyes of the Panther' (1892), a character thinks he hears 'the wild, high scream of the panther, so human in sound, so devilish in suggestion'. In the midst of the wilderness somewhere in eastern Pennsylvania, Charles Brockden Brown's Edgar Huntly encounters a panther who utters a cry 'which, by its resemblance to the human voice, is peculiarly terrific' and 'denote[s] him to be the most ferocious and untamable of that detested race'. In William Gilmore Simms' *The Cub of the Panther* (1869), Rose Carter—unmarried, pregnant, and fleeing across the mountain wilderness—hears 'a cry like that of a child, suffering from pain and crying faintly in its sleep [...]. It is the cry of the voracious cougar'. In Anglo-American frontier Gothic fiction, the panther inhabits a conspicuous position, metonymically evoking the terror of the alien and alienating American wilderness: it is, as Matthew Wynn Sivils notes, 'a demon that must be exorcised'. But, at the same time, the trope of its strangely human cry places it in eerie proximity to the human, collapsing the distance and difference between human and the nonhuman world.

This paper explores the role of the voice of the panther—as metonymic 'voice' of a hostile natural world and strange simulacrum of the human—in American ecoGothic narratives. It argues that the panther simultaneously stands in as the mouthpiece for the threatening Gothic utterances pervading America's howling wilderness and suggests the extent to which the human is implicated within this very threat, inextricably bound up with a threatening nonhuman world that is notionally figured as external. The panther begins to encroach on, and undermine, the linguistic authority of the human, and to trouble notions of an exclusively human subjectivity. Further, to think of a linguistic bridging between the human and nonhuman is to suggest, in the context of Anglo-American expansionist ideologies, the prospect both of communion with and loss of authority over a natural world that is notionally tameable and up-for-grabs.

## Biography:

Jimmy Packham is a lecturer in English at the University of Birmingham, where he specialises in the Gothic and nineteenth-century literature. He is currently completing a monograph on Gothic voices in nineteenth-century American literature, which argues for the importance of attending to the numerous haunted utterances emanating from the pages of America's Gothic fiction, for their work in troubling conceptions of American subjectivities and their very vocal contestation of national narratives and ideas of nationhood. The book includes a focus on the voices of the dead, dying, and nonhuman that are heard at the American frontier, on the southern plantation, and on the Civil War battlefield.

## Kevin Corstorphine

Abstract: “Don’t be a Zombie”: Deep Ecology and Zombie Misanthropy’

This paper examines the ways in which the Gothic imagination has been used to convey the message of environmentalism, looking specifically at attempts to curb population growth, such as the video ‘Zombie Overpopulation,’ produced by Population Matters, and the history of such thought, from Thomas Malthus onwards. Through an analysis of horror fiction, including the writing of the notoriously misanthropic H.P. Lovecraft, it questions if it is possible to develop an aesthetics and attitude of environmental conservation that does not have to resort to a Gothic vision of fear and loathing of humankind. It draws on the ideas of Timothy Morton, particularly *Dark Ecology* (2016), to contend with the very real possibility of falling into nihilism and hopelessness in the face of the destruction of the natural world, and the liability of the human race, despite individual efforts towards co-existence. It examines cases of such despair, such as the diaries of Columbine shooter Eric Harris, whose extreme contempt for humanity spilled over into deadly violence. Lovecraft writes in ‘The Call of Cthulhu’ (1928) of a ‘bland optimism’ as the only alternative to nihilistic horror in the face of forces larger than ourselves, in this paper referring to humanity as a whole. Pointing to Morton, and to Donna Haraway’s notion of the ‘Cthuluscene,’ this argues that radical empathy and shared kinship might instead point the way towards the urgent change that is needed. Here I focus on whether or not the language and conventions of the Gothic might be useful in articulating the possibilities of such change.

### Biography

Dr Kevin Corstorphine is Lecturer in American Literature at the University of Hull. He has published on Gothic and horror authors including Ambrose Bierce, H.P. Lovecraft, Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch, Shirley Jackson and Stephen King. His interests focus on space and place, including haunted houses, gendered and racialised spaces, memory, trauma, and the repressed. He convenes a module on American Gothic at Hull which examines the relationship between American national identity and the Gothic imagination. Together with Laura Kremmel, he is the editor of *The Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature* (2018).

## PANEL 2

## Michael Wheatley

Abstract: ‘Conceptualising the ecoWeird’

In anticipation of my PhD thesis, ‘EcoWeird: An Ecocritical Re-evaluation of Weird Fiction’, this paper introduces the theoretical background and framework of the ecoWeird. A new generic term to encompass the corpus of ecologically-minded Weird fiction, the ecoWeird draws upon Timothy Morton’s dark ecology to argue that the Weird historically dismantles ecological boundaries and reflects contemporary ecocritical concerns.

Specifically, the ecoWeird can be divided into three waves: the Old Weird (1890s-1930s), the Mid Weird (1950s-1960s) and the New Weird (1990s-). The fiction of each of these movements engages with unique ecological anxieties, such as Darwinism during the Old Weird or climate crisis in New Weird writing. Yet, as an inherently intertextual mode, ecoWeird texts also provide ample conversations across these periods. As an example, the Old Weird author Algernon Blackwood anticipates many of the discussions surrounding nonhuman agency found in the works of the New Weird author, Jeff VanderMeer.

First, this paper introduces the theoretical basis of the ecoWeird alongside its key concepts. These concepts include hybridity (the blurring of human/nonhuman distinctions) and ecological liminal spaces (environments where the human and the nonhuman are brought into close, uncertain contact with one another). Then considering notable texts, this paper highlights the development of these concepts through each of the aforementioned periods. Example works include *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* (1912) by Algernon Blackwood, *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) by John Wyndham and *Annihilation* (2014) by Jeff VanderMeer.

Employing Morton's dark ecological theory alongside primary source material, this paper endeavours to reframe the Weird as a distinctly ecological genre. In doing so, it hopes to shift critical discussion of the Weird towards theories of ecocriticism, evidence the potential of the Weird in addressing ecological crises and open up a new avenue of consideration for ecohorror.

### Biography:

Michael Wheatley is an MA student in Creative Writing at Royal Holloway, University of London. His PhD, 'EcoWeird: An Ecocritical Re-evaluation of Weird Fiction', will reconsider the Weird as an ecological mode. His debut collection of short stories, *The Writers' Block*, is published by Black Pear Press.

### **Chloé Germaine Buckley**

#### Abstract: '(Un)natural Ecologies: Weird Worlding, Precarity and Care in Children's and Young Adult Fiction'

Where ecocriticism meets the gothic there emerges the acknowledgment of the weirdness and fragility of planetary ecology. The term 'anthropocene' incites terror because of the simultaneous realisation of humankind's geological-scale impact with our evident inability to comprehend and control complex planetary systems. Simon Estok (2018) has identified one response to the anthropocene as "ecophobia"—a fear of "nature" that pervades fiction, news media, political discourse and theory. An alternative response is a paternalistic ethics of posterity that construes "nature" as an idealised category and an object of care, akin to the child itself with whom it shares a discursive history. Both responses to the Anthropocene have, in different ways, constrained our understanding of the climate crisis and offered limited parameters for action. Recent children's fiction intervenes in these debates, deploying the gothic and the weird to negotiate ecophobia and suggest alternative ethics that figure children as agents entangled in a complex natureculture. These fictions recognize that precarity is the prevailing condition for biological and social life. They imagine broken or fractured landscapes that elicit terror and dread. However, such emotions do not signal ecophobia, but result from the

necessary movement to traverse entrenched dualisms in western thought. The movement renders the planet *unheimliche* (Spivak, 2003), a system of profoundly unnatural ecologies that unhouse or reorient the human. This paper considers two texts, Sam Gayton's *The Last Zoo* (2019) and Kieran Larwood's *The Legend of Podkin One Ear* (2016), both of which weave myth, gothic, and the weird into radical ecologies. Larwood's book removes humans altogether, rewriting Anglo-Saxon myth in a damaged woodland landscape populated by animals. Larwood develops earthy connections between critters that exemplify what Haraway describes as the "chthulucene" (2016). Alternatively, *The Last Zoo* looks to Haraway's "sky gods", developing an ecology of celestial creatures in a weird reimagining of the ark story. Human children are centre stage, operating a planet-wide rescue mission from the ground zero of a "reality bomb". In both texts, unnatural ecologies elucidate a relational ontoethics of care founded on a primordial relationship with alterity.

### Biography:

Chloé is a senior lecturer at Man Met where she teaches and researches the gothic, the Weird and children's fiction. Her first book proposes a nomadic paradigm to read contemporary children's gothic. She is working on a second monograph that explores the intersection between Fantastika, science and philosophy in children's and YA literatures. As a member of the Manchester Centre for Youth Studies, Chloé organises YA book clubs and is developing a participatory project that uses fiction to empower young people's democratic action in the climate crisis. She also researches games with the Manchester Game Studies Network. [www.chloegermainebuckley.com](http://www.chloegermainebuckley.com) @gothlit\_chloe

### **Rebecca Gibson**

#### Abstract: "Until Not One Part Remains": disintegration and reconstitution in *Annihilation* (2018)

*Annihilation* (2018) begins in the future. Natalie Portman's biologist, Lena, is interrogated in a white, featureless decontamination chamber full of bewildered colleagues who keep asking her what happened? What happened to the rest of your team? Where are they? How did they die? What did you see? How didn't you die? Who are you, really?

Alex Garland's film adaptation of Jeff Vandermeer's novel jumps backwards from Lena's evasive answers to show us the origin of all such questions, and the answer to them, in the arrival of something truly alien: a stream of light and colour that penetrates the atmosphere and crashes to earth, enveloping a lighthouse on the coast. The form of the alien being – whether categorised as a creature or element – bears many similarities to the titular menace from H. P. Lovecraft's 'The Colour Out of Space' (1927) but while Garland's alien being does have a disintegrating effect on the characters of the film as the colour does in Lovecraft's story, I posit that the non-chronological structure of the film also signifies a disturbing disruption of time and lived experience. Lena's timeline and perception of events prisms and fractures throughout the course of the film just as surely as her DNA and mental state, resulting in a film which replicates its central theme – disintegration of identity – in its very structure. Lena slips back and forth in time as easily as wading into a stream, and her only markers are the motifs that guide the viewer to an understanding of the horrifying slipperiness of time itself, and the flimsiness of the framework we impose upon it. I conclude that Garland's interpretation succeeds in creating a unique cinematic spectacle by weaving elements of the unknowable and

indescribable from Vandermeer's original text into its structure and storytelling, resulting in an ecoGothic exploration of time and the self.

*Note: this paper has previously been delivered with accompanying music from the soundtrack of Annihilation (2018).*

### Biography:

Rebecca Gibson is a PhD student at Lancaster University. She researches how Gothic depictions of plastic surgery in contemporary text and media foreground the vulnerability of the surgical body and problematise dominant discourses of body maintenance. Her other interests include feminism and gender studies, the medical humanities, folk horror, and ecoGothic.

## PANEL 3

### Kevin Cooney

#### Abstract: 'Gothic Kaiju: The Vengeful Landscape of Daimajin'

Giant monsters as defenders of the natural world and punisher of mankind's transgressions as a genre have ebbed and flowed since 1954's *Godzilla*. The realm of the kaiju, Japan's giant monster genre, is not solely occupied by bipedal lizards or bat-winged aliens. In 1966 *Daimajin* arrived in theaters and as similar as the rampaging stone creature is to the decade of kaiju preceding it, the film's visual style is firmly entrenched in gothic aesthetics while weaving a particularly Japanese story. *Daimajin*, becomes the defender of place, the intertwined worlds of humans and nature, who wreaks havoc upon the greedy abusers of man and earth.

The proposed paper will possess a tripartite structure- First, focus on *Daimajin's* relation to vengeful spirits in Japanese culture and connections to kami of the Shinto religion. Next, understand and review the environmental landscape of Edo Period Japan (which the film takes place) including effects of deforestation and mining; before finally bringing together the two strands to see the ecocritical story of *Daimajin* as embodiment of the land, its role as protector of both place and humanity, and how through a particular style and message transcends a typical kaiju story.

The compelling visual style of *Daimajin's* supernatural elements pulls a typical period-piece/kaiju film in a new direction. With a score and cinematography more akin to European horror of the period, or the early Universal Classic Monsters, *Daimajin* fuses different influences to create a very specific Japanese story of human ecology. Through worship of the giant stone idol, the village finds harmony and balance, only to have it upended by a coup led by greedy destructive forces. The unfolding story follows some conventional territory, but the film captures the intense environmental, technological, and political disruptions of the period through the transformation of standard horror tropes into a uniquely environmental gothic film.

### Biography:

Kevin Cooney is an independent scholar of Human Ecology and Ecocriticism with a recent BA in Environmental Studies from Harvard University. Driven to communicate solutions and ideas that realize environmental equity, Kevin seeks out different ideas- blending the humanities, social sciences, and environmental sciences- to create common ground and consensus among communities. As a freelance writer with over 10 years' experience in journalism and communications, Kevin also enjoys exploring ideas of the uncanny and estrangement in science fiction and horror. Kevin's work has been published by Diabolique, and Scream magazines, as well as the sustainable news site, Sense & Sustainability.

### Antonio Alcalá

#### Abstract: 'Tentacles from the depths of the lagoon: The Nautical Horror of D. T. Neal'

Inside the tradition of horror narratives, the irruption of supernatural elements shatters all convictions on which our idea of supremacy on Earth has been built. When this irruption occurs in nautical contexts, human characters are reminded of the sublime vastness of the open sea and our inability to establish permanent control over and under water. This occurs because the fluid nature of nautical surfaces and depths makes it impossible to leave a permanent footprint that would mark them as human dominions; besides, we cannot restrict the physical movement of nautical creatures in the way we do it with animals on mainland. In this context that suppresses all claim for human superiority, D. T. Neal's novella *Relict* inserts the protagonist and narrator in an experience of weird events that emphasize the minimal position of humanity on the planet. The purpose of this paper is to rely on Timothy Morton's ecological awareness as the parameter to generate an ecological perspective, and combine it with Mark Fisher's view on the Weird to contextualize the elements of Horror in the target text. After doing that, I will be exploring the gradual immersion of Neal's protagonist into a context of nautical horror events. They trigger in her a feeling of weird uncertainty which ends up becoming absolute horror when she confronts a sublime creature whose monstrous proportions reveal humans are not at the top of the food pyramid as we have tried to convince ourselves. The creature, which is only monstrous when seen from a human perspective, is much better adapted to live in the arcane sea corners where humanity has failed to impose its presence. The final intention is to prove that the protagonist's experience of nautical horror stresses the impossibility of humankind to survive on Earth when it becomes isolated from its technological advances and surrounded by primeval nature.

### Biography:

Antonio Alcalá González is researcher and professor of contemporary literature at Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico City, and lecturer on Gothic Literature at UNAM. One of the pioneers in the recent raise of interest for the Gothic in Mexico, he is founder of the *International Gothic Literature Congress* which has been held biennially at Mexico City since 2008. His work includes having published in journals of Mexican universities and

edited the Gothic Studies special issue *Nautical Gothic: The Presence of the Gothic on and Under the Sea*. He has also contributed to the volumes *A Companion to American Gothic*, *Tropical Gothic in Literature and Culture*, *Oscuras latitudes: Una cartografía de los estudios góticos*, and is currently editing the collection *Doubles and Hybrids in Latin American Gothic*.

### Alexandra Hauke

#### Abstract: 'The Wicked Witch in the Forest: Robert Eggers's *The VVitch* and Ecofeminist Folk Horror'

In "Toward a Queer Ecofeminism," Greta Gard argues that an "early impetus for the ecofeminist movement was the realization that the liberation of women [...] cannot be fully effected without the liberation of nature" and vice versa (114-15). Women, along with all individuals considered other to the white, male, heterosexual master, continue to be identified as creatures in line with the natural qualities of the Earth—a discriminatory assumption rooted, in part, in the assaults of the witch-hunts and witch burnings of the Early Modern period. In 17<sup>th</sup>-century New England, eighty percent of those accused of and tried for practicing witchcraft and, thereby, for sexually fraternizing with the devil were women (Aronson 10), resulting in the enduring link of witchcraft to female inferiority and the allegedly innate relation of feminine spirituality to the carnal energies of wilderness.

Images of witches abound in gothic and horror texts, not least because of their mythic potentials to charm, scare, or seduce and their propensities to represent female empowerment and anti-patriarchal revolts. Scholars of the more recent subgenre of folk horror have theorized movies such as *Witchfinder General* (1968) as benchmarks for their deliberations of the form's narrative practices, concluding that negotiations of occultism, witchcraft, and what Adam Scovell terms "skewed belief systems" (14) define folk horror as a genre with a broad understanding of folklore—one that includes practices of the occult. Equally as important, as I will argue, is folk horror's focus on the horrors of being part of a folk that is determined by its cultural-political ideologies and that has, therefore, produced the horrors at the heart of the aforementioned witch-hunts.

Robert Eggers's 2015 film *The VVitch: A New-England Folktale* speaks to the indispensable synergy of ecofeminism and folk horror in ways that signify on the liberating efforts suggested by Greta Gaard. The text's witch-protagonist Thomasin's inclinations towards witchcraft stem from the powers of the forests protecting her from the oppressive forces of her 17<sup>th</sup>-century andro- and anthropocentric environments. A self-proclaimed "New-England Folktale," the film negotiates not only Thomasin's family's banishment from their village settlement due to their differing beliefs but also the protagonist's liberation process from her witch-hunting kin by joining a coven of enchantresses in the adjacent forest—ironically, by signing herself over to the goat-turned-man representation of the devil.

I argue that by reading Eggers's texts through the intersectional lens of ecofeminist folk horror, Thomasin enables her own progression from the terrors of compulsory segregation and male-induced environmental disaster to female inclusion, agency, and ecological care by ridding herself of the constraints of patriarchal folk practices and instead indulging in folklore. The fact that, at the same time, the very natural(ized) features that grant her

liberation simultaneously cast her as yet another patriarchal prisoner signifies, in the end, on Thomasin's lack of real self-determined choices and opportunities. While *The VVitch* scrutinizes the conceptual wickedness of its main woman as a dangerous, sexualized, and othered creature of and in nature in order to decenter essentialist notions of femininity, it also testifies to the fact that these very ideas, rooted in America's most defining era, continue to characterize the androcentric ideologies of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Anthropocene.

### Biography:

Alexandra Hauke studied English and American Studies as well as Hispanic Studies at the University of Vienna and at the University of Maryland at College Park. She is currently a lecturer in American Studies at the University of Passau, Germany, and is working towards a PhD with a thesis on "Crime, Empire, and Embodiments of the Law in Native American Detective Fiction." She was Visiting Research Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley in 2015 and is co-editor of *Native American Survivance, Memory, and Futurity: The Gerald Vizenor Continuum* (Routledge, 2017). Her research interests include Native American and First Nations' studies, crime and detective fiction, gothic and horror studies, ecofeminism, contemporary American TV and film as well as American popular culture.

## PANEL 4

### Marc Ricard

Abstract: "I NOTED IN DISGUST THAT THEY WERE ORCHIDS" – QUEER FLORA IN H RIDER HAGGARD'S *ALLAN AND THE HOLY FLOWER*

At face-value Haggard's *Allan and The Holy Flower* (1915) appears to be a standard and fairly straightforward imperial adventure narrative. Allan Quatermain travels to Africa with young enthusiast in tow, has adventures, rescues some damsels, kills some slavers and returns home wealthier, with a new portion of Darkest Africa explored. However, from the outset of the novel, Haggard already begins toying with the reader's expectations, with the first line from Haggard's narrator being "I do not suppose that anyone who knows the name Allan Quatermain would be likely to associate it with flowers, and especially with orchids". From here, the novel's quest for a rare orchid is dotted with queer narrative slippages that undermine the perceptions of both Quatermain and the reader, running into blockages, mirages and quagmires invariably caused by plant life. Plants are used for disguise, as red herrings, as signifiers of hallucination and even trans-species communication, actively resisting classification and systems of knowledge while infringing on the narrative in ways atypical of the 'background' of environment. In taking time to focus portions of the narrative on plant-life, I argue Haggard is able to provide a subversive vision of vegetation that upends conventions of genre and scientific understanding, presenting an environment of ecological agency typical of the EcoGothic.

This paper will provide a close reading of the long-neglected *Holy Flower* – focusing in particular on the narrative depictions of plant life – in order to showcase the unusual narrative work that is being performed by flora in the text. Making reference to both queer theory and critical discussions of the EcoGothic, I aim to unpick the far-reaching impact of

plant-life in the novel, tying it to wider ecological relationships and cultural depictions of non-human life.

#### Biography:

Marc Ricard is a PhD Candidate in the department of English at the University of Exeter (UK). His current research project, tentatively titled *Fantastical Flora: Vegetal Imaginaries in Late Victorian Literature*, investigates accounts of imagined plants or "cryptobotany" in Victorian literature and culture, with a special focus on speculative fiction, plant breeding, and the role of the ecoGothic in evolutionary theory.

#### **Daisy Butcher**

#### Abstract: 'Vicious Veggies: Mandrakes and Killer Orchids in Netflix's *Stranger Things* and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*'

The killer plant/plant monster has pervaded storytelling from mythology to TV but has never truly received the scholarly attention it truly deserves when compared to its fellow monsters such as the vampire or zombie. It is important therefore to interrogate new manifestations of this folkloric and gothic monster with that of Netflix's popular shows *Stranger Things* (2016-) and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-). I argue that *Stranger Things*' monster 'the demogorgon' is a manifestation of the Killer Orchid which was a sub-section of its own within the killer plant genre during the heights of the Victorian killer plant craze. I will demonstrate that the Demogorgon represents an example of *vagina dentata*, the orchid imagery bound up in sex and death as a partially carnivorous plant named after sexual organs. Moreover, I will interrogate *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*'s episode eight of season two which features a mandrake doppelganger. I will look back at the folklore behind the mandrake and other literary/filmic examples in horror such as Guillermo Del Toro's film *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and short story *The Mandrakes* (1933) by Clarke Ashton Smith. By tracing its roots back to the nineteenth century Botanical Gothic stories by authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle, H.G Wells and Nathaniel Hawthorne, it is enlightening to investigate the enduring legacy of the killer plant genre. This fear of being devoured by the lowest on the food chain (the vegetable) is still as powerful today as it was in Darwin's after his research on 'Insectivorous Plants' (1875) and 'The Power of movement in plants' (1880) inspired an entire genre which struck fear into the heart of the gentleman in his hot-house. I will dissect how the killer plant exploits body horror, the uncanny and fear of the Other in both *Stranger Things* (2016-) and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-). Overall, it is important to analyse the streaming service giant that is Netflix as it has revolutionised the ways in which audiences consume TV shows and understand the importance and success of these series' featuring killer plants.

#### Biography:

Daisy Butcher is a Gothic and Horror PhD student at the University of Hertfordshire attached to The *Open Graves Open Minds* project. Her thesis focuses on the monstrous feminine, psychoanalysis and body horror from the nineteenth century gothic short story to modern film and TV reincarnations. Her PhD project particularly analyses the female vampire, mummy and the killer plant monster. She is currently editing a publication with

the British Library *Evil Roots: Killer Tales of the Botanical Gothic* which will be released in Autumn 2019.

### Henry Bartholomew

Abstract: “Terrific Powers of Witchery”: Becoming the Environment in Algernon Blackwood’s *Pan’s Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories*’

Taking its cue from the points of contact between Ecocriticism, Gothic studies, and Object-Oriented Ontology, this paper examines Algernon Blackwood’s *Pan’s Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* (1912) through the lens of Timothy Morton’s “dark ecology”. Blackwood’s super-natural writings ask what would happen were one to be in closer communion with the world, if - by accident, ritual, sensitivity, or proximity - one could get at the indescribable “life” that churns behind the visible appearances of things. These encounters or communions are by no means strictly beneficent, and characters often “become otherwise” through their contact with the natural world. Bucking a traditional historicist approach, Morton suggests that the experience of art “provides a model for the kind of coexistence ecological ethics and politics wants to achieve between humans and nonhumans”. Thinking through this claim, this paper posits that Blackwood’s nature stories promote a kind of ecological awareness, but one that embraces the uncanny as opposed to exorcizing it. *Pan’s Garden* does something, it models coexistence; but a Gothic coexistence, a dark ecology. Reading Blackwood as darkly ecological, his super-naturalism and eerie atmospheres work to attune their reader to a “deeper” reality, but one which is often abjectifying, if not fatal, to the humans who find it. Using his stories as a means to think reflexively about the connections between the Gothic and “nature”, between the Gothic and the nonhuman, Blackwood’s work is found to be especially well placed to respond to the cultural, psychological, and philosophical issues posed by the climate crisis.

#### Biography:

Henry Bartholomew is an AHRC DTP-funded PhD student at the University of Exeter and Bath Spa University. His research examines the overlap between the recent “speculative turn” in philosophy and the study of the Gothic. He co-convenes the AHRC’s “Embodiment” research cluster, and his work focuses primarily on the writings of M.R. James, Algernon Blackwood, Florence Marryat, and Vernon Lee.

## CREATIVE READING

### Kevan Manwaring

#### Biography:

Dr Kevan Manwaring is the author of *The Windsmith Elegy* series of novels, *The Bardic Handbook*, *Desiring Dragons: Creativity, Imagination and the Writer’s Quest*, *Lost Islands*, *Oxfordshire Folk Tales*, *Northamptonshire Folk Tales* and others. A Fellow of

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