

GOTHIC NATURE

NEW DIRECTIONS IN ECOHORROR AND THE ECOGOTHIC



ISSUE ONE

**FOUNDED BY ELIZABETH PARKER
EDITED BY ELIZABETH PARKER AND MICHELLE POLAND**

GOTHIC NATURE

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ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

Gothic Nature is a new peer-reviewed and open-access academic journal seeking to explore the latest evolutions of thought in the areas of ecohorror and the ecoGothic. It welcomes articles, reviews, interviews, and original creative pieces interrogating the darker sides of our relationship with the nonhuman from new and more revered scholars working at the intersection of ecocriticism, Gothic and horror studies, and the wider environmental humanities.

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Gothic Nature: An Introduction

Elizabeth Parker and Michelle Poland

A tale of two Gothic Natures:

One: You are lost in a wood. Now survive.

Two: The planet you think you live on no longer exists. Now survive.

As we write this introduction to the inaugural issue of *Gothic Nature*, thousands of fires are ravaging the Amazon rainforest in Brazil. These fires are pumping alarming quantities of carbon into the Earth's atmosphere and devastating the world's biggest terrestrial carbon sink: an irreplaceably important home for biodiversity. According to media reports, the major cause of these fires is agricultural – human-made and, in some cases, deliberate. The causes and consequences associated with large-scale deforestation are by now well-known and it is common knowledge that 'wild' spaces are rapidly disappearing. Nonetheless, despite the ostensibly dwindling relevance of the wilderness to our everyday and increasingly urban lives, fears of the nonhuman world are as rampant as ever. The very thought of being alone in these wild, more-than-human spaces still provokes a sense of unease for reasons that go beyond simple physical safety. In the cultural imagination, Nature has always engendered fear, wonder, and fascination. Tale One, above, is a classic if concise example of how Gothic writers engage with our imagined fears of the nonhuman world: Nature is consistently constructed in our stories as Other, excessive, unpredictable, disruptive, chaotic, enticing, supernaturally powerful, and, perhaps most disturbingly, *alive*. It importantly threatens our very definitions of 'humanness'. Tale Two, meanwhile, indicates something far more sinister and unsettling: from climate crisis and collapsing permafrost to mass extinction and microplastics inhabiting our bodies, Gothic depictions of Nature seem to have slipped, uninvited, into reality while we were busy making other plans. This journal aims to explore these two Gothic Natures critically and creatively – that is, the Nature in Gothic and the Gothic in Nature. Open access and peer-reviewed, *Gothic Nature* provides a timely scholarly forum for established and emerging scholars alike to investigate both perennial fears of the nonhuman world and new fears about its degradation, disappearance, and mutation.

It should be noted from the outset that in this introduction, in which we introduce the idea of ‘Gothic Nature’, we use the term ‘Gothic’ in its broadest sense. This is to say that we intend the term here, which is used very generally, to largely encapsulate horror, too. This is not to suggest that we think ‘ecohorror’ and ‘ecoGothic’ are quite the same thing—in fact, we don’t—but the term ‘Gothic’ is used here as a suitably open and malleable shorthand for everything to do with *fear*. Importantly, this journal has emerged in part to specifically address what exactly the differences and crossovers might be between ecohorror and ecoGothic—two terms frequently used interchangeably—and we are keen not to be prescriptive in how we view these terms. Instead, we invite discussion (and likely disagreement) on their usage and intend *Gothic Nature* to be a space in which the fascinating evolutions of these terms can be both tracked and challenged.

1. The Nature in Gothic

The nonhuman world has always been central to Gothic modes and forms, though this fact has been largely neglected in Gothic criticism until this decade. If one considers some of the ‘giants’ of the Gothic canon in this context—think *Frankenstein* (1818), *Dracula* (1897), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), *The Monk* (1796), etc.—it quickly becomes clear that ‘Nature’, in its various forms, is integral to the Gothic. Nature is essential to the Gothic both in terms of *where* things take place and *how* things take place. That is to say, the natural world is dominant both as setting and as character – or, to echo the sentiments of horror writer T. E. D. Klein (1984), one of the most ‘promising’ subjects of the Gothic imagination is ‘Setting *as* Character’ (p. 16). The very foundations of the Gothic lie in the traversal of boundaries: between good and evil, between black and white, between living and dead, and between *the human and nonhuman*. Much of the fear and desire that saturates the Gothic stems from the blurring of distinctions, and the destruction of dualisms, between what we deem wholly ‘human’ and wholly ‘Nature’.

Let’s begin with the obvious. We see Nature, of course, in the Gothic because it often provides the backdrop against which the action unfolds: natural landscapes often provide our Gothic settings. Granted, when listing ‘typical’ Gothic locations, there has been a tendency for years to talk about castles, convents, and haunted houses, to focus on *inside* spaces, but the *outside* spaces are every bit as significant. Often these Gothic structures are importantly that bit removed from settled, busily populated society, from the ‘civilised’, and set instead amidst

ragged and overwhelming landscapes, in the ‘wild’. Yi-fu Tuan (1979) has written extensively on what he terms ‘landscapes of fear’ (p. 1), emphasising the explicit link between natural spaces and terror, whilst Fred Botting in *Gothic* (2013) writes:

‘Landscapes stress isolation and wilderness, evoking vulnerability, exposure and insecurity. [...] Nature appears hostile, untamed and threatening: darkness, obscurity, and barely contained negative energy reinforce atmospheres of disorientation and fear.’ (p. 4)

We see the ‘overwhelmingness’ of Nature reflected in the fact that canonical Gothic is frequently associated with the sublime, an important precursor to Gothic Nature, which emphasises the awesome, exciting, and terrifying aspects of landscape. Ambience is vital to the Gothic and we have many instances in which it is the natural world that provides much of this ambience. Think, for instance, of the icescapes in *Frankenstein* (1818), the storms in ‘Porphyria’s Lover’, the wild moors in *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the mountainous regions in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and the ominous forests of *Young Goodman Brown* (1835) and *Dracula* (1897). There is of course an enormous wealth of criticism on literature and the environment, but in more recent years it has been widely noted that our *darker* portrayals of Nature—particularly within the wide reaches of ecocriticism—have been ‘largely ignored’ (Hillard, 2009: p. 688). There has consequently been a flurry of fascinating work in these areas. Every landscape imaginable carries an intriguing history of representation, varyingly ecophilic (Nature-loving) and ecophobic (Nature-fearing).

Woodlands and forests frequently appear in Gothic fiction as ambivalent spaces. Ann Radcliffe rarely fails to adorn the base of her sublime mountains with dark shadowy forests or her craggy rocks with gnarled old oaks. An uncanny wood—often populated by menacing and unpredictable arboreal creatures—is a common choice of setting for late Victorian and Edwardian writers such as Arthur Machen and E. M. Forster. Puritan perceptions of the ‘dark’ and ‘howling’ forest wilderness heavily influenced constructions of the forest in early North American Gothic, while the theme of ‘survival’ against the hostilities of the land fills the pages of much Canadian Gothic, including Margaret Atwood’s *Wilderness Tips* (1991). The ‘Gothic forest’, as we might term it, is so extensive an archetype that it can be found well beyond the confines of Gothic fiction. It appears in our very earliest example of literature, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (c. 2100 BC), in our fairy tales, in seemingly endless horror titles, and in a wealth

of contemporary titles on Netflix. In contemporary culture, the Gothic forest trope is prolific on the big and small screen. From titles as varied as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-), *Dark* (2017-), and the *Southern Reach* trilogy (2014), these dark green spaces remain hugely popular settings. Indeed, any horror fan will know the perils of venturing into the deep dark woods: one will never return quite the same, if indeed one returns at all.

Gothic seascapes, too, have been of increasing interest. The ‘nautical Gothic’ (Alder, 2017), as it has been recently termed, takes a dive into the blue ecologies of such diverse texts as *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), *Armada* (1866), *Ghost Ship* (2002), and *The Meg* (2018). Stormy weather terrifies; deep waters conceal monsters, dark secrets, and bodies; and the ocean’s unstable, ever-moving surface eerily washes away the boundaries between ‘life and death, chaos and order, self and other’ (Alder, 2017: p. 1). The inability to conquer and colonise the sea has been an endless source of cultural fear and fascination. Catherine Lanone (2013) argues that the failed 1845 Franklin expedition has become a kind of Gothic paradigm. The real-life tale of human hubris and ecological blindness provides a formula for various short stories and novels, including Dan Simmons’ *The Terror* (2007), in which the crew find themselves lost in an Arctic maze and stalked by a mysterious apparition. Occupying the edges of the dark blue Gothic are the ghosts that haunt its coasts. The beach is a popular site for the ghost story because it is a liminal space; the imaginary line dividing the sea and dry land is continually shifting, its topography unstable. This ‘elemental unpredictability becomes a perfect catalyst for ghost narratives’ (Armitt, 2016: p. 99), as we see in stories such as M R James’s ‘Oh, Whistle, and I’ll come to you, My Lad’ (1904), Kate Mosse’s ‘The Revenant’ (2013), and most recently Robert Eggers’ *The Lighthouse* (2019). Providing natural habitats for many of our monsters as well as a foreboding sense of the unknown and uncontrolled, Gothic landscapes and seascapes alike signify an overwhelming ‘excess of presence’ (Jean-François Lyotard, 1991: p.187).

Nature also marks out its extensive territory within Gothic and horror through the copious representation of fearsome fauna and flora. Animals of course have an extensive history in the Gothic, from the monkey in *Green Tea* (1872) and the orangutan in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) to Bwada the cat in *The Ceremonies* (1984) and the wealth of werebeast legends that circulate many of our best-loved monsters. Indeed, monstrosity is always born of hybridity, and often our monsters are so defined because they hideously conflate

the human and nonhuman. The markedly recurrent simian theme in the Gothic is particularly illustrative of our fears of a lack of human/nonhuman divide, perhaps most famously demonstrated in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Real and mythical animals alike are merged and feared. For instance, goats, wolves, panthers, and snakes are commonly associated with evil – and all are associated, too, with their own myriad of monstrous mythologies. When we talk specifically of ecohorror, animals are hugely central in the heyday titles (*Jaws* [1975], *Frogs* [1972], *Night of the Lepus* [1972], etc.), so commonly termed ‘creature features’. In more recent years, Animal Horror has become a growing field of research, increasingly interested in the contemporary mainstream relationship between humans and animals. Some recent work has focused on meat consumption, exploring slaughterhouses as truly Gothic spaces, while others have looked to reappraise horror titles such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) in terms of animal rights. Whilst we are on the topic of monstrous meat and animal ethics, let’s not forget the frequently overlooked fact that Frankenstein’s creature is a proud vegan.¹

In terms of Gothic greenery, there has been a surge of interest in monstrous vegetation. For plants, fascinatingly, are at once so completely commonplace and yet so utterly alien. The Victorian Gothic in particular is filled with examples of ominous plant life, reflecting fears of enhancements in esoteric knowledge from overseas and corresponding fears of the unknown, as well as developments in the scientific community. Such examples are found in everything from the vague, haunting sentience of the trees in Algernon Blackwood’s ‘The Man Whom the Trees Loved’ (1912) and ‘The Willows’ (1907) to the vegetable carnivory in *Kasper Craig* (1892). More recently, Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1938) famously starts with the chilling wildness of the supposedly cultivated garden of Manderlay. And more explicitly, titles like *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986), *The Happening* (2008), and *Jordskott* (2015) have all explored our uneasy—if often unexplored—relationship to the green life that surrounds us. Nature is, of course, everywhere, often seen (or *not* seen) as so mundanely ever-present that is invisible. Nature in the Gothic is so effectively uncanny because it is known and unknown all at once – strangely made visible in these stories in a way that often challenges our foolish sense of human self-enclosure.²

¹ See Jimmy Packham’s essay in this issue for a more extensive discussion of what he terms ‘vegetarian horror’.

² Stacy Alaimo’s notion of ‘trans-corporeality’, which essentially holds that distinct categories of ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ are impossible because everything is ultimately ‘intermeshed’, is intriguing in this context and is explored in Marc Ricard’s essay, below.

2. The Gothic in Nature

In her preface to *Twenty-First-Century Gothic* (2012), Catherine Spooner highlights the tentacular nature of the Gothic mode in contemporary culture. ‘The proliferating signs and traces of Gothic have by now’, she states, ‘spread far beyond the limits of fiction into numerous other forms, discourses and media’ (p.xii). Spilling over literary boundaries (as it is wont to do), Gothic is now beginning to encroach upon the way the West both *understands* and *experiences* the sinister effects of environmental change. From scientific narratives to media reports, psychological case studies to philosophical engagements, ecological, climatological, and geological events and phenomena are continually articulated through numerous reiterations of monstrosity, spectrality, uncanniness, sublimity, dystopia, death, displacement, disintegration, decay and ultimately fear. It seems that knowledge about and encounters with human-caused environmental transition are increasingly being expressed in terms tied to a distinctly Gothic lexicon.

In the twenty-first century there has been, to echo Dale Townshend (2014), a ‘Gothic swarm’ of paralysing scientific information about a rapidly changing Earth system. Underlying popular scientific discourses is a discernibly Gothic sensibility, which registers the frightening instability of an emerging new world order. In *The Balance of Nature* (2009), biologist John Kricher shatters the enduring myth of an ecology in balance by revealing a chaotic ecological reality which, he rightfully asserts, we awaken at our own peril. He compares scientific warnings about the fate of civilisation if we continue unabated to the cautionary message Ebenezer Scrooge receives when visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, who is forever burdened by the chains he forged in life. ‘Today we humans’, Kircher attests, ‘continue forging a very formidable chain, and of our own collective free will. Like old Ebenezer we need to change [...] Our future welfare depends on our actions towards Earth’s ecosystems. Marley’s ghost is staring us in the face’ (pp. 200-201). Kircher’s thesis demonstrates that, like Scrooge, those of us living in industrial-capitalist societies need to change our behaviours, our attitudes, our lives, our very humanity, before we are permanently shackled to a futurity of chaos. Erle C. Ellis (2018), a Professor of Geography and Environmental Systems, likewise draws on a popular Gothic text, *Frankenstein*, to elucidate the role human hubris and technology have played in the making of a new unpredictable geological epoch. ‘Have we created a monster?’ he asks. If so, we must learn from

Frankenstein's mistakes. As the Earth 'reanimates' and the veritable yellow eye of our anthropogenic creation gazes back, it is imperative that we do not flee in horror and revulsion, Ellis implores, but take responsibility for the consequences of our actions while 'there is still time to shape a future in which both humans and non-human nature thrive together' (p. 160). Perhaps what is most chilling about the Anthropocene narrative is the knowledge that we are leaving an epoch of relative stability and creeping into the unknown. Jeremy Davies (2016) asserts that, in order to take in the measure of this unnerving and baffling epochal transition, one need only look back to our deep past. Just as the early Gothic tales looked back to the Middle Ages as a period of horror and barbarity, scientists likewise characterise previous epochs by their archaic disorder and depravity. Extreme seasonal temperature swings, mass extinction, desertification, and grave ocean acidification and deoxygenation, our geological Gothic past—and possible future—is a place, Davies states, 'where *monsters* abound' (p. 4).

Journalistic reports and news media outlets play a seminal role in shaping the way climate crisis is framed in public discourse.³ Representations of environmental crisis in the media frequently oscillate between short-term horror and long-term hope. The popular 'catastrophe' narrative is charged with what Edward Ingebretsen (2001) has termed the 'rhetoric of fear', bringing to light rapid ecosocial disintegration in sensational ways. Unnerving Anthropocene-related phenomena is, in part, commodified by the media, and the value of these stories lies in their ability to both delight as well as terrify, to simultaneously entertain and horrify. Much like the Nature encountered in the Gothic imagination, journalistic framings of extreme weather events—the devastation wrought by Hurricane Harvey, the incineration of Europe by heatwave Lucifer, the floods engulfing the UK, etc.—engender both revulsion and fascination. Framings of so-called 'natural' disasters in the media become familiarly exploitative and excessive reproductions of Ann Radcliffe's brand of pleasurable terror, in which the reader is permitted to peer into the dark power of Nature before being pulled back to safety. For major media outlets, just a click, a scroll, or a turn of a page can save us from the rushing abyss of horror and disgust as we are distracted from these profoundly disturbing occurrences (ironically, often by advertisements for products and activities which contribute to climate crisis). Frame theorists have repeatedly revealed how the catastrophe framework, underpinned by a kind of Gothic sensationalism, is ineffective and redundant.

³ In accordance with numerous recent discussions, we choose to use the term 'climate crisis' as opposed to 'climate change'.

Perhaps, then, the media should look to a different kind of Gothic in their articulations of changes in the biosphere.⁴ A Gothic of insidious unease, one which forces us to confront difficult truths we would rather ignore, may well prove to be more compelling, transformative, and, indeed, more suited to our time.

Lucie Armitt (2016) observes how ‘one major, if unquantifiable, by-product’ of phenomena such as climate change ‘is fear’. Discussing the impacts of encroaching coastal erosion in places like Happisburgh she notes that, even though these processes can be explained in scientific terms, local communities often view the sea as a threatening and supernatural entity ‘more in tune with the ghoulish predator of haunting tales’ (pp. 96-97). The rapid emergence of such real-life Gothic environments across the world—engendering an unsettling sense of Nature’s *aliveness*—has, unsurprisingly, been met with anxiety. The fear of a quickly changing and hostile Earth system, or ‘ecoanxiety’, is having a detrimental impact on mental health and wellbeing. A recent report (Clayton, et al., 2017) reviewing existing scientific literature on mental health and climate crisis found that mental health conditions can be triggered by both direct and indirect experiences with climate crisis. For those who have lived through extreme events such as hurricanes or large-scale wildfires, the consequences can be sudden and severe. Research conducted by Harvard Medical School found that suicide and suicide ideation more than doubled among a sample of people living in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina, while a staggering one in six met the diagnostic criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress (Kessler, et al., 2008). Similarly, slow disasters like the ‘unrelenting day-by-day despair’ of a prolonged drought or more insidious changes like rising sea levels ‘cause some of the most resounding chronic psychological consequences’, such as trauma and shock, stress, depression and anxiety, substance abuse, aggression and violence and a loss of autonomy and control. Mental health conditions can also be caused by indirect experiences with climate crisis phenomena. For example, by ‘watching the slow and seemingly irrevocable impacts of climate change unfold’ in the media and generally ‘worrying about the future for oneself, children, and later generations’ (Clayton, et al., 2017: p. 27). Fear, unease, and feelings of powerlessness in the face of a ‘predatory’ and ‘ghoulish’ environment is an experience central to the Gothic.

⁴ See Kevin Corstorphine’s essay, below, for further discussion of how we understand (or fail to understand) climate crisis through the language and imagery of horror and the Gothic.

These responses are, however, compounding the issue. Repeatedly presenting the realities of climate crisis in terms of terror can ultimately result in desensitisation, denial, and a reduction in the support for action. Timothy Clark (2015) attests that denialism is not just rooted in fear but is also a product of the sheer unthinkability of human-caused epochal transition. He argues that part of the Anthropocene problem is that it is intellectually demobilising, *blurring* and *dissolving*, in a Gothic-esque fashion, ‘some crucial categories by which people have made sense of the world and their lives’. ‘It puts in crisis’, he continues, ‘the lines between culture and Nature, fact and value, and between the human and the geological or meteorological’ (p. 9). Too big a concept to comprehend, the Anthropocene demands that we think about human life in much broader scales of time and space. Clark explains how ‘the Anthropocene challenges us to think counter-intuitive relations of scale, effect, perception, knowledge, representation and calculability’ (p. 13). Though traditionally ecocriticism has avoided, even snubbed, anything pertaining to Gothic, Clark frequently uses Gothic tropes and language to explicate what he terms ‘Anthropocene disorder’ (p. 139) – that is, the bizarre and disproportionate gap between seemingly innocuous individual behaviours and slow-motion large-scale catastrophe. As he discusses at length the ‘spectral’ effects of pollution (p. 143), the peculiar doubling effect of reading people as a geological force (‘as things’, p. 103), and the paranoia engendered by thinking through the connections between trivial action and monstrous reaction, Clark (albeit probably unintentionally) highlights how the Gothic mode is becoming central to ecocritical discourse.

Other scholars working in the ecocritical field and environmental humanities also demonstrate how Gothic can help to give expression to the way we think about, philosophise, and conceptualise an emerging anthro-Nature. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils (2017) highlight how both Rachel Carson’s ground-breaking *Silent Spring* (1962) and Greg Garrard’s defining book on ecocriticism write under a ‘shadow of death’ (p. 2), an indisputably Gothic domain. Margaret Atwood (2017), in her critical nonfiction, is similarly heavy with foreboding when she predicts a Gothic world of moral and physical decay when contemplating the future of oil-dependent societies who fail to kick the habit. With a touch of tenebrous humour, she describes festering garbage and putrefying corpses creating pandemic disease, thugs-turned-warlords pillaging and raping, and people being forced to eat dog food when food and water supplies are cut from cities. She admits that this picture ‘is extreme, and also unlikely, but it exposes the truth: we’re hooked on oil [...] we ought to be investing a lot of time, effort, and money in ways to replace it’ (p. 141). Justin McBrien (2016) invokes the Gothic mode in his

proposal of the ‘Necrocene’. It is not the Anthropocene, he suggests, but the Necrocene, or the ‘New Death’ (p. 116), which is the fundamental biogeological moment of our era. The Necrocene is the repressed counter-image to capitalism’s growing prosperity. It is the long shadow of destruction, death, and extinction-making following the light of capitalism’s accumulation and productivity which has become increasingly active in recent decades. McBrien asserts that the Necrocene is the bestial Hyde to industrial-capitalism’s Jekyll, its ‘shadow double, the future past of its necromancy, its monstrous sublime and uncanny paradox’ (p. 117). David Farrier (2016) likewise detects something uncanny in witnessing our familiar earthly home mutate into something strange and seeing ourselves transform into powerful agents of geologic time. From the fossilised remains of some 60 billion chickens each year killed for consumption to the ‘undead’ plastics acting on the environment thousands of years after disposal, there is certainly something Gothic about the fact that we are ‘conjuring ourselves as ghosts that will haunt the very deep future’.

3. Gothic Nature: Definitions, Developments, and Directions

Arguably, the seed was planted for sustained studies of Gothic Nature (at least in the critical forms we recognise today) when Simon Estok (2009) proposed his influential thesis on ‘ecophobia’, a now widely recognised term. Estok describes ecophobia as ‘an irrational and groundless fear or hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism’ (p. 209). The ecophobic condition, he argues, is rooted in and dependent on anthropocentric arrogance and speciesism, and on the deeply misguided ‘ethical position that humanity is outside of and exempt from the laws of nature’ (pp. 217). Although critics have rightfully asserted that ecophobia does not account for the many destructive human behaviours *not* motivated by fear or contempt, ecophobia has nonetheless proven to be an incredibly productive concept. Scholars have since been busily investigating the connections between the depredation of the environment and other oppressed groups, as well as exploring the extent to which certain structures and systems—international capitalism, for example, and forms of environmental colonialism—are driven, in part, by a contempt for a world that inevitably cannot be controlled. From seed to shoot, Tom J. Hillard (2009) astutely observes that it is indeed fear rather than contempt that more accurately encapsulates our feelings towards nonhuman agency, ‘for doesn’t most hatred arise from some deep-seated fear?’ (p. 686). Given that the Gothic is essentially an investigation of fear in literature, Hillard goes on to suggest that Gothic might provide an apposite critical framework

within which to begin exploring the way in which writers have constructed Nature as a space of fear, ambiguity, and hostility.

Collaboration between ecocriticism and Gothic and horror studies, and between Gothicists and ecocritics, has subsequently opened up a theoretically rich and conceptually diverse discourse about the ways in which fear underpins both how we *imagine* and *understand* the material world – plants, animals, rocks, climates, and all other manner of nonhuman entities. The term ecohorror is reasonably well-established. It is frequently associated with the wealth of creature features from the 1970s which accompanied the popularisation of environmentalism and is generally interpreted as a genre label, as a *type* of horror fiction. For the most part, it is used to describe texts in which *Nature fights back* and in which there is a distinct environmental message which seeks to raise awareness and even incite action. The remit of ecohorror, however, have been recently stretched and challenged, notably by those such as Christy Tidwell (2018), who argue for a recognition of the ‘broader functions’ (p. 116) of ecohorror. Recent discussions of the theoretical tools we might use to examine the more sinister interrelations of the human and the nonhuman have used both the terms ecohorror *and* ecoGothic, with little if any explicit interrogation into the potential and important distinctions between these terms – a paucity we hope this journal will continually address.

The newer term, ecoGothic, is significantly used frequently both as an adjective *and* as a verb. It is, in our opinion, best understood as a *way* of interrogating and interpreting the intriguing darkness in our increasingly troubled relationship to and representations of the more-than-human world. The ecoGothic specifically materialised as a provocative category of analysis in Andrew Smith’s and William Hughes’ 2013 collection *Ecogothic* and, in the following year, in a special issue of *Gothic Studies* edited by David Del Principe, titled ‘The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century’. The former focuses predominantly on the significance and unease engendered by a menacing, spectral, and uncanny Gothic environment, the latter on the monstrous Gothic body, probing how it ‘can be more meaningfully understood as a site of articulation for environmental and species identity’ (Principe, 2014: p. 1). Both works reveal how Gothic writers press upon the increasingly slippery, unstable, and uncertain distinctions between Nature and culture and between human and nonhuman, which signal a loss of human control and identity. Undoubtedly, Keetley and Sivils provide us with the most sophisticated definition of ecoGothic to date in their introduction to *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2017). The benefit of using a ‘specifically *gothic* ecocritical

lens,' when studying human and nonhuman relationships in literature, they suggest, is how it 'illuminates the fear, anxiety, and dread that often pervade those relationships: it orients us, in short, to the more disturbing and unsettling aspects of our interactions with nonhuman ecologies' (p. 1). As they begin to shade in the basic contours of the ecoGothic, Keetley and Sivils persuasively demonstrate how it challenges conventional understandings of Gothic time and space. For ecoGothic, the past that returns is not a buried family secret, but a repressed evolutionary truth; the space that imprisons is not a human-built structure but the broader nonhuman world, including its predators, terrain, and climate. The ecoGothic, then, brings to light a 'fearful' sense of inherited animality and a 'claustrophobic sense of enclosure' (pp. 4-7) in an indifferent and hostile earth system.

In Jerrold Hogle's oft-cited introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002), he states that 'the longevity and power of Gothic fiction unquestionably stem from the way it helps us address and disguise some of the most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural, throughout the history of western culture since the eighteenth century' (p. 4). So far, critics have effectively demonstrated how Gothic and horror can help us to engage with our fears of Nature, both imagined and real, old and new. The importance of the creative forms and narratives of Gothic Nature lie in their ability to provide a more immersive understanding about the unsettling aspects of human relationships to the nonhuman than science alone can offer. Examining the Nature in Gothic and horror not only unearths a 'rich and varied' history of how cultures from across the world and throughout centuries have imagined the 'darker side of nature' (Hillard, 2009: p. 692), but also further reveals the ways in which writers often consciously use dark spaces and figures to register the multifarious anxieties attendant upon emerging environmental crisis: a crisis of material Nature, a crisis of humanity and what it means to be human, a crisis of meaning, a crisis of knowledge, and above all, a crisis of (in)action. As ecological transition occurs with increasing speed and alarm, a central though currently under-researched concern for scholars of Gothic Nature will be to interrogate the ways in which Gothic and horror appears in wider cultural, philosophical, and scientific discourses about our earthly home, and the extent to which it defines our experiences with epochal change.

4. Welcome to *Gothic Nature*

The inaugural issue of this journal showcases some of the exciting work currently being undertaken on the more unsettling aspects of our relationship to the more-than-human world. In addition to the articles, the numerous reviews serve to illustrate the flourishing range of research, fiction, film, television, and podcasts currently being produced, which reflect and comment upon our changing relationships to Nature. Special mention here must be given to the roundtable on Alex Garland's film *Annihilation* (2018), which richly explores, discusses, and interrogates this text in the context of the Anthropocene from numerous different angles. The call for papers we sent out for this issue was purposefully broad and we received a rich array of proposals on a vast range of topics relating to 'Gothic Nature'. The ones included in this issue demonstrate some of the breadth and diversity of these exciting ideas.

The first two essays are from two scholars who are sometimes termed 'the godfathers of the ecoGothic': Tom J. Hillard and Simon C. Estok. Hillard's essay, 'Gothic Nature Revisited: Reflections on the Gothic of Ecocriticism' insightfully explores the fact that 'ecocriticism is', as he states, 'having a Gothic moment' that is 'likely here to stay'. He first reflects on the original *Gothic Nature* conference we held in 2017, before deploying and developing the metaphor of ecocriticism as a horror film. We are now, he argues, at the point with ecocriticism-as-horror-movie where we have discovered 'the body in the basement' and are currently staring somewhat blankly at it. He cites the ecoGothic specifically as potentially helpful in breaking this moment of paralysis or denial and urging us to deal with this 'corpse' of climate crisis. Holding to this all-too-apt metaphor, Hillard explores the origins of and interrelations between the complex and instable signifiers of 'eco' and 'Gothic'. Estok's essay, 'Theorising the EcoGothic', also explores the progression of ecocriticism in recent decades. He focuses in particular on the relationship between ecoGothic and ecophobia, arguing that the ecoGothic is a 'very good lens' through which we can bring ecophobia into focus and consequently reveal various social and environmental injustices. He impressively and provocatively explores a variety of different directions in which ecoGothic research can venture, touching on everything from madness to slime, and discusses the importance of language 'in these early days of ecocritical theorising'.

Kevin Corstorphine's essay, "'Don't be a Zombie": Deep Ecology and Zombie Misanthropy', looks to the ways in which the Gothic imagination is used to convey the message

of environmentalism. Drawing on such varied and fascinating subjects as population growth, horror fiction, and real-life terrorism, he questions if and how we can develop an aesthetics and attitude of environmental conservation without resorting to casting either ourselves or Nature as the horror villain. He argues that for real change we need to ‘reprogramme our minds’ and explores the crucial importance of our *stories* in achieving this.

Jimmy Packham also explores the interesting relationship between the shock value of horror and environmental awareness in his essay ‘Children of the Quorn: *Raw* and the Horrors of Vegetarianism’. He focuses in the main on what he terms ‘vegetarian horror’, a newly emerging ‘offshoot of Gothic Nature and ecoGothic’, which ‘explicitly foregrounds the troubling intersection of the human subject with food and flesh, the ethics of consumption, and the natural world’. Taking two deliberately ‘slippery’ texts as his case studies, he focuses on Han Kang’s book *The Vegetarian* (2015) and director Julia Ducournau’s film *Raw* (2017). ‘The ecoGothic’, he argues, ‘provides a lens by which humanity might not merely recognise its place in the interconnected network of the more-than-human world, but by which it might seek to live with an awareness of the diversity of other subjects and other kinds of sentience inhabiting this network’.

Sarah Cullen’s ‘Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Nocturnal Gothic’ perceptively examines the nightscape as an underexplored ecoGothic environment. Building on the more emotive definitions of wilderness, using Nathaniel Hawthorne’s works to illustrate her ideas, she proposes ‘a new mode of ecoGothic reading’, which she terms ‘the nocturnal gothic’. Cullen intriguingly draws together seemingly disparate texts by analysing their shared representations of what she calls ‘the ecoGothic realm of the night’. In ‘Plant-Animal Hybridity and the Late Victorian imagination’, Marc Ricard makes a compelling case for the extreme relevance of the ecoGothic to the Victorian era. Again, viewing the ecoGothic as a ‘lens’, he examines the excitement and fear that accompanied new scientific discoveries in this period, looking especially to *botanical* discoveries. Highlighting the increasingly precarious boundaries in these years between ‘plant’ and ‘animal’, Ricard analyses a number of sensationally horrific Victorian stories that reflect and encapsulate the terrors implicit in the new findings of natural science, drawing on such authors as Maud Howe Elliott, Lucy H. Hooper, and Algernon Blackwood.

In ‘EcoGothic, Ecohorror and Apocalyptic Entanglement in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ *Tales of the Black Freighter*’, James L. Smith and Colin Yeo focus on the embedded narrative of *Black Freighter*, which lies within the graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986-87). Building on emerging discussions of the nautical Gothic, they explore how *Black Freighter* provides a ‘vocabulary of horror’ which echoes the grim and environmentally entangled fears of the 1980s. Smith and Yeo shed new light on Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’ modern classic, interestingly exploring how it ‘takes on’, in their words, ‘the challenge of the ecoGothic’ through its metatextuality.

Garland Beasley’s ‘The Value(s) of Landscape: The Sublime, the Picturesque, and Ann Radcliffe’ demonstrates how the ecoGothic can be used to re-illuminate much-discussed Gothic classics. Drawing not only on her fiction, but her literary criticism, Beasley provides ecocritical insight into the connections between ecohorror, ecoGothic, and the sublime. He argues in his essay that Radcliffe presents two very different visions of Nature and explores the ramifications of each, looking in particular to the connections between ecocriticism and gender, while making the case that we need to broaden our understandings of Gothic landscape. Finally, Peter Mortensen also provides us with an illuminating single-author study. In ‘“Monkey-Advice and Monkey-Help”: Isak Dinesen’s EcoGothic’, Mortensen presents an ecoGothic reading of Danish author Karen Blixon/Isak Dinesen’s story ‘The Monkey’ (1934). Defining the ecoGothic as ‘a new and enhanced attentiveness’ to the environmental significance of our horror and Gothic stories, he presents us with a firmly ‘dis-anthropocentric’ vision of Blixon/Dinesen’s natural world, underlining the ecoGothic’s ‘challenge to all hierarchical dualisms’.

Interestingly, though we invited essays on ecohorror *and* ecoGothic, there is a definite and discernible pattern in this issue: horror *is* discussed (perhaps most notably in the papers by Hillard, Corstorphine, Packham, Smith and Yeo) but the term *ecoGothic* is the more predominant throughout all of these works. Repeatedly it is described specifically as a ‘lens’ and it seems—looking to these essays, at least—that the ecoGothic is strongly emerging as the means by which we can view, question, and seek to understand the ecophobic elements of our human/nonhuman interrelationships (or indeed, ‘the body in the basement’, with which we are now faced). This may change – and certainly we encourage more elaborative discussions of ecohorror in future in order to further and better compare and contrast these two evolving and sometimes intermeshing terms.

Gothic Nature has come into existence specifically to be a part of the response to various calls for what Timothy Morton (2016) terms a ‘dark ecology’ (p. 1). It seeks to be a part of the challenge to what has been called the largely ‘Wordsworthian tradition’ (Smith and Hughes, 2013: p. 3) in existing environmental criticism. Born of the first conference *Gothic Nature I: New Directions in Ecohorror and the EcoGothic*, held at Trinity College Dublin in 2017, this journal stemmed from the excitement and enthusiasm shared amongst scholars from all over the world at this event. It quickly became clear that there is a vibrant scene when it comes to new research in all things ecohorror and ecoGothic – and this journal sets out not only to bring together and showcase this work, but to seriously highlight its importance within the environmental (and dare we say Gothic) contexts in which we live. We invite scholars and thinkers to use *Gothic Nature* as a space in which to explore, propose, and contest different and evolving definitions of ecohorror and ecoGothic. Discussions of this nature help bring to light fascinating stories about and insights into the increasingly perilous relationship between the human and nonhuman. They reveal some of the intricacies of how Nature has functioned—and continues to function—in the cultural imagination as well as showing how our representations of the natural world are used as a way of engaging with the fears attendant upon emergent environmental crisis and decline.

This journal is deliberately broad in its historical reach and geographical scope. Conscious of the fact that ecohorror and ecoGothic are, as we have said, quite newly evolving fields of inquiry, we are reticent to be too rigid in the remit of *Gothic Nature* and intentionally encourage a range of subjects and ideas in order to provoke conversation. It is our vision that *Gothic Nature* becomes increasingly interdisciplinary – in future incorporating creative works as well as differing opinions from various subject and industry specialisms. We will feature regular blog entries from a different author related to the journal’s central themes. *Gothic Nature* will be issued annually and we hope to hold various events to promote its publication. This inaugural issue is being launched at the conference *Gothic Nature II*, generously hosted by the Department of English and Creative Writing at the University of Roehampton. Headlined by Professor Andrew Smith, co-editor of *Ecogothic* (2013), and featuring creative readings from prize-winning author Kevan Manwaring, this event has attracted a broad range of speakers (some featured in this issue). Both the journal and symposium strive to build on the excellent, open, and provocative works of leading thinkers in all things Gothic Nature – several of whom we are honoured to have as members of our editorial board. We hope to

gradually build a hub of creative research on all things ecohorror/ecoGothic and actively invite potential collaborative proposals.

The launch of this journal represents not a beginning but an emboldening of a new way of thinking about the more unstable and frightening aspects of human and nonhuman relationships, particularly in the context of emergent epochal change. It offers a space for scholars to interrogate the monstrosity, sublimity, spectrality, and uncanniness of Nature as it is depicted in the Gothic imagination, as well as to unearth the ways in which Gothic factors into our understandings and experiences of ecosocial crisis. The Nature in Gothic and Nature as Gothic: these are the essential foundations of *Gothic Nature*.

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BIOGRAPHY

Elizabeth Parker is the author of the forthcoming monograph *The Forest and the EcoGothic: The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination*, which will be published with Palgrave Gothic. She is the founding editor of *Gothic Nature: New Directions in Ecohorror and the EcoGothic* and television editor for *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*. She is co-editor of *Landscapes of Liminality: Between Space and Place* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2016) and the forthcoming collection *'Isn't It Ironic?' Receivership and Responsibility in Popular Culture*. She has co-organised several conferences on space, place, and the relationship between the Gothic and the nonhuman and has published her work in various titles such as *Plant Horror!: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film* (Palgrave, 2016) and *Transecology: Transgender Perspectives on the Environment* (Lexington, 2019). She has taught English Literature and courses on Popular Culture at a number of universities across the UK and Ireland and currently works at St Mary's University, Twickenham. Passionate about all things ecoGothic, she is keen to develop an ecohorror/ecoGothic research hub in the UK and is very open to collaborative opportunities.

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**Gothic Nature Revisited:
Reflections on the Gothic of Ecocriticism**

Tom J. Hillard

ABSTRACT

The 2017 ‘Gothic Nature I’ conference in Dublin, Ireland, and the launch of the new journal *Gothic Nature: New Directions in Ecohorror and the EcoGothic* present an occasion to reflect on how the entangled fields of ecocriticism and Gothic literary studies have developed and evolved over the past decade. While ecocritics have historically been slow and at times reluctant to embrace Gothic texts and approaches, in recent years that has begun to change. This essay argues that the development of ecocriticism itself can be read as a type of Gothic story. If imagined figuratively as if it were a horror film, the field of ecocriticism is at a point where it is confronting the monster that has been hidden in the basement. This can be seen in the current scholarly interest in topics such as slow violence, ecosickness, environmental injustice, environmental grief, the Anthropocene, and the vibrancy of all matter. The neologism ‘ecoGothic’, despite its sometimes uncertain and unstable usage, and despite the sometimes contested methods and meanings of ‘ecocriticism’ and ‘Gothic’ themselves, shows potential to help scholars productively explore the multiplicity of topics at the nexus of ecocriticism and the Gothic. In this regard, this essay argues that Kristeva’s ‘abjection’ a concept long employed in Gothic studies, can aid ecocritics in examining that which is ambiguous, disorderly, unsettling both in the texts they study, and in their understanding of the trajectory of ecocriticism itself.

In late November 2017, a group of nearly fifty scholars gathered on the campus of Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. Coming from countries across Europe and from North America, they convened for two days in the Trinity Long Room Hub (and later at nearby pubs and restaurants) to present research, discuss books and film, and otherwise share scholarship. Titled ‘Gothic Nature I’: New Directions in Ecohorror and the Ecogothic’, the event marked an unprecedented moment in the history of both ecocriticism and Gothic literary studies. This

conference was the first of its kind, and the brisk North Atlantic autumn weather, the antiquated Trinity College architecture, and the rich, deeply-layered history of the campus and surrounding city provided a perfect setting for the exploration of Gothic literature. The panels featured topics such as ‘Into the Ecogothic Woods: Trees and Forests of Horror’, ‘Monstrous Vegetality and Themes of the Anthropocene’, ‘Ecohorror and Ecogothic: American Contexts’, and ‘When Nature Bites Back: Animal Horror’, among many others. Two keynote addresses covered related territory: Jenny Bavidge shared an insightful survey of current ecocriticism as she examined the ‘Ethics of the Ecogothic’, and William Hughes drew from his well of knowledge about the Gothic in his reflections on ‘Zombies, Ecoterrorism, and Environmental Apocalypse’. The energy and excitement among attendees and participants was palpable.

I was fortunate enough to have been invited to this auspicious event as an honoured guest of sorts, in part because of an essay I published a decade ago called “‘Deep Into That Darkness Peering’: An Essay on Gothic Nature” (Hillard, 2009). In it, I argued that ecocritics would do well to bring their critical acumen to Gothic texts, and to consider the Gothic qualities of texts that were already part of the environmental literature canon. When I wrote that piece (and during my doctoral work in the preceding years), I was venturing into what seemed almost entirely unexplored territory—particularly in the realm of ecocriticism in which I was trained. Back then, virtually no one was publishing about ecocriticism and the Gothic.¹ That’s now changed. Ten years later, a steady string of publications and the Gothic Nature I conference have made clear that the terrain is now quite different: ecocriticism is having a Gothic moment. Moreover, the existence of this scholarly journal demonstrates that a Gothic ecocriticism likely is here to stay. In some respects, this should be no surprise: after all, I’d argue, ecocriticism itself has always been a Gothic story.

Consider an example.² Greg Garrard opens his field-defining 2004 book *Ecocriticism* with a discussion of the first chapter of Rachel Carson’s iconic *Silent Spring* (1962), a book he identifies as a point where ‘modern environmentalism begins’ (p. 1). Carson’s famous chapter, titled ‘A Fable for Tomorrow’, initially sets a pastoral scene of ‘a town in the heart of America

¹ Although no one was really publishing then, it turns out that many scholars were indeed actively interested in a Gothic ecocriticism and diligently but quietly beginning work in this subfield, as I discovered not long after ‘Deep Into That Darkness’ was published. But like so many subfields that cross boundaries, the scholars of the Gothic weren’t necessarily communicating with the ecocritical community, and vice versa.

² Keetley and Sivils (2018) make note of this same example in their recent volume *EcoGothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (p. 2).

where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings' (Carson, 1962: p. 1). It is a place where 'wildflowers delighted', one 'famous for the abundance and variety of its bird life' and where many 'came to fish the streams' (p. 1, p. 2). Garrard notes these bucolic descriptions, and then points to the famous shift in Carson's narrative, where she writes: 'Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens; the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death' (p. 2). Garrard rightfully points to how Carson here moves away from the pastoral scene into one of 'catastrophic destruction' and he explains that the 'silent spring' of which she writes becomes 'a synecdoche for a more general environmental apocalypse' (p. 1, p. 2). Thus, he claims, 'the founding text of modern environmentalism' invokes the 'literary genres of pastoral and apocalypse' (p. 2).

As it turns out, of course, the 'strange blight', the 'evil spell', and the 'maladies' that afflict this town and usher in a 'strange stillness' marked by 'illness', 'sickness', and 'deaths' are brought about by 'no witchcraft'—instead, the 'people had done it themselves' (p. 2, p. 3). Carson's pattern of language here evokes the supernatural, and in doing so she briefly sustains an atmosphere of unease, uncertainty, and fear. This suspense created by this atmosphere is released (to a large extent) when we learn that it is not a supernatural agent, but rather the widespread commonplace use of pesticides (and DDT in particular) that is the cause of the harm. Garrard's assessment of these rhetorical moves—from pastoral to apocalypse—is useful, particularly in the context of framing his introduction to the field of ecocriticism. But Carson's deploying of hints of the supernatural and of malevolent forces, and then later explaining them away with something more mundane or prosaic (but no less deadly and only differently horrific) is also a narrative move reminiscent of another type of storytelling, one exemplified in such iconic Gothic novels as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) or *The Italian* (1797). The narrative trope is that of the 'explained supernatural' and of a secret (hidden or ignored) past that comes back to haunt, a repressed or unacknowledged story that refuses to remain hidden. The truth will out, as the saying goes. Thus, the opening chapter of *Silent Spring*, as well as Garrard's analysis of it, can *also* be read as peculiarly and deeply Gothic.

As I said, the story of ecocriticism has been a Gothic one all along. In some respects, it might go without saying that, from its inception, ecocriticism has been a mode of critical inquiry rooted in an awareness of crisis and danger. 'As global climate change, pollution, and habitat destruction have tilted a comfortable Earth', Sara L. Crosby has recently observed,

‘horror is becoming the environmental norm’ (2014, p. 514). Given this reality, the launch of *Gothic Nature: New Directions in Ecohorror and the EcoGothic* presents an opportunity to reflect on Gothic studies and ecocriticism, both past and present, and to consider where we are now—since we all first began peering deep into that darkness. In the brief pages that follow I want to consider some of the implications of imagining ecocriticism as a Gothic tale. Doing so can help contextualise some of the entanglements of the fields of ecocriticism and Gothic studies, some of their uncertainties, and it can also underscore the timely, important, and valuable work of a journal such as *Gothic Nature*.

To this end, I offer a thought experiment: *Imagine if ecocriticism were a horror film.* Here’s where we’d be: For some time now, the main characters have been traipsing about the grounds outside the remote house recently encountered, blithely exploring in daylight hours, and they have only just ventured inside—unaware of, or perhaps unwilling to recognise, the dangers that lurk off-screen. The soundtrack has been slowly building suspense, and the camera angles and editing cuts make it clear that someone, or *something*, is going to be the matter. We’ve reached that point in the film—and I suspect all the readers of this journal know that point—where a curious protagonist opens the basement or cellar door, and with a flashlight (or some other uncertain light source) steps cautiously down the stairs. We’re unsure what’s going to happen next, and the tension mounts. Who or what will be there? Then, upon turning that corner, suddenly thrown into dim but unmistakable relief, is a mouldering corpse. This, I’d suggest, is where ecocriticism is right now: Staring at the body buried in the basement.

It’s taken quite a while to get here. But perhaps that shouldn’t be surprising, given the origins of ecocriticism and its commitments. In its earliest iterations, ecocriticism tended to favour particular types of texts and approaches to them. Among these early projects was the ‘recovery’ of a large but previously ignored canon of ‘nature writing’, a literary genre firmly embedded in the legacy of the European Romantic tradition and employing a stance toward ‘nature’ that helped promulgate our modern day environmental movement (think Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and so on). Cheryl Glotfelty (1996) described this as the second stage of ecocriticism, and such recovery work was important.³ Yet this focus, necessary as it was, didn’t come without costs. For example, in his 2004 anthology *Reading*

³ Glotfelty modelled her vision of ecocriticism’s trajectory after the historical development of feminist criticism (pp. xxii-xxiv). To date, her assessments and predictions have proven largely accurate.

the Roots: American Nature Writing before Walden, Michael P. Branch considers why ecocritics tended to pay so little attention to early American texts. '[T]he current blossoming of environmental literature and ecocriticism', he observes, 'has been inspired by a particularly modern, ecological sensibility' (p. xvii). A result of this, he speculates, is that 'we are uncomfortable engaging writers whose approach to the natural world threatens or offends our own literary, environmental, or ethical sensibilities' (p. xviii). Just as important, Branch suggests that '[i]t may also embarrass some scholars to take seriously representations of nature that are badly flawed in matters of scientific accuracy' (p. xx). While he refers to the lack of attention given to early, pre-modern nature writing texts, his observations could just as easily be made about the literary Gothic. If ecocritical scholars were reluctant to embrace such older representations of 'bad science', it's hardly a surprise that the supernatural, fantastic, taboo, and highly affective realms of the Gothic have also been shunned. The Gothic's frequent lack of strict adherence to the probable or possible likely dissuades scholars who are drawn to more realistic and accurate depictions of nature and environment. Moreover, Gothic literature itself has long been an outlier among 'serious' scholars of literature, often perceived as too 'low brow' to be given much scholarly attention, and I suspect that some of this legacy follows it in the realm of ecocriticism.⁴

Thankfully, that is changing. Many ecocritics are beginning to pay attention to the history and tradition of the literary Gothic mode. This is important because, as I've said, right now we stand face to face with a corpse, a body, a monstrosity we don't yet fully know what to do with. Potentially helpful in this endeavour is the new term *ecoGothic*. I won't reiterate this word's short history here, since several recent publications have done that work quite well, such as Elizabeth Parker's essay in the volume *Plant Horror* (2016), and Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils' introduction to *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-century American Literature* (2018). It is my hope that the excellent work of this journal will further clarify and establish its scope and boundaries, because thus far 'ecoGothic' as a term has been used quite loosely.⁵ I admit I'm often sceptical of the impulse to add the 'eco-' prefix to denote something

⁴ Many of the recent companions, introductions, and handbooks to ecocriticism still give little (or no) attention to the Gothic. For instance, the introduction to Garrard's impressive, wide-ranging, nearly 600-page *Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (2014) makes passing mention of the 'importance' of the Gothic, yet at the same time categorizes it as 'genre fiction' along with 'romance' and discusses it no further (p. 20). Likewise, Hubert Zapf's equally impressive, 700-plus-page *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology* (2016) makes no significant mention of the Gothic.

⁵ This loose usage includes the word's capitalisation, which has variously been rendered in different publications as 'EcoGothic', 'ecoGothic', and 'ecogothic'.

‘environmentally aware’ or somehow ‘green’ in its methods—which I suspect too often arises more from a desire to coin a new term (or, in the realm of advertising, to sell a product) than to create a genuinely useful or meaningful one. My reservation with ‘ecoGothic’ is that it might be something of a house of cards, since its basic building blocks—*ecocriticism* and *Gothic*, or just *eco-* and *Gothic*—are themselves hardly stable signifiers.

Take ‘Gothic’, for example: It’s a notoriously slippery word. Most people have some understanding of what it means, perhaps conjuring images of frightening characters or entities, supernatural events, dark archaic settings, and so on. Or, as a cultural term, it might make one think of styles of dress or types of music. But readers of this journal know the word ‘Gothic’ can be more widely construed as a literary term, a historical term, an artistic term, or an architectural term (and even a sociological one). So which do we mean?

The word ‘Gothic’ originally referred to ‘the Goths’—those Germanic tribes in what is now northern Germany who played a role in the fall of the Roman Empire. When it was used in this sense in the 1600 and 1700s in England, it was generally based on limited historical understanding and outright misconceptions, and it typically carried a pejorative connotation of ‘barbaric’. But the meaning of ‘Gothic’ expanded (again, in part by something of a misunderstanding of the historical timeline) over the course of the eighteenth century to refer more broadly to things from the so-called ‘Dark Ages’. In that Enlightenment-era context, ‘Gothic’ was understood to be contrasted with ‘classical’, and in that sense derogatory. As David Punter (1996) describes, ‘Where the classical was well-ordered, the Gothic was chaotic; where simple and pure, Gothic was ornate and convoluted; where the classics offered a set of cultural models to be followed, Gothic represented excess and exaggeration, the product of the wild and uncivilized’ (p. 5).⁶ Even so, during the eighteenth century those connotations began to change, and a widespread shift in values came to associate these things (the medieval, the primitive, the wild) with *positive* qualities. Consequently, there developed a new sense of looking backward to earlier eras, and in literature this meant an embracing of a ‘truly ancient British heritage’ (Punter, 1996: p. 6), including a revival of interest in older literary figures such as Chaucer, Spenser, and even Shakespeare.

⁶ Punter’s *The Literature of Terror* (1996) offers an in-depth explanation and history of the evolving meanings and connotations of the term ‘Gothic’, which I draw from in this paragraph. For another helpful overview of this history, see also Jerrold E. Hogle’s ‘Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture’ (2002).

This era, one of an ambivalent looking to the past, is the one in which Gothic literature as we know it begins, with the 1764 publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. As the British Gothic novel began to flourish in the late eighteenth-century, most of its earliest authors chose displaced settings—often in the distant lands of continental Europe, and during the Middle Ages. This displacing is what prompted the use of the term 'Gothic' to describe them. It was (and still is) alluring because such distancing allowed authors a freedom in storytelling, and it enabled a means of grappling with present-day concerns by casting them, in disguised forms, as part of a former era. To put it another way, and much more bluntly, 'the modern "Gothic" as we know it has been grounded in fakery' (Hogle, 2012: p. 496). Yet, of course, the Gothic remains attractive in part *because* of its fakery. That is, 'Gothic' has long been a handy, empty signifier rooted in an often misperceived sense of the past, into which present concerns, desires, anxieties, and fears are projected. As Allan Lloyd-Smith (2004) has said, the Gothic 'is about the return of the past, of the repressed and denied, the buried secret that subverts and corrodes the present, whatever the culture does not want to know or admit, will not or dare not tell itself' (p. 1).

But what makes a Gothic text Gothic? Is it the use of familiar set-pieces, characters, and plot devices that harken back to those original eighteenth-century British Gothic tales? Thus, aspects of content, genre, or form? Or is it instead a literary mode, one that functions in particular ways because of the displaced narrative—and therefore the disguised confrontations with secrets, transgressions, and taboos? One thing we know with certainty: there is little critical consensus, so much so that Punter (1996) has noted that there is only one 'element' found in all Gothic texts, and 'that is fear' (p. 18).

This brings us back to the slipperiness of the term 'ecoGothic'. If the terrain of 'Gothic' is hardly stable, then no more surefooted are those working on the 'eco-' side of things. Much in the same way as the 'Gothic' has had a sometimes contested meaning, those who study or practice ecocriticism don't typically agree on common goals, methods, or theories—or even if the term '*ecocriticism*' is the one that ought to be used. Yet like the Gothic, patterns emerge. In her foundational *Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Glotfelty declares ecocriticism to be simply 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (p. xviii). Moreover, she contends that 'all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it' (p. xix). In that early iteration, Glotfelty describes ecocriticism in this manner: 'As a critical stance, it has

one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman' (p. xix).

Since those early years, ecocriticism has been repeatedly revised, redefined, and re-examined, and introductory ecocritical volumes and handbooks have proliferated. Amid the retelling of the story of ecocriticism, we find some common claims. Garrard (2004) has identified ecocriticism as 'an avowedly political mode of analysis', in which critics 'generally tie their cultural analyses to a "green" moral and political agenda' (p. 3). For Garrard, the 'widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term "human" itself' (p. 5). Such a roomy definition leads to his accurate observation that 'no single or simple perspective unites all ecocritics' (p. 15). Timothy Clark (2011) has also noted that 'the moral impetus behind ecocriticism [...] commits it to take some kind of stand, however implicit, on the huge issue of what relationship humans should have to the natural world', yet he emphasises that '[n]o distinctive method defines environmental criticism' (p. 5). Similarly, Ursula Heise (2006) observes: 'ecocriticism coheres more by virtue of a common political project than on the basis of shared theoretical or methodological assumptions' (p. 506). These descriptions of the multiplicity of ecocritical methods are but a few; a wider survey of the ecocritical field than this could produce many similar claims.

To be sure, I don't intend to make a case that there *should* be a clear, stable, or neatly defined single method or theory of ecocriticism. Indeed, its openness has been one of its assets, and I hope that remains the case. But where does this leave us with terminology? If 'Gothic' remains a historically unstable term prone to critical disagreement, and ecocriticism is only a loosely coherent 'project' without unified methods or theoretical leanings, what then to make of this recent coinage *ecoGothic*? Despite such semantic slipperiness, *ecoGothic* is particularly valuable as a praxis, or, as Parker (2016) has put it, a 'framework of ideas' (p. 217). As we know, the Gothic mode allows us, by way of narrative and text, to confront fearful 'secrets', things 'buried'—'whatever the culture does not want to know or admit', in Lloyd-Smith's phrase. If we consider this in the context of the story of ecocriticism, the Gothic mode (or the 'ecoGothic') urges us to ask: What has ecocriticism been burying? What has it been keeping out?

This brings us back to that body in the basement. Julia Kristeva's concept of 'abjection'—a type of psychological displacement that is a core function of Gothic literature—is helpful here.⁷ In *Powers of Horror* (1980), Kristeva explains:

'The corpse [...] is cesspool, and death [...] refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit [...] It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.' (pp. 3-4)

In other words, we psychologically abject (or 'throw off') those things that unsettle a stable, coherent identity (whether individual, or more widely cultural), yet those denials or 'throwings off' remain a fundamental aspect of that identity, inextricably a part of it. When seen in this light, ecocriticism has become infected, disturbed: there is that corpse, the body—the revenant (literally, the thing that returns, but which never really left in the first place!). The body was there all along in the basement, haunting the cheery hopefulness of ecocritical work in its earliest days when 'nature' was 'out there'. In the context of Kristeva's abjection and her description of the corpse, let's consider the recent movement known as the 'new materialism'. At the front of this 'material turn' in ecocriticism—a theoretical shift that focuses attention on matter, materiality, the body—Stacy Alaimo (2010) asserts: 'Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlies the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from "the environment"' (p. 2). Moreover, Alaimo argues: 'Those particular sites of interconnection demand attention to the materiality of the human and to the immediacy and potency of all that the ostensibly bounded, human subject would like to disavow' (p. 4). Described that way, there is something decidedly Gothic about this 'material turn' in ecocriticism.

⁷ For excellent explanations of the ways that Kristeva's abjection has been a central function of the Gothic, see Hogle (2002: p. 7-8) and Goddu (1997: p. 10).

Ecocriticism has been heading towards this figurative basement for a while, facing what it would ‘like to disavow’. In recent years—and with or without the term ‘ecoGothic’ attached to it—a Gothic-inflected (or Gothic-infected) ecocriticism has been among us. There is clearly a rich field of inquiry at the nexus of Gothic studies and ecocriticism. Over the past decade or more, as these fields have expanded and their scope of analysis has enlarged, we’ve seen an increased awareness that all is not necessarily well in the world, and that things might not be quite as we’d imagined them. We’ve seen a direct scholarly engagement with such diverse topics as slow violence, ecosickness, environmental injustice, environmental grief, a dawning understanding of the Anthropocene, and a creeping concern about the vibrancy and the ‘mesh’ of all matter, living or not. A perusal of recent Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) conference programs and a scan of published ecocritical books and articles shows how pervasive such interest is. We’re hip-deep in a cultural moment that is hyper-focused on discourses of catastrophe, toxicity, pollution, destruction, waste, refuse, death. We face the looming threat of irreversible climate change, and fear apocalyptic disaster from without and within. And I’m reminded again, the Gothic is at heart a literature of fear, of excess.⁸ As we study it more and more closely, the diversifying canon of texts about humans and nature (overtly Gothic or otherwise) reveals that such things were always there, *haunting us all along*—anxieties about the dangers of the natural world and our place in it, ethical perils of unchecked scientific experimentation and extractive industries, the unstable boundary between human and nonhuman, and a growing dread over human-caused environmental change.

The impressive array of scholarship at the 2017 Gothic Nature I conference in Dublin and, now, in the pages of *Gothic Nature* points to the exciting and cutting edge work that lies ahead. Ecocriticism is at last confronting many of the things that it has abjected for so long. Here we are, with the body in the basement. If ‘ecoGothic’ enables us to attach a word to such confrontings, and naming them leads to better understanding, then all the better. After all, the root ‘eco-’ derives from the Greek *oikos*, meaning ‘house’ or ‘home’. In that sense, what we have is *house-Gothic*. And if earth is home, then perhaps it’s true, as Emily Dickinson suggested nearly a century and a half ago, that all of ‘Nature is a Haunted House’.

⁸ Fred Botting opens his 1996 book *Gothic* with the declaration, ‘Gothic signifies a writing of excess’ (p. 1).

Yet the question remains: If ecocriticism is a horror film, how will the film play out? Asked another way: What kind of haunted house story is this? Now that we've seen the body, now that we have some notion of what the monster is, will it be the kind of horror film where everyone dies by the end? Or is it the kind where the strong survivor, sadder and wiser, escapes to live another day?

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BIOGRAPHY

Tom J. Hillard is Associate Professor of English at Boise State University, where he teaches courses on early American literature, environmental literary studies, and Gothic literature. His scholarly research focuses primarily on the literary Gothic in early American literature and culture. Recent publications include work on Nathaniel Hawthorne and Charles Brockden Brown, as well as essays in the volumes *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-century American Literature* (Routledge, 2018) and *EcoGothic* (Manchester University Press, 2013). He co-edited (with Amy T. Hamilton) the book *Before the West Was West: Critical Essays on Pre-1800 Literature of the American Frontiers* (University of Nebraska Press, 2014). From 2011-2018, he served as Book Review Editor for the Oxford University Press journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. He is currently working on several projects related to early nineteenth-century American Gothic literature.

Theorising the EcoGothic

Simon C. Estok

ABSTRACT

Theorising about the ecoGothic is undoubtedly one of the most exciting developments in recent ecocritical work because it accepts the challenge to get real about our environmental issues and to look at ‘the fear, anxiety, and dread that often pervade [the relationship of humans to the nonhuman world]: it orients us, in short, to the more disturbing and unsettling aspects of our interactions with nonhuman ecologies’ (Keetley and Sivils, 2017: p. 1). Growing out of discussions about ecophobia, the ecoGothic allows for an enormous range of productive comments. Theorising about menace, the ecoGothic allows for understandings of how we imagine and persecute social and environmental Otherness; about how monstrosity is central to an environmental imagination that locates the human as the center of all things good and safe; about how the control-freak aspects of humanity point toward continued problems; about the entanglement of ontological and existential matters with environmental ethics; and about solutions. One thing is certain: there is no way forward until we come to serious understandings of how ecophobia got us to where we are. EcoGothic theorising helps us toward these understandings.

Theorising the EcoGothic

The appearance of *Gothic Nature* is timely: it is a reflection of the growing understanding that there is a need to look ‘beyond the benign shores of Walden Pond [...] [at] the darker aspects of the human cultural relationship’ (Keetley & Sivils, 2017: p. 16) with the natural world, as Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils have recently explained in their superb introduction to their edited collection *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Ecocriticism did not begin with this vision. When I entered ASLE in 1999, ecocriticism was much different than it is now, much more of an exultant and jolly celebration of nature writing with a more insistent renunciation of theory and ‘obfuscation’. ASLE was disproportionately male, lacking

diversity, very American, and deficient in vegetarian food options at the conferences (except a salad). It probably wasn't a bunch of aging American hippies with guitars singing kumbaya around a campfire, though it seemed to my Canadian eyes to be. Discussions were limited in ways that they aren't now. We've come a long way, but even as recently as 2009, theorising about ecocriticism caused an uproar. This is odd, since theorising, especially about ecophobia, can take us to the roots of the environmental holocausts we have caused. I assume in this article that it is logical to theorise the ecoGothic through ecophobia¹ (indeed, that it is difficult to do otherwise). If we are to better understand why the ecoGothic has been so surprisingly late in developing as a theory, it is reasonable here to try to understand the controversy theorising about ecophobia has generated.

Controversy? What Controversy?²

It has been dubbed 'The Estok-Robisch Controversy',³ and it began with the publication of 'Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia' (hereafter referred to as 'Theorising') in the spring of 2009 in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, the flagship journal of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). This provocative article changed the direction of ecocriticism in unexpected ways. It evoked a fiery response from former Purdue University professor Kip Robisch, and this response substantially shifted ecocritical groundings. Robisch (2009) held that theory is counter-productive. He indicated that he had no patience for what he called 'Francophilic scholasticism' (p. 703), and he encouraged direct action against scholars he believed are 'nature-fakers' (p. 707).⁴ The article was a disturbing manifestation of a resistance to theory, replete with threats of violence, that had the exact opposite effect of what Robisch seems to have had in mind. A host of well-respected scholars have responded, and I include

¹ As I have explained in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis*: The ecophobic condition exists on a spectrum and can embody fear, contempt, indifference, or lack of mindfulness (or some combination of these) towards the natural environment. While its genetic origins have functioned, in part, to preserve our species, the ecophobic condition has also greatly serviced growth economies and ideological interests. Often a product of behaviors serviceable in the past but destructive in the present, it is also sometimes a product of the perceived requirements of our seemingly exponential growth. Ecophobia exists globally on both macro and micro levels, and its manifestation is at times directly apparent and obvious but is also often deeply obscured by the clutter of habit and ignorance (Estok, 2018: p.1).

² Most of this section appears in slightly different form in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (pp. 2-5).

³ See Garrard (2011) and Mackenzie and Posthumus (2013).

⁴ This material has been well summarised elsewhere – see, for instance, Mackenzie and Posthumus. Robisch does not specify precisely what *he* means by "nature-fakers".

lengthy quotations from them here to make clear the fact that there really was and is little controversy, if any, at all—except perhaps to Robisch.

In his review of ecocritical theory in *The Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory* for 2009, Greg Garrard identified the core of Robisch's discontent as being a concern over the role of theory in ecocriticism. Though it might more properly be seen as a debate than a controversy, the phrase 'Estok-Robisch Controversy' has certainly gained traction. Louisa Mackenzie and Stephanie Posthumus (2013) summarise the contours of the debate exceptionally well in *ISLE* as follows:

'In the Spring 2009 *ISLE* issue, an article was published by the well-known ecocritic Simon Estok entitled 'Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia' [...] As its title suggests, the article was a position piece on theory itself. Estok argued the potential of the notion of ecophobia to provide a point of coalescence within the currently 'open' and 'ambivalent' space of ecocriticism, and suggested that such confluent theorizations would not only make ecocriticism more rigorous but also make theory itself more engaged with activism. 'Theorizing' was sure to provoke debate, and it is still doing so—but the controversy came from the blazing response, published two issues later, of S. K. Robisch: 'The Woodshed: A Response to "Ecocriticism and Ecophobia"' [...] This article sees Estok as representative of a modern theoretical machine in need of 'monkeywrenching' (700), a 'masturbatory apparatus' (698) that erases nature and has nothing to do with green activism. 'Francophilic scholasticism' (703) comes in for a particular drubbing. Furthermore, the author invites the like-minded to contact him at a published e-mail address in order to show up at conferences with red paint to 'go PETA on these nature-fakers, these seated hikers' (707). 'Feeding theory to the animals' will apparently merit an encounter with the 'wrong end of [his] walking stick' (708), an echo of the title's woodshed.' (p. 758)

Ethan Mannon (2013) has also discussed 'Robisch's near-fanatic desire to defend the purity of an ecocriticism untainted by theory' (p. 3) and characterises the debate as follows:

‘Robisch declares Estok’s piece contemptible from the start because it is hospitable towards theory. Robisch demonstrates a clear distrust of ‘the culture of “theory”’ – which, he argues, ‘seeks rank and power more than it seeks art and insight’, ‘relinquishes thorough analysis in a quest for the limelight’, and ‘is the Monsanto of a native grassland’ (698, 699, 703). Throughout his article, Robisch’s message to sympathetic readers is clear: he suggests it is high time to ‘start monkey-wrenching the theory machine’ and concludes with a rallying cry capable of producing a wide range of emotions, including amusement, passion, and even anxiety (700). After describing his urge to pelt a panel of theorists with karo-syrup-filled water balloons, Robisch outlines his vision of a militant ecocriticism: he writes, ‘Let’s go PETA on these nature fakers, these seated hikers. I want an ELF of ecocritics [...] “Theory” fantasizes itself victimized. I say, dreams can come true’ (707). [...] the Estok-Robisch exchange stands apart in terms of venom.’ (p. 2)

Serpil Oppermann (2011) has described it thus:

‘Estok’s provocative thesis on ecophobia has attracted some serious hostilities against theory in general, as exemplified by S.K. Robisch’s essay in the following Autumn 2009 issue of *ISLE*. This piece, which goes against the very spirit of ecocritical notions of engagement, places praxis in opposition to theory in the name of embracing the active side of life, which ironically leads to the nature/culture dichotomy ecocriticism has persistently sought to avoid. [...] Robisch’s fierceness is a clear sign of an epistemic crisis in the field.’ (p. 161, p. 163)

Richard Pickard (2017), past president of ALECC (the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada) observed in a blog that

‘Simon Estok writes a mostly reasonable [...] piece suggesting that ecocritics need to think and work in a more consistently theoretical way. [...] S.K. Robisch writes—and to his great detriment, Scott Slovic publishes—an angry and unhelpfully ad hominem reply to Estok, representing as well as a broader response to ‘the ecocritical equivalent of cosmetics testers—from Neil

Evernden through Timothy Morton'. (I don't think I'm alone in not understanding the equation in this phrase, or in disliking what I think I understand.) In Robisch's view, 'Poststructuralism, cultural criticism, and their sleazy uncle "theory" have spun out of control to the point at which we should expect more frequent deformities resulting from inbreeding'. Perhaps most startlingly, Robisch suggests asking this question of conference presenters talking about questions of the animal: 'If I got naked right now and came running at you, howling, what would you do?' It's the kind of piece for which the word 'screed' was invented—and I don't think I've ever used the word before.'

And finally, Matthew A. Taylor (2012), in a thoughtful discussion of Poe and posthuman ecology, one that seeks more detailed discussion and nuancing of the theory and definitions ecophobia, found

'Robisch's argument to be problematic, both for its Manichaeian depiction of the evils of theory and for the violence with which its author imagines visiting physical harm upon his theoretical adversaries, as when he fantasizes withholding 'food and water' from a 'poststructuralist' stranded in the forest 'until the survivor acknowledges the representational value of words like "giardia" [...] and "grizzly bear"' (705). Timothy Morton voices a similar concern regarding Robisch's rhetoric in 'Queer Ecology', *PMLA* 125 (March 2010): 273–82.' (p. 370)

Given the storm that was developing, the *ISLE* editor first added to the journal a disclaimer that *ISLE* would not publish articles that 'imply the incitement of violence' and second issued 'a call for submissions to a special forum on the broader topic of "Ecocriticism and Theory"' that would appear in a 2010 *ISLE* issue (Slovic 'Further Reflections'). The call—though it made no mention of the two articles that motivated it (mine or Robisch's), effectively silencing debate about both—appeared in the first issue of 2010 and barely touched the hypothesising that spurred it.

Theorising about ecophobia is now expanding in the rich soils of ecocriticism and the environmental humanities. EcoGothic thinking is part of (and only part of) the larger body of

ecophobia—as an apple is to the tree, a feather to the wing, a second to the hour, and a Nazi to anti-Semitism. With the flourishing of ecophobia, the growing interest in the ecoGothic is understandable: ‘at the broadest level, the ecogothic inevitably intersects with ecophobia, not only because ecophobic representations of nature will be infused, like the gothic, with fear and dread but also because ecophobia is born out of the failure of humans to control their lives and their world. And control, or the lack thereof, is central to the gothic’ (Keetley & Sivils, p. 3). Ecophobia is the unwillingness of humans ‘to come to terms with their nonhuman ancestry and the common, biological origin of all life’ (Del Principe, 2014: p. 2). It is not an intimacy or urge to affiliate with a loving nature (what E. O. Wilson calls ‘biophilia’) that spurs the ecoGothic imagination: the ecoGothic is at core ecophobic. Work theorising ecoGothicism frequently works with or through ecophobia theory, yet, as Derek Gladwin (2014) usefully points out, my own discussions of ecophobia paradoxically do ‘not engage with the EcoGothic *per se*, [...] [but] do [...] foreground fear and phobia as a central concern in ecological readings of literary texts, as well as other cultural productions that have been Gothicised’ (p. 41). Gladwin’s critique is made considerably more poignant by the assertion of Keetley and Sivils that my work is ironically the *source-point* of ecoGothic studies and that ‘efforts to characterize the term “ecoGothic” arguably began with Simon C. Estok’s provocative 2009 essay “Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia”’ (p. 2). Certainly there is no question in my mind now that ecoGothic literary representations are exceptional examples of the ecophobic imagination and that ecoGothic Studies and theorising about ecophobia are on the same page, with similar goals and methodologies.

The Rise of the EcoGothic

Arguably, the first volume to explore the ecoGothic was the 2013 edited collection *Ecogothic* by Andrew Smith and William Hughes. This impressive collection does indeed provide ‘a starting point for future discussions’ (p. 13), as the editors hope it will, and it does so as much by what it omits as by what it covers. The most notable and surprising omission is any serious discussion of ecophobia. It is one thing to follow Timothy Clark in ‘tracing different conceptions of nature and their effects throughout the history and cultures of the world’ (as cited by Hillard in ‘From Salem’, p. 105), but it is quite another to misperceive (or, worse yet, ignore) the roots of the ecoGothic. To be perfectly clear: no ecophobia, no ecoGothic. Tom Hillard’s dismissive response to theorising about ecophobia is as clear in his 2013 ‘From Salem witch to *Blair Witch*’ as it was in his 2009 “‘Deep Into That Darkness Peering’: An Essay on

Gothic Nature’, where he suggests that to start analysing ecophobia, ‘we need look no further than the rich and varied vein of critical approaches used to investigate fear in literature’ (p. 688). Respectfully, however, I think that to look ‘no further’ seems—to use Hillard’s own words, originally aimed at my call for critics to address ecophobia—‘overly proscriptive, potentially stifling, and, let’s be honest, unlikely to happen’ (p. 187). Nonetheless, Hillard is perhaps the first scholar to have made the connection between ecophobia and Gothic nature.

The term ‘ecophobia’ has, since Hillard’s 2009 response article, found considerable usage among scholars studying horror and the ecoGothic. For instance, Tara K. Parmiter, in ‘Green is the New Black: Ecophobia and the Gothic Landscape in the *Twilight* Series’, finds use for the term in her discussion of how Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* novels ‘reflect this pervasive fear of nonhuman nature but [...] simultaneously model an increased engagement and appreciation—a more biophilic response—to the natural world’ (p. 222); Bernice M. Murphy discusses ecophobia in *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness* (2013); the term appears in a couple of essays (one by Tom Hillard, and the other by Sharae Deckard) in the Smith and Hughes collection; it also appears in several of the chapters in Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga’s *Plant Horror* (particularly Elizabeth Parker’s “‘Just a Piece of Wood’”: Jan Švankmajer’s *Otesánek* and the EcoGothic’); Sarah Groeneveld does not directly reference ‘ecophobia’ in ‘Unsettling the Environment’, but she does refer to the seminal ‘Theorising’ essay; Abby Goode identifies ecophobia in Leonora Sansay’s early nineteenth century *Secret History; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo* (See ‘Gothic Fertility’); Maria Parrino uses the term to describe the ‘sinister place [...] the frightening atmosphere’ (p. 88) of Antonio Fogazzaro’s *Malombra* (see ‘L’orrida magnificenza del luogo’: Gothic Aesthetics in Antonio Fogazzaro’s *Malombra*’); Kaja Franck uses the concept to organise some of her thinking about the Gothic in her PhD dissertation entitled ‘The Development of the Literary Werewolf: Language, Subjectivity and Animal/Human Boundaries’; and in ‘Vegetable Monsters: Man-Eating Trees in *Fin-De-Siècle* Fiction’, Cheryl Blake Price draws on the term to discuss nineteenth century ‘gothic stories and fictionalised travel accounts featuring dangerous exotic plants’ (p. 311).⁵ Elizabeth Parker (2016) explains that ecoGothic is ‘a theoretical lens as opposed to a genre classification’ (p. 217), which, as she notes, is consonant with the definition that Smith and Hughes offer in

⁵ In June 2019, as the articles for this inaugural issue of *Gothic Nature* went to the final proofs stage, *ISLE* published a Special Cluster entitled “Revisiting Ecophobia,” with nine original essays defining and expanding the scope of ecophobia studies.

EcoGothic (p. 1). Parker also claims that ‘the “ecoGothic” has emerged’ (p. 217) in response to my insistence that ecophobia ‘needs theorizing’ (Estok, p. 203). If ecoGothic is an approach, such is not the case with eco-horror, and Parker reiterates the position put forth by Joseph J. Foy (2010) that eco-horror is a genre (p. 217). If we take Parker’s position that ecoGothic is a theoretical lens (which I do), then precisely what does it theorise?

Imagining Menace, Theorising Persecution

Ecophobia needs theorising, and the ecoGothic is a very good lens through which to begin such focusing because it allows us to describe some very specific aspects of the ecophobic imagination. The imagining of nature as a menacing threat is central to ecoGothic texts. The menace can (and often does) involve the idea of nature as an agent bent on vengeance. An agential nature is menacing in itself; a vengeful one is truly horrifying. For Keetley and Sivils, ‘the ecogothic turns to the inevitability of humans intertwined with their natural environment – to humans surrounded, interpenetrated, and sometimes stalked by a nonhuman with an agentic force that challenges humans’ own vaunted ability to shape their world’ (p. 7). For the American ecoGothic, this world ‘was already a haunted land: the ghosts born of colonialism and its attendant environmental perversity grew entrenched in the very soil of North America’s contested ground’ (p. 1). Indeed, ‘American ecogothic [...] grows in soil too often fed by the blood of violent oppression’ (p. 8). One of the things that the ecoGothic lens promises to do for ecophobia theorising, especially with the current ecoGothic focus on the US and the Americas, is to further develop understandings of the intersections between racism and ecophobia, ethnocentrism and ecophobia, and sexism and ecophobia. Keetley and Sivils express this superbly:

‘...the nineteenth century ecogothic imagination [...] taps into the murder and displacement of indigenous peoples, the oppression of women, children, and the lower classes, and, of course, the horrors of slavery. These injustices play out upon a natural world that is likewise victimized. Deforestation, over-hunting, and unsustainable farming, along with countless other forms of shortsighted land management, have forever degraded the continent’s ecological integrity. Combined with their human toll, these practices cast the natural world as a burial ground for victims of social and environmental trauma [...] humanity’s continued abuses against the land and its denizens, human and nonhuman alike,

have spawned a culture obsessed with and fearful of a natural world both monstrous and monstrously wronged.’ (p. 11)

Imagined as menace to the fantasies about normalcy, stability, and control, the natural world in the ecoGothic imagination functions precisely to entrench such fantasies. Just as Americans dug their heels into their xenophobic and racist traditions after 9/11, thus entrenching dualistic (and often stupid) thinking, so too do ecophobic narratives now articulate a stark dualism. Comparable to people’s incomprehension of ethnic foreignness (whether having to do with linguistic issues or vestimentary codes) and their subsequent xenophobic responses, ecophobia is often a response to the perceived inscrutability of the natural world. The inability to understand what is being communicated results in suspicion. From suspicion grows resentment, and from resentment, violence. The roots of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and racism are intertwined with the roots of ecophobia.

Theorising ecophobia through the lens of the ecoGothic helps bring to light social and environmental injustices and perhaps to help curb violence against people and the environment. We need to be very careful in these early days of ecocritical theorising, and our words are very important in how they characterise human/nonhuman relations. It seems reasonable to claim, as Keetley and Sivils do, that ‘nature poses a problem of control, inciting human efforts at dominance’ (p. 3), but I’d suggest that the word ‘inciting’ here is, perhaps, not the best, since it seems to blame the victim. Nature does not incite violence against itself.

Monstrosity and Horror

In ‘Six Theses on Plant Horror; or, Why Are Plants Horrifying?’, an essay destined to become a classic, Keetley (2016) comes at ecohorror through a discussion about the scale and pervasiveness of plants, their 95% share of earth’s biomass dwarfing our own presence and embodying an ‘absolute alterity’ (p. 6). Similarly, David Del Principe’s concise but compelling introduction to a Special Issue of *Gothic Studies* in 2014 recognises the centrality of the monstrous in the ecoGothic imagination: ‘the EcoGothic examines the construction of the Gothic body – unhuman, nonhuman, transhuman, posthuman, or hybrid – through a more inclusive lens, asking how it can be more meaningfully understood as a site of articulation for environmental and species identity’ (p. 1). Del Principe explains that ‘An EcoGothic approach poses a challenge to a familiar Gothic subject (nature) taking a nonanthropocentric position to

reconsider the role that the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear' (p. 1). For Keetley and Sivils, the ecoGothic is important because it 'it not only takes up [...] questions about our very being [...] but also more particular questions of determinism and freedom, especially as these questions play out through a long history and on the limit edges of what we think we know about the human – and what shapes or “possesses” the human' (p. 4). They go on to explain convincingly how 'Ecogothic texts [...] invoke [the] Other as a disturbed and disturbing natural world, one in which traditional boundaries between the human and the nonhuman become blurred in grotesque ways by human atrocities and amoral biological processes' (p. 11). Associations of the disturbed Other and madness with monstrosity and threatening nature is perhaps as old as the ethics and exercise of ecophobia. Certainly, we see associations in the popular imagination between monstrosity and madness in the early modern period, showing how fears about madness represent a larger concern about the intrusion of the undomesticated natural world into the controlled spaces of human civilisation. Keith Thomas argues that 'one of the reasons that monstrous births caused such horror was that they threatened the firm dividing-line between men and animals' (p. 39).

Amidst the sparsity of work that exists within the environmental humanities theorising on psychiatric debility and disability is the startling insight from ethicist Serenella Iovino that imagining madness involves imagining the presence of a kind of nonhuman nature within the human. In 'The Human Alien: Otherness, Humanism, and the Future of Ecocriticism' (2010), Iovino cleverly explains that 'madness and disability create in fact a “wilderness zone” inside the civilised or “tame” area of humanity-as-normality' (p. 55). There are radical implications to this idea. First, the insight challenges, as Iovino notes, the very taxonomy of the human, the 'ontological segregation' (p. 56) of the human. Second, and perhaps more important, is the fact that in imagining madness as the inclusion of the threatening nonhuman within the human, representations of madness imply a distinct disdain toward the more-than-human realm (roughly nature beyond the human). Moreover, unlike many propositions in literary analysis, Iovino's 'wilderness zone' thesis has ample support from literary sources. Even among common contemporary idioms describing madness or insanity, images of animals and nature abound. We cavalierly label madness by talking about going bananas, about bats in the belfry, about harebrained ideas, about going nuts, about rats in the attic, about being as nutty as a fruitcake, about being as crazy as a loon, about being barking mad, about being loony, and so on. But if we regularly imagine nature as an origin of the metaphorical disintegration of the

self, then what about the horrors that attend the actual material disintegration of what we are and the deep imbrication of this process with the materiality of nature?

Slime, the Agony of Water

Decay and rot are important to the ecoGothic because they are agency and excess overgrown and unpredictable. Literary treatments of rot and decay clearly reveal the ecophobic unconscious. As I explain in *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* (2011), for instance:

‘The metaphors Hamlet uses are very telling. Whenever he talks about difference, his thoughts eventually devolve upon some form of rot. For instance, evil resides in excess, and people are bad only ‘By their o’ergrowth of some complexion, / [...] / Or by some habit, that too much o’erleavens/ The form of plausible manners...these men / [...] / Shall in the general censure take corruption/ From that particular fault’ (1.4.27–36). The problem is not ‘one defect’ or ‘particular fault’, since nobody is perfect; the problem is the ‘o’ergrowth’ of such a ‘complexion’. Excess (and eventually rot), then, is the problem, and it is defined with naturalistic imagery.’ (p. 86)

Ecophobia is vestigial genetics gone to seed, things in evolutionary biology that have preserved us but are no longer necessary and yet form the basis of a very destructive set of behaviors. The stamp of one defect, the overgrowth of some complexion, corruption: these are the hallmarks of tragedy and of ecophobia, and as I have argued in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (2018), ‘in narrating a loss of human agency to nature—[ecophobia] is in the very process of writing tragedy (the fall of the human from a place of exceptionalism) while simultaneously announcing the ethical superiority of the human over the nonhuman’ (p. 10).

Rot is slowly receiving more and more ecocritical attention. In a fascinating exploration of ‘the myth of the California dream’ (Weidner, 2017: 237), Ned Weidner reveals convincingly ‘how ecophobic olfactory imaginations separate people across racial lines’ (p. 245). Weidner explains that ‘paradise is generated by an ecophobic desire to safeguard people from the dangers of nature, including its interpenetrating cycle of life and death’ (p. 251). Rot

and slime are unpredictable in their transgressions and blurring of borders and in their imagined alliance with an antagonistic nature. Corruption is the horror of uncontrolled agencies.

There is surprisingly little talk of slime in ecoGothic discussions, surprising because slime is so very central to horror – from the slime inexplicably oozing out of the mouth of the alien in Ridley Scott’s classic *Alien* franchise (1979-) to the slimy eponymous monster in *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). Jennifer Schell briefly raises the topic of slime in her 2006 article ‘Fiendish Fumaroles and Malevolent Mudpots: the EcoGothic Aspects of Owen Wister’s *Yellowstone Stories*’ but without any theoretical discussion of slime. Anthony Camara makes several points about slime in his ‘Abominable Transformations: Becoming-Fungus in Arthur Machen’s *The Hill of Dreams*’, but the discussion is primarily thematic. Slime is indeed oozing into the discussions, and there are important connections waiting to be made, especially with regard to how are slime, ecohorror, and sexism are interrelated.

Leonard Tennenhouse (1986) once noted that early modern tragedy ‘defines the female body as a source of pollution [...] [and that] any sign of permeability automatically endangers the community’ (pp. 117–18), and we can ask what this means in terms of a feminist ecoGothic. How might a feminist ecoGothic respond to essentialist co-locations of women’s bodies with the natural world and its rhythms? Ben Woodard’s *Slime Dynamics* (2012) gestures toward more of the theoretical routes—ontology and ‘being-toward-extinction’ (p. 13)—that *could* lead to important discussions, but without any mention of gender, sexuality, Gothic, or even Sartre, the book is doomed to be little more than an interesting title. What is particularly glaring is the omission of Sartre.

Jean-Paul Sartre’s theoretical discussions of slime are unique and compelling. ‘Sliminess proper, considered in its isolated state’, Sartre argues, ‘will appear to us harmful in practice (because slimy substances stick to the hands, and clothes, and because they stain)’ (1966: p. 605). Slime is a threat. It threatens boundaries, and ‘the slimy appears as already the outline of a fusion of the world with myself’ (p. 606). It is an utterly ambiguous material: ‘immediately the slimy reveals itself as essentially ambiguous’, and ‘nothing testifies more clearly to its ambiguous character as a “substance between two states” than the slowness with which the slimy melts into itself’ (p. 607). It is beyond our control, is not the water we so

proudly control in our fountains and dams:⁶ indeed, ‘slime is the agony of water. It presents itself as a phenomenon in the process of becoming; it does not have the permanence within change that water has but on the contrary represents an accomplished break in a change of state. This fixed instability in the slimy discourages possession’ (p. 607). It can neither be possessed nor controlled. It is not an object of raw ecophobia: ‘even young children show repulsion in the presence of something slimy’; neither, however, does it take meaning through absolute hardwiring and is, to some degree, an object ‘whose materiality must on principle remain non-meaningful’ (p. 605). Despite their breathtaking originality, Sartre’s comments entirely ignore the gendering of slime (and it is perhaps useful here to remember that the slime-dripping monster in *Alien* was female). Future research within the feminist ecoGothic will no doubt look at slime and at what happens within the Gothic when patriarchies imagine women and women’s sexualities as sites of pollution.

Loss of Control

Unpredictable and uncontrolled nonhuman agency is troubling. The ecophobic loathes the unpredictable. Ecophobia emanates from anxieties about control. The prospect of a loss of control—the perceived threat to human agency by nonhuman nature—is at its core ecophobic. To recognise this is to be able to make changes in our attitude; to fail to recognise it is to be stuck whining about the problems without being able to offer anything but cosmetic solutions. The thought of being taken over by nature is horror, and this imagined threat is potentially ubiquitous. As Lisa Kröger (2013) explains, ‘nature is always reclaiming its space [...] it will always be victorious in the end’ (p. 26). This is what gives a play such as *King Lear* such visceral horror. For *King Lear*, vulnerability to an unpredictable, sometimes capricious, and often hostile nature is terrifying. Images of bareness, exposure, vulnerability, homelessness, and lack of control associated with psychological maladies deftly identify a madness that is enmeshed with a frightening environment in this play, an environment over which control is never a given. It is the changeability of this environment that causes horror, and it is self-

⁶ I have often thought that the reason people are so fascinated by fountains has to do with control. Fountains offer the possibility of chaos, the threat of disorder in the very moment that they carefully choreograph every splash and movement of water. Like our childhood fascination with heavy snow and leaf-strewn autumnal streets that temporarily obscure human order, fountains remind us of natural agency (particularly of water), and it is a powerful and potentially deadly agency. Our control over water, it seems, is rarely complete and is often fraught with ambivalence. On a visit to the Three Gorges Dam in 2008, the ambivalence of the visitors (Chinese and foreign) toward the massive structure hailed as a ‘taming of the Yangtze’ was palpable, a taming that cost 200 lives in onsite casualties and displaced more than 1.2 million people.

abandonment, lack of control, and sheer unpredictability that such an environment threatens to entrench. The result is madness.



Figure 1: Nature taking over buildings in Angkor Wat (Source: Wikipedia).



Figure 2: Nature taking over cars in Macau. (Photo by Simon C. Estok).

But it is not simply a physical encroachment; rather, the fear of reclamation by nature evokes deep anxieties about control. As I have explained in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (p. 18, n. 19), the epic frustrations of not being able to hold and control nature are at their core ecophobic. These frustrations are what is behind the aging sovereign raging at the storm in *King Lear* and the heroic men battling weather in films such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *2012* (2009), and *Waterworld* (1995). The epic frustrations of control by nature have been very influential indeed in how both ecohorror and tragedy have developed as genres.

Perhaps one of the reasons that mainstream media representations of climate change looks so much like the news about terrorism is that both climate change and terrorism jerk our nerves about what we can control and what we can't control – and about where our agency stops.

Again, best to be careful with our terms. Ecohorror and the ecoGothic are always ecophobic. Antipathies and ecophobia toward nature, on the other hand, often arise from rationally perceived threats to physical survival, such as tsunamis or earthquakes, and clearly do not always rank as ecohorror or the ecoGothic. It is reasonable then to suggest that, on the one hand, the ecoGothic genre typically expresses or reveals or is dependent on ecophobia and that, on the other, ecophobia does not necessarily imply ecohorror or the ecoGothic imagination. Indeed, representations of dangerous manifestations of nature do not, in themselves, even necessarily constitute ecophobia. Nor, for that matter, is controlling nature *ipso facto* ecophobic.

Ecophobia

For Parker, 'EcoGothic analysis, as well as ecoGothic texts themselves, demands a serious shift in perspective from the pervasive Western anthropocentrism (a view of the world that is human-centric) to "ecocentrism" (where all living things are of equal importance and nature is no longer defined in terms of human value)' (p. 218), and it is certainly true that the analysis and the texts reveal anthropocentrism for what it is. Also true, however, is the fact that it is ultimately the *human* world that matters most to us in the perceived threats of the environments represented in such texts. The threats have no footing within an ecocentric ontology: horror takes meaning in our own sense of what we stand to lose as a species – art, Enlightenment philosophy, knowledge, technology, comfort, continued existence. Part of the horror such texts offer is in precisely the shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism, toward the very possibility of such an ontology 'where all living things are of equal importance and nature is no longer defined in terms of human value'. The problem for ecoGothic analysis is in determining what the threatening agent is and what it is threatening. Fleeing from a plant that is stalking me for food is not displaying ecophobia. There is nothing irrational about self-preservation. Conjuring up images of plants that stalk people for food, on the other hand, is a perfect example of the ecophobic imagination. The ecoGothic imagination itself is under the rubric of ecophobia; it is difficult, though perhaps possible, to imagine otherwise.

Ecophobia is large and complex, neither exclusively fear-based nor entirely a result of an antagonism toward the natural environment. Theorising about the ecoGothic is undoubtedly the most exciting development in recent ecocritical work because it accepts the challenge to look at ‘the fear, anxiety, and dread that often pervade [the relationship of humans to the nonhuman world]: it orients us, in short, to the more disturbing and unsettling aspects of our interactions with nonhuman ecologies’ (Keetley & Sivils, p. 1). There has never been a more timely moment for such work: as Parker explains, ‘In an age of anthropogenic ecological crisis, we know that our own environmental monsters inevitably await us [...] [and] the emergent discourse of the ecoGothic is of increasing relevance in an age of human-caused environmental crisis’ (p. 222). We face a frightening future, but it is at least a little encouraging that we are actually beginning to look at the root issues that have brought us to where we are.

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BIOGRAPHY

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‘Don’t be a Zombie’: Deep Ecology and Zombie Misanthropy

Kevin Corstorphine

ABSTRACT

This article 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, referring to humanity as a whole. Pointing to Morton, and to Donna Haraway’s notion of the ‘Cthulucene’, this article argues that radical empathy and shared kinship might instead point the way towards the urgent change that is needed.

Sir David Attenborough, in a 2013 interview with the *Radio Times*, states that ‘We are a plague on the Earth. It’s coming home to roost over the next 50 years or so. It’s not just climate change; it’s sheer space, places to grow food for this enormous horde. Either we limit our population growth or the natural world will do it for us, and the natural world is doing it for us right now’ (*Telegraph*, 2013). Attenborough is one of the world’s most important popularisers of environmental thinking, and of course speaks with first-hand authority about the state of the planet, having travelled extensively to film the diversity of plant and animal species on Earth. His avuncular presence on the BBC is well-loved, and makes this bleak warning all the more

potent. This is an almost Biblical prophecy of apocalypse, although the implied revenge is associated with that of nature, rather than God. The language used is highly evocative of the Gothic, with a ‘horde’ of destroyers threatening the safety of the planet and of ourselves – although the threat, of course, is ultimately none other than *us*.

Andrew Smith and William Hughes (2013), in their collection *EcoGothic*, make a firm connection between Gothic fiction and environmentalism, arguing that the Gothic mode is crucial to this discourse:

‘Debates about climate change and environmental damage have been key issues on most industrialised countries’ political agendas for some time. These issues have helped shape the direction and application of ecocritical languages. The Gothic seems to be the form which is well placed to capture these anxieties and provides a culturally significant point of contact between literary criticism, ecocritical theory and political process.’ (p. 5)

In line with this way of thinking about the relationship between fiction and urgent political debates, this study will bring together overtly Gothic fiction, the science of population theory, and cultural criticism. Key to this will be the Gothic vision of environmental apocalypse put forward by Attenborough and other commentators who, I argue, put forward a ‘zombie misanthropy’ that likens human behaviour to that of the brain-dead creature of myth and of so much modern fiction. Darryl Jones (2018) points out that ‘zombification has become one of our major metaphors for thinking through the contemporary scene and our own individual helplessness in the face of vast economic forces which we may feel are inimical to the good life, or of the seemingly inevitable environmental catastrophes brought on by those forces’ (pp. 57-58). The ways in which the zombie is used as a metaphor to dehumanise others will be discussed through an examination of contemporary environmental discourse. The ways in which this tips over into misanthropy will be illustrated through comparisons with the hatred of humanity espoused by the Columbine killer Eric Harris. It will be located in the portrayal of cosmic horror found in the short stories of the most notoriously misanthropic author of the Gothic, H. P. Lovecraft, and the roots of this world view examined in the writing of population theorist Thomas Robert Malthus. Like Lovecraft and Malthus, most contemporary environmental thinkers indulge in speculation about what the future will entail if we do not change our ways. This speculation, at its worst, can lead to fear and revulsion, and even a sense

of utter hopelessness. Ways out of this trap, however, are possible by shifting our perspective on what 'nature' actually is; something suggested by literary critic-turned environmental theorist Timothy Morton, whose work on 'dark ecology' will be integral to the present argument.

There can be no doubt that we are in a state of environmental crisis and facing a crossroads. Although many might nod and agree with Attenborough's doom-laden proclamation, the real implications of limiting population growth are hard to accept. Potential measures might involve Government control, such as China's one-child policy, which ran in its strictest form from 1979-2015, and infamously involved forced abortions as well as fines and other punishments. Alternately, it might involve 'softer' methods, directed mainly at developing countries and conducted by NGOs. One such organisation is Population Matters, which proposes several practical ways of bringing birth rates down. These measures include: 'getting contraception used where it's needed', 'challenging assumptions about family size and contraception', 'lifting people out of poverty', 'women's empowerment', and 'exercising the choice' (Population Matters, 2018). Only the last point focuses on the developed world, whereas the previous ones aim to bring other nations up to the standard set by prosperous ones in terms of the cultural and social issues of contraception and women's rights. First world countries, however, lead the world not only in terms of social progress, but in overconsumption. Both developing and developed countries need a shift in attitude, according to Population Matters, but the focus shifts from wider-scale development in the former to personal ethical decisions in the latter. Citizens of developed countries are granted a power of agency lacking in developing ones, and this agency is held up as the primary goal, particularly for women, whose capacity to choose dictates the numbers of children that are born. A natural connection is made that when women have this capacity to choose, they will choose to have fewer children. Looking at broad-scale statistics, this assertion does indeed seem to be valid. Population Matters' website uses statistics from 2008, stating that:

'According to the UNPD's¹ 2008 Revision, the population of most developed countries is expected to remain almost unchanged, at 1.28 billion, but that of less developed regions to rise from 5.6 billion in 2009 to 7.9 billion in 2050, with a tripling of numbers in some of the poorest nations. Net migration from

¹ The United Nations Population Division.

developing to developed countries is projected to average 2.4 million people a year.’ (Population Matters, 2010).

Migration might seem to be less relevant, but Population Matters, while noting an opposition to discrimination, broadly oppose mass migration on the grounds that it causes an increase in the population of the destination country and reverses the trend towards ageing populations and falling birth rates, thus causing a net increase in global numbers. Furthermore, these migrants increase the populations of developed countries, which already have a disproportionately high level of consumption of natural resources.

These are difficult issues. Even if we accept that the goal of reducing the global population is an unconditional good, an immediate conflict is set up between the claims of feminism and individual liberty on one hand, and the rights of developing nations to reject what could be seen as neo-colonial policies on the other. The opposition to mass migration has much common ground, if not from the same ideological basis, with xenophobic and far-right political movements. Nonetheless, the stakes are high, and the warning is clear. The threat to all sustainable life on Earth is such that any effective means of dealing with it might have to involve a radical restructuring of how we view ourselves and our place on the planet. Human rights and concerns cannot, in such a vision of the future, remain at the centre of decision-making about the environment. Such a way of thinking, in fact, might involve casting humanity as the villain. This is exactly what Population Matters do in their 2016 short film, *Zombie Overpopulation*, uploaded to video-sharing website YouTube as well as appearing on their own website. *Zombie Overpopulation* presents the viewer with a familiar set of images. Shambling human figures shuffle across an urban landscape, intent on consuming everything in their path. These particular zombies do not seem to attack people (who are absent), but instead destroy non-human animal life and drink all of the available water until there is none left. It is, of course, a less-than-subtle allegory for human behaviour towards the environment. It is narrated throughout by *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* star Anthony Stewart Head, who ends the film with a series of stark facts about overpopulation before advising the viewer, ‘Don’t be a zombie. Use your brain. We all have a choice about how many babies to have and how much we consume’ (*Zombie Overpopulation*, 2016). The choice of Head for the role of narrator is apposite, even beyond his association with the Gothic supernatural. His character in *Buffy*, Rupert Giles, is a ‘Watcher’, who has the responsibility of guiding the ‘Slayer’. The presence of his voice gives

the listener the assurance of his wisdom, while simultaneously placing them into the role of the ‘Chosen One’ who must fight the forces of evil.

This is without doubt a Gothic vision of human existence, which presents us with a vision of a monstrous ‘other’ in the form of the zombies. The monstrous other in this scenario, however, is humanity, and the basic drive of the human race to consume, in order to continue to live. This is not just consumption, of course, but overconsumption: the *modus operandi* of the zombie. Fred Botting (1996) has famously suggested that ‘Gothic signifies a writing of excess’ (p. 1) and associates this with the figure of the tyrannical villain who emerges as the antagonist of the genre in the late eighteenth century. Gothic, however, remains a mode that presents excess in order to draw limits. Botting (1996) argues that: ‘Gothic fiction is less an unrestrained celebration of unsanctioned excess and more an examination of the limits produced in the eighteenth century to distinguish good from evil, reason from passion, virtue from vice and self from other’ (p. 5). If overconsumption itself is the villain in the case of *Zombie Overpopulation*, and if this is the current state of humanity, then we are urged to seek a sense of the proper limits in order to be saved. This imperative, of course, appears in the film’s message: ‘*don’t* be a zombie’, the narrator advises. The way to avoid this is by exercising the right choices, which in this case means limiting the production of children and the consumption of natural resources. It is tempting to read this moral message in the older language of sin, specifically the deadly sins of lust,² greed, and gluttony. Writing on Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), Carol A. Senf (1997) discusses Van Helsing’s warning that to fail in their fight against the vampire would mean the heroes being turned into creatures like him: ‘Becoming like Dracula, they too would be laws unto themselves—primitive, violent, irrational—with nothing to justify their actions except the force of their desires’ (p. 428). This is exactly the situation warned against by *Zombie Overpopulation*, where the only way to avoid becoming a ‘zombie’ is to exercise restraint and thoughtful planning in terms of contraception and consumption. This also echoes George A. Romero’s 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead*, which specifically parodies consumer capitalism by having the undead mindlessly congregate around a shopping mall, in an imitation or lingering memory of their habits whilst living.

² It would be unfair to imply that Population Matters are anti-sex, given their strong pro-contraception stance. Nonetheless, the message involves an exhortation to moral responsibility and sensible foresight in the sexual realm. The concept of unplanned pregnancy and childbirth is unimaginable in its horror here.

The challenge of overcoming human instinct and desire—of fighting our more ‘zombie’-like propensities—is an ancient moral question, and radical solutions have been put forward in the form of religion. The challenge of deep ecology, however, is even more radical. Deep ecology attempts to think about the world from a point of view that is so radically dispassionate as to remove the relevance of human perspective, refocusing the question on nature as important in itself, rather than as mere ‘environment’ for humans. We need to think, as Morton proposes, on a global scale, and on a global timeline. How, though, can the global scale be articulated in human terms? Morton proposes an environmental dilemma as illustration. No one, when starting their car, intends to destroy other species on Earth, yet the resultant pollution and rise in global temperature does. If one person chooses not to drive on the other hand, then their gesture is so small compared to the greater mass of humanity that it makes no difference whatsoever. We are part of a larger species that has an undeniable impact on the environment, yet are individually insignificant. This is no longer a moral question, but one that renders morality and thus human agency meaningless:

‘Thinking the human at Earth magnitude is utterly uncanny: strangely familiar and familiarly strange. It is as if I realize that I am a zombie – or, better, that I’m a component of a zombie despite my will. Again, every time I start my car I’m not meaning personally to destroy lifeforms – which is what “destroying Earth” actually means. Nor does my action have any statistical meaning whatsoever. And yet, mysteriously and disturbingly, scaled up to Earth magnitude so that there are billions of hands that are turning billions of ignitions in billions of starting engines every few minutes, the Sixth Mass Extinction event is precisely what is being caused. And some members of the zombie have been aware that there is a problem with human carbon emissions for at least sixty years.’ (Morton, 2016: p. 35)

Morton’s use of the zombie metaphor is an even bleaker one than we have seen in either *Dawn of the Dead* or *Zombie Overpopulation*. In both Romero’s cinematic universe and in the world view of *Population Matters*, individual humans can use their brains to combat the zombies, which threaten to assimilate the living into their unthinkingly destructive ranks. In Morton’s ‘dark ecology’, however, we are placed into context as part of a wide and interrelated ecosystem from which we are inseparable. It is dark, rather than deep, because we are connected to even that which is non-living. As he writes elsewhere (2010), ‘we need to live up

to the truth of our desire to animate the dead' (p. 267). Morton's new term, 'dark ecology', takes deep ecology even further. It removes the conception of nature as object, and places human existence within its scope.

A fascination with the return of dead humans as monstrous destroyers, to stretch Morton's imagery, speaks to a lingering awareness that we are only part of this wider system, and that it is one in which our very existence carries with it the necessity of our own negation. We consume in order to push this awareness away. Ernest Becker (1973) influentially argued that civilisation is the result of a 'denial of death' (the title of his book), and in *Escape from Evil* (1975), added that that money, in particular, 'is the human mode *par excellence* of coolly denying animal boundedness, the determinism of nature' (p. 82). James K. Rowe extends this critique of capitalism in a 2016 essay, claiming that:

'Fantastical efforts to escape natural finitude by endlessly accumulating wealth are, ironically, undermining the environmental preconditions for modern life. As accelerating climate change has us teetering on the edge of the Holocene, there is heightened urgency to understand the driving forces behind consumer capitalism, the economic system that has prevailed over the great acceleration in ecological impact since 1950.' (para. 3)

It is here that we find ourselves returning to Attenborough's evocative description of humanity as a 'plague'. The claim is certainly catchy, and made many headlines at the time, yet it is difficult to reconcile this forthright misanthropy with Attenborough's sense of genuine wonder at the natural world and passion for communicating this to other humans. If we lack the capacity for choice, as bacteria do, then there would be little point in his mission of spreading this reverence for nature. This is an attitude born of frustration and anger, much like Bill Hicks' (1997) famous description of humanity as 'a virus with shoes' (np), which contrasts sharply with the comedian's more general vision of a world without conflict, prejudice, and oppression.

It is no wonder, though, that frustration results from the sense of powerlessness inherent in the destruction of the Earth on a large scale. It is not just that our will is frustrated, but that it is irrelevant, to think within the framework of deep ecology. When Arne Naess introduced the term 'deep ecology' in the early nineteen-seventies he was, as Alan Drengson (2012) points out, 'characterizing an existing grassroots movement, rather than simply stating his personal

philosophy' (para. 4). This is important, because deep ecology can then be seen as emerging from a genuine reaction to both environmental destruction and the failures/limitations of modern environmentalism. Drengson (2012) also specifically addresses the question of misanthropy, noting that although some supporters of the movement have indeed been misanthropic in their statements at times, 'supporters of the deep ecology movement are not anti-human, as is sometimes alleged' (para. 5). Even when Arne Naess and George Sessions (1984) go so far as to put together a manifesto in the shape of 'The Deep Ecology Platform', it remains committed to human 'rights', albeit in a very different form than we are used to. They claim in their first principle that: the well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: inherent worth, intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes' (Naess & Sessions, 1984: para 1). Humanity is not necessarily in opposition to the nonhuman, but quite the opposite is proposed. In fact, this preservation of the nonhuman may actually increase the quality of the human experience: 'the flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease' (Naess & Sessions, 1984: para. 5). What is decoupled here is the association of human 'flourishing' and relentless economic growth with its attendant increase in population and consumption per capita. Instead, Ness and Sessions (1984) argue: 'The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent worth) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living' (para. 7). This would also involve an increased value being ascribed to the diversity of people and cultures on Earth. Deep ecology aims to learn from, rather than reject, the lessons of aboriginal peoples who do not subscribe to the logic of capitalist growth, what Morton (2016) calls 'agrilogistics' (p. 42).³ As Drengson (2012) notes, 'while industrial culture has represented itself as the only acceptable model for development, its monocultures destroy cultural and biological diversity in the name of human convenience and profit' (para. 6).

In this way we see a false dichotomy set up between environmentalism and human progress. The direction that progress might take, or rather the definition of what qualifies as progress, is the real issue at stake. Deep ecology involves a deep pessimism, not about

³ Morton's point of origin for our current age of Environmental destruction, or what we might term the Anthropocene, is twelve-thousand years ago in ancient Mesopotamia. There, the birth of agriculture and a specific focus on maximising yield of crops, as well as domesticating animals for the same purpose, came to be the dominant model for what we think of as 'civilisation', despite its failures through the millennia.

humanity itself, but about the adequacy of the current human way of looking at the world. Before Morton's 'dark' version of deep ecology, Sessions (1987) had already argued that ethical questions themselves are insignificant compared to the scale of the problem facing the environment. He suggests that 'the new ecological world view challenges Western ethics and calls into question the metaphysics of the modern world view' (p. 118). Science, in this formulation, cannot be the shining technological saviour, because it offers merely newer and better ways to manipulate the natural world, when what is needed is a paradigm shift towards a recognition of our interconnected place in a web that connects human and nonhuman life. Michelle Niemann (2017) discusses a more recent set of principles, 'The Uncivilisation Manifesto', (2009) by Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine, who write as part of their larger Dark Mountain Project. As she notes, 'the manifesto attacks "the myth of progress", the related myth that humans are separate from nature, and mainstream environmentalism, which they argue has been co-opted by capitalism' (p. 254). Kingsnorth and Hine (2009) begin with the proposition that the coming catastrophe cannot be averted; indeed we are already living through it. Niemann contrasts this with the preaching tradition of the Jeremiad, which warned the congregation of what would happen if they did not change their sinful ways. The Dark Mountain Project (and dark ecology more generally) suggests embracing the 'guilt and helplessness' (Niemann, 2017: p. 254) that results from this acceptance that we exist in an irreversible age of extinction caused by the human race (the Anthropocene). The first two principles of 'The Eight Principles of Uncivilisation' make this clear:

1. We live in a time of social, economic and ecological unravelling. All around us are signs that our whole way of living is already passing into history. We will face this reality honestly and learn how to live with it.
2. We reject the faith which holds that the converging crises of our times can be reduced to a set of 'problems' in need of technological or political 'solutions' (Kingsnorth and Hine, 2009, Section IV: para 12).

This is not hopelessness, but merely a rejection of faith. It is a call not so much to action, but to attitude: an ideological shift is needed. The Dark Mountain Project takes as central Sessions' claim that the problem lies in the way that we look at the world, rather than individual ethics. Accordingly, the third principle emphasises storytelling:

3. We believe that the roots of these crises lie in the stories we have been telling ourselves. We intend to challenge the stories which underpin our civilisation: the myth of progress, the myth of human centrality, and the myth of our separation from 'nature'. These myths are more dangerous for the fact that we have forgotten they are myths (Kingsnorth and Hine, 2009, Section IV: para.12).

Kingsnorth and Hine subscribe, as does Morton, to the idea that language and storytelling function in a way that is analogous to a computer programme, or to use a word more apt in the context, a virus. The solution is to change the code, and ecocriticism, and indeed ecologically-minded art, emerge as something more akin to an ethical hacking of the cultural script, rather than a straightforward appeal to our reason. It is for this reason that The Black Mountain Project is an artistic one. It envisions an art that does not take itself seriously in order to entertain, but one that playfully engages with the making of a new reality. Morton (2016) puts forward a similar vision of play, contrasting its creative potential with that of Google's famously laid-back workplace, which 'hassles its employees with serious playfulness where what we want is playful seriousness' (p. 116.). In other words, we would be best served not to nihilistically distract ourselves from what is happening to the Earth (of which we are a continuous component), but to face up to the harsh reality, or 'darkness', of ecological awareness with a playful and joyous creativity.

Nihilism, Lovecraft, and Malthus: Fear at Earth Scale

This paper began by making links between misanthropy and the claims of deep ecology. Ecocritical thinkers like Morton have pointed ways beyond the potentially nihilistic consequences of thinking on a planetary scale. The temptation, however, remains potent. The examples we have seen borrow from horror fiction, and so it is appropriate to turn to this fiction, specifically that of Howard Phillips Lovecraft, whose massive contribution to fantasy fiction is only rivalled, and perhaps overshadowed, by the scale of his misanthropy. Lovecraft's relevance is shown by the critic Donna Haraway (as discussed later), calling for the age of the 'Cthulucene' (Haraway, 2016: p. 101). Lovecraft's loathing of humanity, and certain racial groups in particular, links together the set of attitudes seen elsewhere in this discussion, and goes some way to diagnosing an aesthetics of green misanthropy. The author Michel Houellebecq (2005), often noted for his own misanthropy, summarises Lovecraft's attitude as

‘absolute hatred of the world, in general, aggravated by an aversion to the modern world in particular’ (p. 57). It would, however, be more accurate to talk here about the *human* world, and indeed the ‘modern world’ might well be associated with the idea of the Anthropocene. Houellebecq sees value in adopting Lovecraft’s philosophical position, while rejecting his racism and hatred of sexuality. What happens, however, when we take hatred of the modern world to its absolute conclusion? This is the nihilism of the terrorist.

Such terrorist nihilism was seen on the day of the Columbine High School Massacre in 1999. The motivations of the perpetrators, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, were soon linked in a kneejerk media response to their alleged tastes, notoriously the band Marilyn Manson and the videogame *Doom* (far from unusual interests, given the existence of millions of fans of both). Harris does indeed seem to have used WAD files (a *Doom* level editor, and popular hobbyist activity) to recreate his neighbourhood, but did not limit himself to violent fantasies, as he wrote in a school essay: ‘many times I have made levels with absolutely no monsters or guns in them. I have created worlds with beautiful, breath taking scenery that looks like something out of a science fiction movie, a fantasy movie, or even some “eldritch” from H. P. Lovecraft’ (Kass, 2014: p. 58). It would be foolishly reductive to reduce, as some did, this complex incident to an enjoyment of specific pop cultural products. It did not, however, happen in a vacuum, and Harris’ violent hatred of the modern world, while not stemming from Lovecraft in any direct way, shows the same kind of thinking that happens when nihilism and misanthropy collide. In his journal, Harris writes, ‘the human race isn’t worth fighting for, only worth killing. give the Earth back to the animals, they deserve it infinitely more than we do’ (Harris, 1998-99: para. 5). He also fantasises about killing the whole human race: ‘just thinking if I want ALL humans dead or maybe just the quote-unquote “civilized, developed, and known-of” places on Earth. maybe leave little tribes of natives in the rain forest er [sic] something’ (Harris, 1998-99: para. 9). He indulges in racist rants, although in an inconsistent way that at times includes a hatred for the ‘white’ race. The only consistent thread of argument is a conviction that human beings are hypocritical, worthless, and deserve to be destroyed.

Lovecraft, too, held racist views, and they are now generally acknowledged to have gone beyond the commonplace assumption of white supremacy that characterised his time, place, and class. These include a specific fear of Africans (and African-Americans) and non-English speaking immigrants, which clearly indicate a reactionary response to the Great Migration of African-Americans from the South to the North, and to the waves of immigration

from Europe, both of which were occurring early in his writing career and continued throughout. Houellebecq (2005) points out that it was when Lovecraft left the town of Providence, Rhode Island, and moved to New York, ‘that his racist opinions turned into a full-fledged racist neurosis’ (p. 105). Pointing to a now-infamous 1924 letter to Frank Belknap Long, where Lovecraft uses particularly racist language, Houellebecq claims that ‘this is no longer the WASP’s well-bred racism; it is the brutal hatred of a trapped animal who is forced to share his cage with other different and frightening creatures’ (p. 106). In this world view, other people are reduced to something less than human, even something monstrous. His vision in this letter (quoted here by Houellebecq), is almost indistinguishable in style from his fictional prose, and describes a scene that would not altogether be out of place in the zombie fiction discussed earlier:

‘The organic things—Italico-Semitico-Mongoloid—inhabiting that awful cesspool could not by any stretch of the imagination be call’d human. They were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and amoebal; vaguely moulded from some stinking viscous slime of earth’s corruption, and slithering and oozing in and on the filthy streets or in and out of windows and doorways in a fashion suggestive of nothing but infesting worms or deep-sea unnamabilities [...] From that nightmare of perverse infection I could not carry away the memory of any living face. The individually grotesque was lost in the collectively devastating.’ (Houellebecq, 2005: pp. 106-107)

Lovecraft combines an incredibly broad range of imagery that includes decay, disease, and the primitive (the pithecanthropus was considered at the time to be a kind of ‘missing link’ between humans and non-human apes). What is most striking is the way in which all individuality is lost in a hateful portrayal of one monstrous face. This is the essence of true racism, but is also so ludicrous as to almost transcend it. As Houellebecq (2005) points out, the description of the ‘Italico-Semitico-Mongoloid’, for example, is essentially meaningless: ‘the ethnic realities at play had long been wiped out; what is certain is that he hated them all and was incapable of any greater specificity’ (p. 107).

Lovecraft describes a common fear of his day: that immigration and race-mixing would lead to the decline of Western nations. L. Sprague de Camp identified this idea in Lovecraft’s thinking in his 1975 biography of the author, noting the popularity of belief in the division of

humanity into the separate races, of which the Aryan is superior. De Camp notes that Lovecraft was a keen reader of Houston Stewart Chamberlain's *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, translated into English from the German in 1912. Chamberlain rails in particular against the mixing of supposedly superior and inferior races to create 'mongrel' races. As de Camp (1975) points out, 'these delusions were popularized in the United States by Madison Grant (*The Passing of the Great Race*, 1916) and Lothrop Stoddard (*The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*, 1920)' (p. 97). De Camp associates Lovecraft's reading of these books with his belief, certainly in his early years, in the superiority of the Aryan race and his own membership of this group. He claims that this allowed Lovecraft, who never really managed to live up to any of his academic or career ambitions, to feel special: 'if he could succeed as an individual, at least he could belong to a superior breed of man' (de Camp, 1975: p. 99). There is, then, a desire for purity, as if the world could be cleansed of its flaws through the avoidance of miscegenation. Lovecraft continually returns to hybrid creatures as a source of horror, most famously the monstrous Cthulhu. When the narrator of 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1928) discovers a bas-relief representation of the thing, he declares 'my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature' (Lovecraft, 2008a: p. 205). This, however, is merely an impression from the carving, as the thing itself 'cannot be described' (Lovecraft, 2008a: p. 223) because it is so alien that it seems to contradict the very laws of nature. When a group of terrified sailors plough through the creature with their ship it bursts into a foul gas, only to end up '*recombining* in its hateful original form' (Lovecraft, 2008: p. 224). This is reminiscent of the 1991 action film *Terminator 2*, where the time-travelling killing machine, the T-1000, is frozen and shattered into pieces, before recombining to continue its pursuit of the human protagonists. The horror comes from the fact that these enemies cannot be destroyed. This is also the horror of the zombie, and as Morton (2016) suggests in *Dark Ecology*, the horror of the realisation that we are a part of the monster while simultaneously having no power to do anything about it.

It is perhaps no wonder, then, that Lovecraft might want to step back from the world, as constructed by his racially-tinged consciousness, and to imagine himself superior. There is no doubt that this hybridity is racially charged. S. T. Joshi (1990), discussing Lovecraft's monstrous creations, notes that 'if subhuman creatures are cases of individual decadence, hybrids are symbols of a racial degeneracy still more horrible because vastly more widespread' (p. 221). This is a horror that cannot be contained. In this context, Joshi quotes from Lovecraft's

short story ‘The Horror at Red Hook’ (1927), which is worth repeating here (with a slightly different selection of text) because of the way that it demonstrates this racialised threat:

‘Red Hook is a maze of hybrid squalor [...] The population is a hopeless tangle and enigma; Syrian, Spanish, Italian, and negro elements impinging upon one another, and fragments of Scandinavian and American belts lying not far distant. It is a babel of sound and filth, and sends out strange cries to answer the lapping of oily waves at its grimy piers and the monstrous organ litanies of the harbour whistles [...] From this tangle of material and spiritual putrescence the blasphemies of an hundred dialects assail the sky.’ (pp. 150-151)

It is curious that Lovecraft associates environmental squalor with the ‘horror’ of this mingling of people, represented by the sound of their different dialects. The ‘oily waves’ and ‘grimy piers’ speak of modernity and industrialisation, although Red Hook, positioned in Brooklyn on the Upper New York Bay, was indeed massively polluted in the early twentieth century, before the introduction of the 1972 Clean Water Act and the subsequent Red Hook Water Pollution Control Project (NYC Department of City Planning, 2014: p. 14). This is simultaneously a fear for humanity, and a disgust at the human race. As Joshi (1990) notes, ‘Lovecraft does not offer humanity much hope in the end: we shall either be wiped out by those unassailable nuclei of aliens on the fringe of our civilization or destroy ourselves through repeated miscegenation’ (p. 227).

There is not much room here for choice. It is easy to see Lovecraft in the position, as Houellebecq (2005) describes it, as displaying, ‘the brutal hatred of a trapped animal’ (p. 106). This is the same kind of hatred shown in Eric Harris’ journal (1998-99), although his thoughts are tinged with a kind of environmental consciousness that is as vague and simplistic as his racial thinking:

‘we arent GODS. Just because we are at the top of the food chain with our technology doesnt mean we can be “judges” of nature [...] I think we are all a waste of natural resources and should be killed off, and since humans have the ability to choose... and I’m human... I think I will choose to kill and damage as much as nature allows me to so take that [...] only Nature can stop me. I know I could get shot by a cop after only killing a single person, but hey guess the

fuck WHAT! I chose to kill that one person so get over it! Its MY fault! not my parents, not my brothers, not my friends, not my favorite bands, not computer games, not the media. IT is MINE! [sic].’ (para. 10).

Harris is adamant in his assertion of free will, even as he plans his destruction of human will through murder and suicide. This is clearly the rambling of a severely disturbed young man, but his choice of language is revealing. Human civilisation is portrayed as simply being ‘a waste of natural resources’, and ‘nature’ is invoked as something much larger that does not involve a consideration of human moral values. It is, according to Harris, in his ‘nature’ to kill, and the possibility of society’s influence is completely rejected. It is through this desire to be free of a corrupt society, and to act with impunity, that Harris feels a comradeship with the Nazis. Fascism offers a way out of the tangled complexity of politics, and racial purity offers a sense of identity and belonging that can all too often be lacked. Lovecraft found horror in this complexity and represented it through his monstrously hybrid creatures. To transfer this onto the real world, however, is dangerous territory, and territory which Lovecraft came close to in some of his sentiments. Morton (2007), writing on deep ecology, warns against the temptation to simplify. Nature, he argues, is not ‘over there’ (p. 19); it is not something detached from the reality of our existence. Whatever ‘nature’ might be, human existence and culture are inseparable from it, as is the fact of our own death and the death of our species. We should not, however, wish for these to come about. An overly fond wish for death, he suggests, is ‘a warning to deep ecology: if we aestheticize this acceptance, we arrive at fascism, the cult of death’ (p. 205).

Such a potential line of thinking springs from the work of Thomas Robert Malthus, the most famous and influential advocate of the reduction of population growth. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, published in 1798 and expanded in 1803, argued that unchecked human population growth would inevitably outstrip resources, leading to various types of natural misery, with famine chief among them.⁴ To prevent this misery, Malthus argues that preventative measures should be taken. Over the years, his name has become a byword for misanthropy, with the adjective ‘Malthusian’ used to describe any kind of pessimistic attitude

⁴ The later term ‘carrying capacity’ appears in the mid-nineteenth century to describe this limit on natural resources in a given area. Population control groups commonly use this to refer to a hypothetical maximum human population on the Earth as a whole.

towards population growth.⁵ Malthus himself would not have identified as a misanthrope, claiming instead the goal to reduce human suffering. Claiming that a check to population is inevitably necessary in nature, he suggests that, ‘it was better that this check should arise from a foresight of the difficulties attending a family and the fear of dependent poverty, than from the actual presence of want and sickness’ (Malthus, 2018, Book IV, Chapter I: para. 3). As with *Zombie Overpopulation*, the goal is to reduce human suffering through a targeted and intelligent strategy of limiting numbers. Nonetheless, an unhappy legacy of Malthus’ thinking has been a callous indifference to the plight of the poor. In an article marking the end of China’s one-child policy, Matt Ridley (2014) traces the influence of Malthus, claiming that he ‘thought we should be cruel to be kind to the poor, lest they have too many babies’ (Ridley, 2014: para. 7). This claim is not strictly true, but there is no doubt that this interpretation of Malthus, particularly his implication that overpopulation should be curbed by moral restraint, led directly to an official indifference to the suffering of millions. We might look to Charles Trevelyan, who blamed the 1845-49 Great Irish Famine on the laziness of the people, or Winston Churchill, who blamed the 1943 Bengal famine on the overbreeding of Indians.

As evidence for this ideology, Ridley points to a section of Malthus’s expanded version of his essay, where the following passage appears, suggesting that because overpopulation inevitably leads to death by famine, we should avoid famine by actively encouraging disease:

‘[W]e should facilitate, instead of foolishly and vainly endeavouring to impede, the operations of nature in producing this mortality; and if we dread the too frequent visitation of the horrid form of famine, we should sedulously encourage the other forms of destruction, which we compel nature to use. Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor, we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations.’ (Malthus, 2018, Book IV, Chapter V: p. 1)

⁵ See, for example, thirty-six references to ‘Malthus’ or ‘Malthusian’ in a relatively short pro-population growth essay by journalist Brendan O’Neill: ‘Our Brave New World of Malthusian Madmen’ (2010), published on the overtly anti-Malthusian website *Spiked*.

What Ridley does not note is that this is an extremely disingenuous section of Malthus' essay, where he deploys a sarcastic tone, along the lines of 'well, we're letting famine happen, so why not plague while we're at it?' The target of his barb is this failure to curb population, with specific reference to a moral argument that has been made elsewhere for early marriage (if people marry later, his reasoning goes, then they will have fewer children). As Gregory Bungo (2003) argues, this is 'an extreme statement of what he believes would be a consistent policy for people who think that early marriages are conducive to good morality. He is not describing what he wants to occur — he is satirizing the proponents of early marriage' (para. 3). Bungo compares this to Jonathan Swift's 'A Modest Proposal' (1729), where Swift makes the famous (and brutally ironic) suggestion that poor Irish people could benefit by cooking and eating their excess children. In all these cases, the imagery is consistent, and consistent too, with Lovecraft's description of the overcrowded and filthy Red Hook district. Disease, horror, and inevitable death are attendant on overpopulation.

Despite this overly straightforward reading of Malthus (which is far from the first time this has happened), Ridley makes important links to Western green thinking, and how it was Western environmentalism, rather than Chinese Communist ideology, that directly influenced the implementation of the one-child policy. In fact, despite the human rights abuses the policy entailed, many thinkers are beginning to reappraise the policy from an environmental standpoint. Sarah Conly (2015) writes in *The Boston Globe* that the policy was implemented in a heavy-handed way in terms of forced sterilisation and abortions and argues that its other ill effects such as sex-selective abortion and the consequent gender imbalance can be blamed on sexism rather than the policy itself. She continues: 'the idea that people should limit the number of children they have to just one is not, I would argue, a bad one, for the Chinese or for the rest of us' (para. 2). A paper published in 2017 in the prestigious journal *Demography* led to calls for its withdrawal, notably by demographers Wang Feng and Cai Yong, due to the fact that the author, Daniel Goodkind, goes some way towards backing up the Chinese government's claim that the policy led to four hundred million avoided births, rather than dismissing this as propaganda, as is the standard Western view (2017: p. 1375). This argument, however, is about whether or not China has done what it has claimed. There is increasingly little dispute about the idea that if the policy has indeed lessened population, then from an environmental standpoint this is a moral good. This is in contrast to the population optimism proposed by Ridley (2014), who claims that economic growth and technological development are our best hope, and that populations tend to balance out when reaching enough prosperity

(para. 8). This moves towards a debate about human nature: are we indeed a ‘plague’ on the Earth, or will the human potential for both rationality and compassion make us its saviours? Conly (2015) argues that we must be cautious:

‘Of course, things might change. Maybe technological fixes will save us, ending our unsustainable depletion of natural resources and our contributions to climate change. When we speak of the future, we can never be completely certain. But, at present, when the probability of harm is high, and the damage in question is great, we have no right to risk the danger. Certainty isn’t required [...] It’s new for us to think of something as immediately joyful as childbearing as harmful, and it’s hard to change our ideas when we are confronted with new circumstances. This is natural. Natural, but dangerous.’ (para. 22)

Both the media understanding of overpopulation and the academic appraisal of solutions present a dichotomy that is hard to avoid. The future is indeed uncertain, and speculation tainted by either pessimism or optimism.

Lovecraft (1928) recognised this in his famous opening to ‘The Call of Cthulhu’, where he suggests that science will not save us, but will eventually reveal the truth of the universe, and that this will be overwhelming in its horror:

‘The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.’ (pp. 201-202)

This concept is a brilliant one, but however it may be shaped by Lovecraft’s own pessimism and misanthropy, it is also a literary device designed entirely to set up the appearance of Cthulhu and the rest of his pantheon of fictional monsters. Lovecraft’s racism and fear of modernity doubtless inform his fiction, but are not its purpose. This contrasts with something

like *Zombie Overpopulation* that draws on shared cultural imagery in order to advance its polemic. There is another telling phrase used in the story: the narrator claims that theosophists⁶ have guessed at the truth, but present it ‘in terms which would freeze the blood if not masked by a bland optimism’ (Lovecraft, 2008a: p. 202). ‘Bland Optimism’ is exactly how a deep ecological perspective views the hope that technology and human ingenuity will save the planet. In contrast to this, Gothic imagery is deployed in order to shock us out of this complacency.

It is in adopting such a Gothic tone that ecological thinking tends to reach a wide audience. This device was used by Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring* (1962), which is widely regarded as the ‘birth’ of ecocriticism as we know it and depicts a dystopian future without birdsong. It continues with Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* (1968), which uses the language of warfare to warn of mass starvation in the near future. William and Paul Paddock’s *Famine 1975! America’s Decision: Who Will Survive* (1967) goes so far as to suggest a system of triage that in the future would see starving nations such as India abandoned to their fate. The crossover between scientific speculation and science fiction is nowhere more obvious than in Ehrlich’s introduction to the SF collection *Nightmare Age* (1970). Under the heading ‘Eco-Catastrophe!’ he imagines a future where the Green Revolution of the 1950s and 1960s fails and leads only to further starvation, world chaos, and eventually global warfare. As William Yeatman (2017) points out, however:

‘In real life, these green revolutionaries—led by Norman Borlaug—saved as many as a billion lives. Simply put, Ehrlich’s vision of the future, which he based on appeals to his scientific knowledge, was the exact opposite of what occurred. His vision is apocalyptic; reality was a story of human progress.’
(para. 5)

Nonetheless, this saving of lives can yet be viewed as a negative development, if we take a misanthropically green view. The environmental apocalypse is only deferred. So where to go in this future? It is curiously appropriate that the futurist thinker Donna Haraway (2016) has turned to Lovecraft, albeit obliquely, in her call for a ‘Chthulucene’ to replace the Anthropocene (p. 101). Here she changes the spelling to move the connection away from

⁶ An esoteric philosophy popularised in the United States by Helena Blavatsky in the late nineteenth century.

‘Lovecraft’s misogynist racial nightmare monster’ (p. 101) and towards the ancient Greek term *Chthonic*, or those things related to the underworld, which she identifies with the Californian *Pimoa Cthulhu* spider. The spider lives under stumps, and also possesses long legs, which are reminiscent of the tentacles emerging from Lovecraft’s creature. We should view ourselves as connected, she argues, by webs or by tentacles, and adopt a radical rejection of anthropocentrism that would have us ‘make kin, not babies!’ (p. 102). Thus, although we should not subscribe to the top-down hierarchies that have characterised movements such as China’s one-child policy, we nonetheless should make part of our living on Earth a commitment to reducing the numbers of our species for the good of all.⁷

Critics like Haraway and Morton recognise that we are already living in an environment which has been substantially destroyed by human activity, yet neither suggest that should inevitably lead to misanthropic nihilism. It is yet possible to engage with the Earth as the living part of it we are. If we are to succeed it will not be through viewing nature as a Gothic villain, or alternately by casting ourselves in the role. Gothic fiction, however, can force us to recognise these extremes of thinking about our place in Earth’s ecosystem. Are we the monstrous villain, mindlessly consuming and destroying, or can we face up to the moral responsibility thrust on us by the nature of our species, which has set itself up as master of the planet’s destiny? The former view is tempting, and even if we take the latter, we are dragged back to a hopeless nihilism by the impossibility of working together as one. As Morton (2016) points out, when we see ourselves as we truly are, as part of an uncontrollable whole, then the experience is terrifyingly uncanny, or rather, he writes, ‘it is *weird*’ (p. 1). The only solutions are tyranny, violence, or at least the yearning for cataclysmic destruction. This is a Gothic way of looking at the world, and it is in this very recognition that this represents an excess of pessimistic vision that we may reach a position of nuance where we can avoid a continued destruction of the environment without indulging in moral inhumanity. If this is a question of cultural programming then we need to urgently replace the narrative, and the stories we tell could not be more crucial.

⁷ Morton amusingly rejects Haraway’s term, while acknowledging her a friend, writing: ‘Sorry Donna, It’s Not the Cthulhucene. Cthulhu is a being that *doesn’t* link shit in its tentacles. Cthulhu means *shit doesn’t matter at all*. I’m sticking with *Anthropocene*.’ (Morton, 2016). Here Morton rejects the spelling variation and admits to his irritation with critics who reject ‘Anthropocene’ as a term.

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BIOGRAPHY

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Children of the Quorn: *The Vegetarian*, *Raw*, and the Horrors of Vegetarianism¹

Jimmy Packham

ABSTRACT

Flesh, consumption, and the Gothic have enjoyed a productive consanguinity for centuries—from the reconstituted body of the creature in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), to the vampires and zombies that have proliferated across the genre. This article considers this Gothic preoccupation in light of a particularly prominent trend in contemporary Gothic and horror stories: vegetarian horror. The article positions vegetarian horror as an off-shoot of Gothic Nature and the ecoGothic, exploring the history of the Gothic’s politics of consumption in light of ecological concerns, paying particular attention to Han Kang’s surreal and unsettling novel *The Vegetarian* (2007; English translation 2015) and Julia Ducournau’s vegetarian cannibal film *Raw* (2016). These narratives develop vegetarian horror in relation to enduring concerns surrounding the ethics and implications of meat-eating: they insist fundamentally on the unbroken spectrum that exists between inanimate nature, the animal and nonhuman world, and the human. Further, they illustrate the violence, and most significantly the self-violence, that emanates from a system that tries to proclaim humanity’s distinguished place in, or separation from, this spectrum. Where vegetarian horror differs from the traditional blood-suckers and cannibalistic undead is in its figuration not of monstrously Other practitioners of transgressive eating, but of the everyday eating practices of large swathes of humanity as a site of gory Gothic horror. These works reiterate that acts of consumption are always political. Finally, however, contemporary vegetarian horror narratives offer no easy answers—vegetarianism and veganism are not simply proclaimed as more ethically sound, less horrific ways of engaging with the more-than-human world. Rather, they illuminate the ever-present spectre of violence that

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predominates humanity's ways of engaging with the world and suggest the pitfalls of many—if not all—ethical and moral codes.

‘Your body smells of meat’.

(Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*)

Having recently celebrated the 200th anniversary of the publication of *Frankenstein* (1818), it seems apt to return to the creature's *roots*: that is, to the fruit and fibre that comprise its diet in Mary Shelley's novel. ‘I do not destroy the lamb and the kid, to glut my appetite’, the creature tells Frankenstein, since ‘acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment’ (Shelley, 2018: pp. 137-138). The insistence here between conventional human appetites and the necessity of violence and destruction to appease those appetites is unequivocal. Where the creature's vegetarian diet is presented as moderate and humanely nourishing, humanity's carnivorousness is in thrall to its own excessive cravings. Tellingly, the creature makes reference to ‘glutting’ two other times in the novel, and in both instances it expresses an intemperate desire to wreak his vengeance on a human world that has spurned him. First, the creature approaches Frankenstein on Mont Blanc and demands that Victor, as creator, fulfil his duty towards his creation; ‘if you refuse’, the creature warns, ‘I will glut the maw of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends’ (p. 90). Second, recalling his rejection by the De Lacey family, who he had hoped would treat him kindly, the creature remarks that ‘I could with pleasure have destroyed the cottage and its inhabitants, and have glutted myself with their shrieks and misery’ (p. 128).

‘Glutting’ in *Frankenstein* is figured as a death-dealing voraciousness, a term suggestive of feeding on and finding satiation through the extirpation and misery of (human) community. When the creature uses this term later, then, in his invocation of humanity's eating habits, it carries with it this previously established significance: the implication is surely that other life forms, other communities, are ruined and made miserable as humanity gluts its appetite. The creature's own source of nourishment, by contrast, serves to establish a more benignant ethical engagement with the natural world, and specifically its (other) nonhuman inhabitants. It is, Carol J. Adams (2015) argues, through the creature's vegetarianism that we witness its ‘inclusive moral code’, indicative of an ethics that incorporates the nonhuman animal and that stands as ‘an emblem for what [the creature] hoped for and needed—but failed to receive—from human society’. In contrast to the creature, human society—or ‘the closed

circle of patriarchy’—equates men with the human in a schema that positions women and the animal beneath or outside it. This society operates through rigorous processes of exclusion, excluding, for instance, the creature, the animal, vegetarianism, and the feminism that Adams associates with the creature’s morally-inclusive, socially-excluded standing (p. 97, p. 105).

In the last few years, two particularly striking examples of what might be termed ‘vegetarian horror’ have emerged in the English-speaking market: Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian* (originally published in Korean in 2007 and translated by Deborah Smith into English in 2015) and Julia Ducournau’s French-Belgian horror film, *Raw* (released theatrically in 2017). These narratives revisit the concerns *Frankenstein* touches upon, doing so in ways that develop vegetarian horror in light of enduring concerns surrounding the ethics and implications of meat-eating: they insist fundamentally on the unbroken spectrum that exists between inanimate nature, the animal and the nonhuman world, and the human; and they illustrate the violence, and most significantly the *self*-violence, that emanates from a system that tries to proclaim humanity’s distinguished place in, or separation from, this spectrum. Where *Frankenstein*’s creature articulates a clear moral code, however, these contemporary narratives do not, and part of what makes the (re)emergence of this vegetarian horror tradition in recent years worth attending to is its refusal to neatly demarcate between a vegetarianism that is ethically sound and a carnivorousness that is ethically flawed. What I wish to do in this essay is propose vegetarian horror as an off-shoot of Gothic Nature and the ecoGothic, exploring the history of the Gothic’s politics of consumption in light of ecological concerns, before turning to *The Vegetarian* and *Raw* as particularly salient, but by no means isolated, contemporary examples of this genre and the modes of thinking it prompts.

As a term, ‘vegetarian horror’ can be understood to refer to a Gothic mode that explicitly foregrounds the troubling intersection of the human subject with food and flesh, the ethics of consumption, and the natural world. For Andrew Smith and William Hughes (2013), the ecoGothic is characterised by its ‘presumptive dystopianism’, in which something called ‘nature’ is figured as ‘a type of blankness’ and inscrutable ‘space of crisis’ which humanity seeks to control, inscribe or narrativize, and render meaningful (p. 3). If this is a site that resists simple representation, reading with an ecoGothic lens further allows us to see, via nature’s resistance to anthropocentric or anthropomorphic modes of interpretation, ‘the role that the environment, species, and nonhuman play in the construction of monstrosity and fear’ (Del Principe, 2014a: p. 1). Vegetarian horror develops this line of thinking in two ways.

First, vegetarian horror provides commentary on the extent to which our engagement with nature for the most part takes place within the world of culture. It insists less on a pre-existing Gothic nature (which is Gothic because it remains largely inscrutable to the human), but rather on a nature that is Gothicised at the point of (and because of) contact with the violence(s) of a human culture, where the consumption of the nonhuman can be understood as a form of ecological despoliation. Second, vegetarian horror repositions the site of the ecoGothic's 'crisis': it shifts focus from the external wilderness beyond the human to the interior of the human subject itself, the stability of whose subjectivity may be compromised through its butchery and ingestion of the more-than-human world. Vegetarian horror works to render carnivorous consumption strange, insisting on the slipperiness of the spectrum by which the stable human subject is opposed to the edible (nonhuman or animal) Other. In common with other Gothic narratives—such as those of the conventional vampire or the modern zombie—vegetarian horror works to destabilise long-standing notions of humanity's position at the top of the food chain, thereby seeking to challenge enduring conceptions of the human's relationship with the natural world beyond it. Where vegetarian horror may differ from the blood-suckers and the cannibalistic undead is in its figuration not of monstrosity Other practitioners of transgressive eating, but of the everyday eating practices of large swathes of humanity as a site of gory Gothic horror.

Flesh, Blood, and Gothic Cuisine

Questions surrounding the consumption of flesh and blood, human or otherwise, have had a fruitful consanguinity in horror narratives since *Frankenstein*: in novels like *Dracula* (1897) or *Under the Skin* (2000), in zombie cinema or the Italian cannibal-sploitation boom of the 1980s, acts of consumption are a litmus test for the ethical and ontological limits of the human, or for the exploration of the prospect of the human-as-animal (and therefore, implicitly, of the human-as-meat). Entwined with the recent turn in Gothic studies towards ecocritical considerations of a Gothicised nature is a critical interest in Gothic cuisine – in both the food and drink of Gothic narratives and the Gothicising of processes of food production and consumption. The Gothic is a genre of what Elizabeth Andrews (2008) has termed 'morbid eating' (p. ii). David Del Principe (2014b) argues that a general neglect in the scholarship of the Gothic's politics of meat may be down to the fact that questioning human carnivorous

behaviour ‘remains a tabooed subject in Western, flesh-eating society’ (p. 25).² Meat-eating is hyper-normalised, and, Lorna Piatti-Farnell (2016) notes, even as it is ‘neatly package[d]’ and ‘sanitised’, it ‘continues to possess [...] an aura of potency and power’ (p. 160); further, meat is manly (Adams, 2016), ‘typically marketed and modeled as a masculine food’ and thereby aligned with hegemonic conceptions of masculinity (Love and Sulikowski, 2018: p. 2). Gothic and horror are well established as literatures of transgression, giving voice to and troubling a whole smörgåsbord of institutionalised ideologies, prohibitions, limits, and taboos (Botting, 2014). As such, these literary and cinematic modes provide an evocative discourse through which to broach our seemingly disturbing relationship with flesh and with our ‘flesh-eating society’ and the nonhuman ecologies obliged and exploited to uphold it.

The emergence and heyday of the Gothic is roughly coextensive with the First Industrial Revolution (c.1760-1840), an upheaval in manufacturing processes that initiated ‘a paradigm shift in the agricultural means of production’ (Del Principe, 2014b: p. 25). An effect of the industrialisation and mechanisation of labour was the transformation of the place of the animal in this system. On the one hand, work once undertaken by animals could be done by machinery, and humans could afford to foster more emotional bonds with their closest domestic animals (Tuan, 1984; Carr, 2015). At the same time, the processing of animals into food—a process that might be read as a translation from nonhuman subject to consumable object—shifted to ‘more remote, “off-site” respositor[ies]’ such as slaughterhouses (Del Principe, 2014b: p. 25; see also Lee, 2008). If this removal served to obscure the transformational processes that turned livestock (a term whose overt insistence on the animal’s status as ‘living’ already gestures towards its opposite) into a comestible – if, that is, industrial farming obscured the workings of production, the Gothic brings back into view this abjected flesh through its pronounced interest in monstrous, animalised, nonhuman bodies.

² In some sense, of course, Gothic scholarship that has given attention to the figure of the vampire and the contemporary zombie has *always* been interested in the politics of consumption, but recent studies to specifically foreground food as a prominent feature of Gothic or horror narratives include Elizabeth Andrew’s doctoral thesis, ‘Devouring the Gothic: Food and the Gothic Body’ (2008); Maria Parrino’s doctoral thesis, ‘Mouths Wide Open: Food, Voice and Hospitality in Nineteenth-Century Gothic fiction’ (2013); Jennifer Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (2013); the special issue of *Gothic Studies* on ‘The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century’ (16(1): 2014); Lorna Piatti-Farnell’s *Consuming Gothic: Food and Horror in Film* (2017); Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper, *What’s Eating You? Food and Horror on Screen* (2017); Emilia Quinn, ‘Monstrous Vegan Narratives: Margaret Atwood’s Hideous Progeny’ (2018). Emily Carr (2013), too, offers a deeply compelling theorisation of an ecofeminist Gothic that returns to Carol J. Adams’ work, in ‘The riddle was the angel in the house: towards an American ecofeminist Gothic’.

Reading the Gothic for what it might tell us about our relationship with food and flesh, we are witnesses to a return of the processed – that is, a return of the nonhuman subjects who are obscured as they are sliced-up and transformed from the individuated animal into ‘meat’, a nonspecific term which, as critics have noted, renders the particular animal an unspoken, unacknowledged referent (Adams, 2015). Indeed, as Othering serves to consolidate senses of human subjectivity—generating and abjecting the ‘not-me’ by which the ‘me’ can be known—then by looking to acts of incorporation we might see a literalising of the metaphor: as the nonhuman Other is consumed and thereby internalised by the human subject, the Other is returned into an interior space to which it, so long as it is performing ‘Otherness’, has always already belonged. *Frankenstein*, as I have suggested above, can be read as one of the most explicit Gothic texts to explore subjectivity and its relationship with nature and the more-than-human world.³ As Jackson Petsche (2014) writes, the creature ‘is created from “pieces” of nonhuman animals killed for their flesh’; he is ‘a bizarre by-product of eating’ and ‘threaten[s] the carnivorous and speciesist social order which underscores human-animal relations’ (pp. 98-99). Beyond Shelley’s novel, the Gothic and horror genres are rife with acts of incorporation that trouble the boundaries between human and animal, human and nonhuman, human and monster, and indeed human and human. If there is any suggestion of truth in the old adage ‘we are what we eat’, then the remarkable instances of horrific consumption that occur across the pages of Gothic fiction open up an opportunity to see how such an act might inflect one’s physical and moral constitution.

There is one more connection we might elaborate between the consumption of meat and a discourse of horror and the grotesque. As advocates of vegetarianism and veganism present their diets as morally responsible so is a language of horror invoked to elaborate the relationship between meat and the meat-eating subject. For Percy Bysshe Shelley (1884), the preparation of meat works simply to overcome a natural horror at the prospect of consuming unprepared flesh: ‘It is only by softening and disguising dead flesh by culinary preparation that it is rendered susceptible of mastication or digestion, and that the sight of its bloody juices and raw horror does not excite intolerable loathing and disgust’ (p. 13). Eating meat, he argues, is a sign of ‘the depravity of the physical and moral nature of man’ (p. 9), and even as cookery gives a veneer of cultivation to this process, it is nonetheless a thin disguise for the unpalatable

³ Andrew Smith and William Hughes (2013) also turn to *Frankenstein*’s engagement with nature in their work towards a definition of the ‘ecoGothic’, specifically reading it as a ‘critique of a Romantic idealism which asserts that nature can be apprehended as natural rather than cultural’ (p. 2).

horrors beneath. More recently, the most extreme animal rights activist groups—such as 269 Life—construe humanity’s relationship with the more-than-human world as explicitly bloody and grotesque. 269 Life’s protests—which have been seen as fundamentally sexist and racist (Jadalizadeh, 2015)—unfold as graphic horror shows, which include human branding, the packaging of humans as meat in plastic wrapping, and the staged slaughtering of human bodies as if animals in an abattoir. The implication is clearly that only through the excessive language of horror and the grotesque can our ‘flesh-eating society’ be understood for what it is.

The Gothic serves us, then, with a reminder of the flesh and blood that constitute a carnivorous diet, as in the horrible visibility of Frankenstein’s creature. Further, the Gothic also places the human itself in a continuum in which the human’s fleshy body is material to be harvested and processed into meat, as seen when Jonathan Harker is left to mature in Castle Dracula or in the interplanetary farming of ‘vodseles’ in *Under the Skin*. By asking us to see how else we might eat, and how we might do so less destructively, less violently, Gothic and horror show themselves to be deeply concerned with the morality of consumption and the means by which humans might further embrace an ecocentric subject position. The ecoGothic provides a lens by which humanity might not merely recognise its place in the interconnected network of the more-than-human world, but by which it might seek to live with an awareness of the diversity of other subjects and other kinds of sentience inhabiting this network.

Where a novel such as *Frankenstein* clearly posits vegetarianism as the moral alternative to meat-eating, however, contemporary vegetarian horror narratives are less clear cut. Vegetarianism is still clearly presented as an unusual and uncommon choice within the societies depicted in *The Vegetarian* and *Raw* – it still renders one, like the creature, an outsider. But it is also rendered strange by the narratives themselves, which chart the disturbing trajectory or gesture towards the unsettling implications of a vegetarian diet; it is difficult to read either text as a whole-hearted endorsement of vegetarianism. *The Vegetarian* and *Raw* deal graphically with the consuming of meat and proffer the idea—through their nightmare imagery and scenes of human and animal terror—that this act of consumption may ultimately prove to be just as traumatic as the production of meat almost certainly is. More crucially, both narratives feature female protagonists whose self-proclaimed vegetarianism positions them as

a curious—at times, monstrous—presence within the communities they uneasily inhabit.⁴ Bonds of sisterhood, too, bring these two texts together: in each case, the protagonist's Gothicised eating shines a light on the prospect of sisterly unity as a means of resisting the forces of an oppressive patriarchal world that sees such eating only as something that needs to be controlled or tamed – and, if this is not possible, abjected. I want to argue that *The Vegetarian* and *Raw* present vegetarianism (and cannibalism, which *Raw* posits as a related phenomenon) not simply as a type of protest against human ravishment of the more-than-human world. More than this, these texts suggest vegetarianism might be a security against the inevitability of a violence that is as harmful to the self as to other subjects and which is indicative of humanity's engagement with the interrelated worlds of culture and nature. At best, these texts suggest that such a lifestyle choice keeps one's worst habits in check; at worst, they suggest that vegetarianism is simply a means of redirecting this inevitable violence in new directions, including inwards towards the self rather than outwards towards another.

‘[T]hat Vivid, Strange, Horribly Uncanny Feeling’: *The Vegetarian*

The Vegetarian tells the story of Yeong-hye, whose turn to vegetarianism early on in the novel isolates her from her conservative family and the enduringly patriarchal world of South Korea more generally. Only two characters make any effort to retain a meaningful connection with Yeong-hye: her struggling-artist brother-in-law, with whom Yeong-hye establishes an erotic relationship predicated on painting their naked bodies with images of flowers; and her sister, In-hye, who alone keeps up visits to Yeong-hye in the novel's final section, and who, more profoundly, gradually helps reveal the abuse both sisters suffered under their father. In the end, *The Vegetarian* is not really about a vegetarian: rapidly, Yeong-hye opts out of almost all forms of consumption, until, in the novel's final sequence, she is institutionalised and (barely) living on water and sunlight alone, seeking to transform herself into a tree. Critical reception of quite what stance Kang's novel takes on its titular subject matter has insisted on the puzzling—even troubling—ambiguity with which the writer treats vegetarianism.

Margarita Carretero-González (2019) suggests that the novel places greatest emphasis in its final section on the sisters' 'hidden story of shared oppression and expectations' (p. 177).

⁴ Linking vegetarianism with women, these narratives reflect the fact that men are greater consumers of meat than women, and that women are more commonly vegetarian than men (Love and Sulikowski, 2018: p. 2).

At the same time, vegetarians or vegans would struggle to find something fully politically affirming in *The Vegetarian*: it is ‘disquieting reading [...] It is the story of a woman on the verge of death. Yeong-hye’s body is, actually, a diseased one’, as the novel elides veganism as a lifestyle choice with ‘eating disorder[s]’ (pp. 175-176). Indeed, shifting between ‘vegetarian’ and ‘vegan’ as the appropriate term for Yeong-hye’s position, Carretero-González’s essay attests to the ambiguity and slipperiness writ deeply in Kang’s novel. In interviews, Kang has said that vegetarianism is a means of talking about the possibility of existing in a world non-violently. The novel ‘depicts a woman who rejects an omnipresent and precarious violence even at a cost to herself’ (Lee, 2016).

For Kang, it seems, the novel is a meditation on the ultimate *impossibility* of living without violence, and a working-through of the troubling prospects of that impossibility: ‘Violence is part of being human, and how can I accept that I am one of those human beings?’, Kang asks. If Yeong-hye is committed to *not* accepting that, then the novel paints a bleak picture for others who would follow in her footsteps. Neat lines of division cannot be drawn across Kang’s novel, as ethical behaviour merges into mental instability. Yet this may also be where it is most intriguing: *The Vegetarian* may be approached as a novel explicitly about the blurring of boundaries and the difficulties of navigating between modes of being and socially-sanctioned behaviours, and the different ways one can incorporate or be incorporated by the more-than-human world. To this end, the novel is also, it seems, concerned with different kinds of material immanence – inflected by the animal or the ecological. Yeong-hye’s struggle may be productively glossed by, even as it diverges from, ideas raised by ecofeminist writers like Mary Mellor. In *Feminism and Ecology* (1997), Mellor advocates for an ecocentric human engagement with nonhuman nature that acknowledges ‘an awareness of ecological holism, of the immanence of humanity as a material fact’ – an effort to read the human and nonhuman as interconnected and interdependent. ‘Humanity’s connection to an ecological “whole” has a material form and material consequences’. Such a politics, Mellor writes, inevitably ‘raises fundamental questions about the nature of human subjectivity’ (p. 147). It is the troubling question of how subjectivity may be sustained as one works towards the embodiment of a subject position that celebrates ‘ecological holism’ that Kang’s novel ultimately wrangles with.

At the beginning of *The Vegetarian*, it is Yeong-hye’s italicised nightmares that offer the reader a glimpse into the profoundly troubling influence the consumption of meat is having:

'Dreams of murder.

Murderer or murdered...hazy distinctions, boundaries wearing thin. Familiarity bleeds into strangeness, certainty becomes impossible. Only the violence is vivid enough to stick. A sound, the elasticity of the instant when the metal struck the victim's head...the shadow that crumpled and fell gleams cold in the darkness.' (Kang, 2015: p. 28)

The narrator—Yeong-hye's husband, Mr Cheong—remarks of Yeong-hye's father, a violent carnivore and proud Vietnam veteran, that 'Shame and empathy just didn't suit him' (p. 29). The suggestion that Yeong-hye's father cannot feel shame or empathy, connected as it is in a single paragraph that recounts his military service, his traditional patriarchal values, his violence towards his children, and his bewilderment that Yeong-hye won't eat meat, establishes a network of interrelated traits that Yeong-hye's political stance pushes back against. Vegetarianism here reveals how the politics of meat—of one's relationship with meat—seeps into all corners of culture; vegetarianism, then, becomes a tool to dismantle culture, akin to the work Petsche understands Frankenstein's creature to undertake. But in *The Vegetarian* there is a dismantling of subjectivity, too, as Yeong-hye's dream hints. There are '*hazy distinctions*' and '*boundaries wearing thin*'. The processing of the animal for meat has generated a dissolution of the subjectivity of the meat-eater: the violence one performs—or implicitly sanctions—as a meat-eater rebounds on the self as the body is suffused by the blood and remnants of the animals one has done violence to, as '*their lives still stick stubbornly to my insides*' and '*a different person rises up inside me, devours me*' (pp. 49, 32). As the nonhuman Other is incorporated into the human self, the self here is remade by that Other – a failure, or sign of the futility, of abjection as a means of establishing the 'me' against the 'not-me'. The result is a '*vivid, strange, horribly uncanny feeling*' (p. 12), a sensation invoking the faithful spectre of the Gothic: the familiar-unfamiliarity of the *Unheimliche*. By contrast, from the perspective of the carnivores of this novel, vegetarianism dissolves one's bonds not just with culture, but with community, with the living: numerous characters, numerous times, see Yeong-hye as 'just a ghost' (p. 45).

An earlier memory of Yeong-hye's summons the spirit of Sylvia Plath's 'Cut' (1962). Yeong-hye remembers the morning before her dream: as she is mincing meat she accidentally slices off the end of a finger and takes pleasure in some negligible autophagia, sucking the blood from the wound. '*My hand, the chopping board, the meat, and then the knife, slicing*

cold into my finger. A drop of red blood already blossoming out of the cut. [...] Sticking the finger in my mouth calmed me [...], left me strangely pacified (p. 19). In ‘Cut’, we read:

‘What a thrill—
My thumb instead of an onion.
The top quite gone
Except for a sort of hinge

Of skin [...]’ (Plath, 1965: p. 23)

The pleasure of ‘Cut’ is in the vivid, even life-affirming, glimpse of lifeblood ebbing out. In *The Vegetarian* pacification comes as the ‘blossoming’ blood—a word that serves to connect the vital fluid with the novel’s pervasive interest in flowers and flowering—is redirected inwards in an image of self-sustaining sustenance, a ‘closed circle’ of bloodshed and nourishment (to re-appropriate Adams’ terminology).

For all the uncanny revulsion Yeong-hye feels in response to the dreams and messages from her subconscious, the dissolution of subjectivity is not necessarily something she wishes to turn away from. Instead, it is something Yeong-hye wishes to achieve by travelling in the opposite direction: away from consumption, towards a (fatal) unification with the nonhuman, the non-animal, the vegetal. We might here see *The Vegetarian* seeking to embrace what Dawn Keetley (2016) has identified in the ecoGothic strain of the comic book *Manifest Destiny* (2014): the articulation of ‘a thorough-going interpenetration of human and plant’ and an awareness of ‘our always already-present vegetal otherness’ (p. 25). More than bridging the human-animal divide, *The Vegetarian* explores the prospect of bridging between sentient and non-sentient life. Yeong-hye’s first sustained effort to achieve this is with her brother-in-law, who films the sex they have while covered in painted-on flowers. At the novel’s end, In-hye finally sees the potential of these videos made by her sister and (now) ex-husband:

‘Covered with flowers and leaves and twisting green stems, those bodies were so altered it was as though they no longer belonged to human beings. The writhing movements of those bodies made it seem as though they were trying to shuck off the human.’ (Kang, 2015: p. 179)

Next, Yeong-hye works to become tree in more than just superficial detail via a transformation of self with Ovidian overtones. The mythic-Romantic effort to lose oneself not simply in but *to* nature carries with it also its Gothic undertones in the further disintegration of a troubled mind that such a process is suggested to embody. In-hye visits her sister in a psychiatric ward, and finds her doing handstands. Yeong-hye explains that trees ‘stand with both arms in the earth’ and that

‘I was in a dream, and I was standing on my head...leaves were growing from my body, and roots were sprouting from my hands...so I dug down into the earth. On and on...I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch so I spread my legs.’ (p. 148)

The image is faintly ludicrous perhaps, but this literal inversion of the human finds Yeong-hye itching to ‘shuck off’ the indices of the animal. As she tells her sister ‘I’m not an animal any more’ she remarks too that soon ‘words and thoughts will all disappear’ (pp. 153-154).

Ultimately, Yeong-hye’s effort to find sympathetic communion and solidarity with the nonhuman and vegetal world has led to her awareness of all that prevents the human from achieving this. As she suggests, language—and sentient thought—are barriers to the prospect of any real kind of immanent integration with this world. Such things, as the work of Julia Kristeva (1982) demonstrates, root one fundamentally in a symbolic world, the world of culture and violence, of signs and an awareness of one’s separation from the real (see pp. 1-32). Whether or not Yeong-hye ever succeeds in her project is unknown; indeed, by her own logic, Yeong-hye herself will never know of the success, because success itself depends upon unknowing, of forgetting what it means to know, of abandoning one’s subjectivity. *The Vegetarian* celebrates the power of vegetarianism and veganism to help challenge and dismantle culture and the violence of patriarchy. The failure and flaws of Yeong-hye’s protest are in her refusal to compromise. Her story illustrates the impracticability of establishing a compromise in which human immanence in the material world beyond it is not antithetical to remaining simultaneously in the human world of culture. For to do so is to occupy a subject position that implicates itself in a culture that does not feel shame or empathy, one predicated on the denial of the value of marginalised or abjected bodies, whether human or not. Here, participation or compromise are impossible positions to countenance, just as the alternative itself may be impossible.

The final perspective offered in the novel is that of Yeong-hye's sister, In-hye. At the end of the book, In-hye seems to exhibit some sympathy with Yeong-hye's acts, while at the same time keeping her distance. As Yeong-hye is taken away in an ambulance, 'In-hye stares fiercely at the trees. As if waiting for an answer. As if protesting against something. The look in her eyes is dark and insistent' (Kang, 2015: p. 183). The answer that In-hye seeks, the same perhaps that her sister and Han Kang seek, is impossibly located in an inscrutable nature that, as we've seen, exists beyond 'words and thoughts': the trees are not, cannot be, forthcoming. The novel's final section both reaffirms the sisterly bond and reiterates the unbroachable divide between the two women. This bond is one that also receives significant scrutiny in Julia Ducournau's vegetarian horror film, *Raw*: the sister-sister bond is both safe haven and productive of remarkable violence, physical and emotional.

'Bite him, Justine': *Raw*

Raw follows vegetarian veterinarian student, Justine (Garance Marillier), through the hazing rituals of the first week of college: she is immersed in blood and forced to consume various morsels of animal. These sequences invite comparison with *The Vegetarian* and with the shock-tactics of a group like 269 Life, suggesting as they do that to emerge into the world of human culture is to be symbolically reborn into a hierarchical world of institutionally sanctioned violence. Along the way, Justine appears to discover both her sexuality and her cannibalistic tendencies. Reviews of *Raw* have—quite appropriately—read it as a feminist coming-of-age parable: it is an 'intimate tale of identity crisis', a 'jangly opera of sexual and dietary awakening', a horror film where 'turning into a monster also means sexual liberation', where Justine finds 'empowerment [...] crossing the no-man's-land between girlhood and womanhood' (Kermode, 2017; Catsoulis 2017; Newman, 2017; Fear, 2017). De Sade's *Justine* (1791), Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974), and the films *Suspiria* (1977) and *We Are What We Are* (2010) have been common reference points in these reviews. For the director, Ducournau, *Raw* throws the net slightly wider: it is about 'interpersonal devouring', in society, in the family, and in love (BUILD series, 2017). Acts of consumption drive this narrative and function as a means to talk about the treatment of women's bodies under patriarchy. This is most overt when Justine's trichophagia is mistaken, entirely without fuss, for bulimia by a fellow student.

But vegetarianism and cannibalism are not working solely metaphorically here; nor is consumption solely a gateway to liberation or self-discovery. The film prompts us to think carefully about the relationship between the human body and the nonhuman body, to think about what might be incorporated under the term ‘animal’, and what the human subject might be doing to the nonhuman subject it carves up and incorporates.⁵ As Justine becomes rapidly indiscriminate about the type of meat she’ll eat, the question is raised: if one is going to eat meat, what justification is there for being picky about the kind of meat one eats? There are suggestive overlaps with a novel like *Dracula*, as Justine embodies a form of vampirism, feeding on the blood of other humans, sustaining her body at the expense of others’. Visually, the film repeatedly aligns Justine at her most cannibalistic with *Raw*’s numerous dogs. In this respect, Ducournau’s narrative takes us in the absolute opposite direction to Kang’s: *Raw*’s vegetarian is cannibalistic carnivore, where *The Vegetarian*’s undertakes a near-total rejection of the very notion of consumption and the inescapable violence that comes with such a process.

At the film’s halfway mark, Justine’s sister, Alexia (Ella Rumpf), attempts to give Justine a Brazilian wax. It goes quite spectacularly wrong, and the camera tracks both Justine and the dog, Quicky, hunting around on the floor for Alexia’s severed finger, a prelude to the film’s most prolonged sequence of cannibalism. The sequence is also invested with a vaguely Freudian, quasi-erotic queerness, as Justine savours Alexia’s ‘castrated’ finger while holding her sister’s gaze in her own. This cannibalism is then a challenge to the normative family unit, and to heteronormativity more broadly. Indeed, in giving queer sexualities such prominence, *Raw* continually excludes heteronormative masculinity in displays of love and desire that result quite literally in the consumption—or incorporation—of the desired object.

In losing her finger, Alexia joins the film’s cast of human bodies that don’t quite meet the standards that a character like the sisters’ mother would hold them to; indeed, the entire Brazilian sequence is part of Alexia’s effort to ensure Justine conforms to mainstream beauty standards. *Raw* subtly gestures towards these wounded human bodies within the world of a veterinarian college, in which nonhuman bodies are repeatedly opened-up, plunged into, and taken apart as a matter of course. Justine’s body is covered in a rash after being forced to eat

⁵ To this end, *Raw* is comparable to novels like *Under the Skin* and such films as *Okja* (2017) and *Carnage* (2017), even *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974)—films about animal rights and the meat industry—as readily as the coming-of-age horrors it has frequently been compared with. Another notable development of the vegetarian horror trend can be seen in *Rabid* (2019), the Soska sister’s upcoming remake of David Cronenberg’s body horror film.

raw rabbit kidney; Alexia recounts her bewilderment in discovering she once hooked up with a ‘one-armed guy’; at the hospital, Justine watches an old man dislocating his false teeth. Ableism, too, inflects how human bodies are seen in this film: the sisters’ mother is unable to see Alexia as anything other than disabled after the loss of a finger, forcing Alexia to remain in a wheelchair she quite clearly doesn’t need. If the focus on these bodies suggests the human body cannot be held to normative, ableist standards, it also becomes a means for *Raw* to establish a connection between human and nonhuman, one that is less sensationalist than Justine’s canine behaviour and which allows us to think less hierarchically about the human-nonhuman relationship.

On Justine’s turn to cannibalism, one reviewer emphasises Justine’s ‘descent into animalism’ (Yoshida, 2017). We are urged to make this connection with the animal – most evidently when Justine is seen drunkenly crawling on the floor of a morgue, being goaded to ‘Go fetch’ and ‘Bite him’, as Alexia waves a cadaver’s arm at her sister. But it is worth considering whether the film offers an opportunity to push back against the implications of a word like ‘descent’ here, as the film may be seen to disavow a clear human-nonhuman hierarchy. ‘An animal who has tasted human flesh isn’t safe’, says Justine’s father, after Quicky is scapegoated for eating Alexia’s finger and must be put down. Presumably, *Raw* implies, a human who has tasted animal flesh isn’t safe, either: in blood-soaked initiation ceremonies, carnivorous humans continually demonstrate their savage ‘animality’. Further, the elision of the human with the animal gives us an opportunity to see in *Raw* the intersection of vegetarian horror and what has been termed ‘animal horror’, those narratives in which ‘a particular animal or animal species commits a transgression against humanity and then recounts the punishment the animal must suffer as a consequence’ (Gregersdotter, et al., 2015: p. 3).

‘Animal horror’ as a critical perspective allows us to focus on ‘the relation between “human” and “animal” as categories unrelated to their places in the ecosystem’ (Gregersdotter, et al., 2015: p. 4). *Raw* demonstrates little interest in ecologies or the ecoGothic proper, insofar as it does not position its human characters in the midst of a hostile wilderness; the setting is conspicuously urban, artificial, and indeed sterile (in such spaces as a veterinary school and a hospital). Once again moving in the opposite direction to *The Vegetarian*, we might read *Raw* as a film that invites its animals into the world of culture and illuminates the human-nonhuman relationship accordingly (by so doing, of course, it further blurs a clear boundary between the natural and the cultural). Justine’s unrestrained acts of carnivorism—a mere extension, we

might say, of her peers' eating habits—position her as the figure 'transgress[ing] against humanity'. In part, this transgression echoes the theories of cooking elaborated by Claude Lévi-Strauss (2008), in which 'the cooked is a cultural transformation of the raw' (p. 37). Of different types of cooking, Lévi-Strauss argues that 'the roasted is on the side of nature, the boiled on the side of culture' – to roast is an 'unmediated conjunction' of food and fire, whereas boiling is 'doubly mediated' by water and a receptacle. As Piatti-Farnell (2017) notes, there are evident shortcomings to Lévi-Strauss' concept, but it is nevertheless suggestive, and *Raw*'s very title proclaims that which Lévi-Strauss tip-toes around – the prospect of eating 'pure rawness' (p. 158).

For Lévi-Strauss no food is truly consumed raw, for it has all been 'selected, washed, pared or cut, or even seasoned' (p. 37). As such, 'no human is conceptually allowed to eat raw meat' for it is 'too unashamedly reminiscent of the live animal' (Piatti-Farnell, 2017: p. 158). Justine's crime—her status as unassuming Gothic monster—may depend less on her choice of meat and more on her failure to properly prepare it for consumption: she eats in a way that situates her beyond what Lévi-Strauss constructs as the limits of human culture, and beyond the carnivalesque performance of eating 'pure rawness' that her peers undertake in their hazing rituals. In this way, *Raw* illuminates the contradictions and exclusions that undergird cultural hierarchies and social practice. By its final scene, the film has associated womanhood with vegetarianism, vegetarianism with cannibalism, and cannibalism with queerness, incest, and the animal. This spiralling sequence of subjects and practices that are notionally excluded from the centre of a patriarchal system of power and oppression signify, in the end, in quite the opposite way. As that which is excluded proliferates via this (by no means unproblematic) associative chain, the possibility of a normative masculinity that endures or wholly dominates is increasingly shown to be an untenable prospect.

The film's most provocative sequence involves a conversation that brings together sexual politics, homophobia, violence against women, and animal rights. At lunch, a student quizzes Justine's gay roommate, Adrien (Rabah Naït Oufella), on whether it is possible to give monkeys HIV by having sex with them. Adrien is unsurprisingly hostile to the implications in this line of questioning—wondering whether this student was 'raised by wolves'—while Justine reasons that, as animals with sentience and rights, a monkey that is a victim of sexual assault 'suffers like a woman'. Here, Justine's opinion clearly isolates her among her peers, while aberrant or distasteful human behaviour sees the offending human colloquially relegated

to the animal world (where being ‘raised by wolves’ situates them outside society’s ‘closed circle’). Curiously, the character whose opinion on animals most closely echoes Justine’s is one she meets at a late-night petrol station. As the stranger gropes an evidently uncomfortable Adrien, he says to the vet students: ‘Pigs are almost like humans. You learned that yet? Genetically or something’. The statement itself implies the proximity of the human to the nonhuman, though it is uttered by a morally unsavoury character who is sexually aggressive and keeps a pig in his truck in order to substitute its blood for his own to conceal his drunk driving. In this instance, the nonhuman is brought into a corrupt human world, in which a violence towards animals legitimates or begets violence towards humans. Justine’s unpopular opinion, on the other hand, envisages an ethical collapsing of the different worlds inhabited by human and nonhuman, in which one readily extends both citizenship and empathy to others regardless of species. In either scenario, the erasure of difference is not without its troubling aspects.

Raw is a deeply compelling film, even as its politics remain slippery. Sharing this moral and political slipperiness with *The Vegetarian*, one wonders whether this is suggestive of a greater difficulty in deploying vegetarianism as a political signifier in horror narratives. As another commentator has noted, *Raw* seems quite explicitly to be about animal rights, but precisely what its ethical position is here remains more oblique; the overlapping of interrelated concerns in the film is suggestive rather than prescriptive (“Rick”, 2017). In the final sequence of the film, Justine’s father reveals that her cannibalism is inherited from her mother, and his own scarred body stands as a visible testament to her appetite. In *The Vegetarian*, Yeong-hye’s lifestyle choice is figured, as Carretero-González notes, as a disorder. At the same time (or, perhaps, the novel suggests, ‘accordingly’), *The Vegetarian*’s ‘vegetarianism’ is symbolic of a more all-encompassing opting-out—of the human world, of the animal world—asserting a solidarity with the seeming nonviolence of the natural world, or the ‘vegetal’, to adopt the word that resonates most strikingly within the novel itself. Vegetarianism, then, is a safeguard against a monstrous carnivorousness which is detrimental to both human and nonhuman alike.

In a final turn of the screw, *Raw*—via the patriarchal figure of the father—aligns cannibalism with women, at which point it seems to urge us to read ‘vegetarianism’ as a safeguard against women’s desires. ‘I’m sure you’ll find a solution, honey’, Justine’s father tells her just before the credits roll. But what is he urging Justine to find a solution *to*: her cannibalism? Her vegetarianism? Or her desires – for flesh, for men, or for the power(s) men

assume under patriarchy? It is the father who speaks of the need to put Quicky down for tasting human flesh. And, in the end, his uneasy final lines echo this sentiment, striving to maintain order in the household, and to maintain a fundamental difference between human and nonhuman, operating, to recall Adams, through a process of exclusion. From this last perspective, vegetarianism itself is a monstrous form of control. It is the connections made throughout *Raw* between human and nonhuman bodies—bodies that cross and collapse a murky nature-culture divide—that help us to read against the father’s words towards a different ethical engagement with flesh, human or otherwise.

Conclusion: Food for Thought

Food—and meat in particular—is a site and symbol of power, especially, commentators note, male power (Adams, 2015). ‘The blood is the life’, we might say, echoing *Dracula*’s zoöphagous madman, Renfield (Stoker, 2003: p. 152). The symbolic potency of consumption is richly explored by the Gothic and horror, repeatedly demonstrating what it means for acts of incorporation to function as both performance and embodiment of power. To remain for a moment with *Dracula*, in Stoker’s text we encounter a novel stuffed with references to food, eating, and recipes (Parrino, 2013a). Jonathan Harker’s encounter with ‘paprika hendl’ in the opening pages of the novel is a good example of this. For more than one reader, Harker’s explicitly red meal is a sign of the novel’s overarching interest in blood lust, a taster of things to come, and, further, an indication of the power that (unfamiliar, foreign) food and inappropriate consumption can have over the human body (Del Principe, 2014b; Bale, 2018). It is also an enactment in miniature of the powerplays the novel will explore – including the power relations between men, between human and nonhuman, West and East, natural and unnatural. Harker records his meal in this way:

‘I had for dinner, or rather supper, a chicken done up some way with red pepper, which was very good but thirsty. (*Mem.*, get recipe for Mina.) I asked the waiter, and he said it was called ‘paprika hendl’, and that, as it was a national dish, I should be able to get it anywhere along the Carpathians.’ (Stoker, 2003: p. 7)

That parenthetical aside—‘get recipe for Mina’—is an effort towards mastery over the exoticised Eastern world, a means of identifying, documenting, and reconstituting back in the imperial heartland a symbol of another national culture; it is a ritualistic process that converts

the potentially dangerous Other into something safer, recalling perhaps the ritualistic processes that keep vampiric infection at bay. Where Dracula later threatens Britain as an uncontrollable foreign power, at this early stage in the novel Harker seeks out that which can be contained and safely imported: the *right* kind of eating preserves the *right* kind of *status quo*. Yet the meal itself may ultimately replicate Dracula's power, another instance of what Stephen D. Arata (1990) has famously called Dracula's act of 'reverse colonisation'. Later that night, it is either this meal or the dogs' howling outside the window (he cannot be quite sure which) that gives Harker a poor night's sleep and 'all sorts of queer dreams' (Stoker, 2003: p. 8). What is at stake here in either case is the disturbance of the body, a disturbance rooted in an overt awareness of the presence of the nonhuman.

In the contemporary narratives discussed above, Renfield's mantra continues to resonate, but in markedly different ways. For *Raw*, the blood is the life and, as such, it is to be embraced as a site of oppositional empowerment disruptive to the very social norms a figure like Jonathan Harker is seeking to maintain. For *The Vegetarian*, the blood is the life and this is very much the problem, as the novel fathoms how one might sustain the life without the blood. The recent trend in vegetarian horror participates, then, in a long-standing Gothic discourse, calling attention to the persistent violence that underpins human interaction with a more-than-human world exploited to glut a human appetite, and explores how this violence is indicative of other manifestations of power and its abuse. More than this, vegetarian horror equates human animals with nonhuman animals by insisting on and rendering hypervisible a shared flesh-and-blood corporeality.

Both of the vegetarian horror narratives I have discussed in this essay posit an indeterminate, even arbitrary, dividing-line between the raw flesh of the nonhuman and the raw flesh of the human; further, these narratives illustrate the horror of coming into an awareness of the indistinguishability of the one from the other, of the human from its notional Other. Indeed, in both texts even a vegetarian diet is, in the end, figured simultaneously as an ethical stance one might take against one's carnivorous desires and, conversely, as a replication in a new context of the human propensity for violence against others. The alternative communities these texts gesture towards are articulated in the midst of a world that is fundamentally hostile to the notion of such alternatives: the ecocentrism of *The Vegetarian* is akin to madness; the reformulation of culture to include the nonhuman in *Raw* is interpreted as grotesquely misogynistic. As meditations on legitimate sources of foodstuff and the ethical limits of an

anthropocentric society, vegetarian horror reiterates that acts of consumption are always political. If we take the challenges they offer seriously, the texts urge us as participants in our own cultures to fathom the limits of our own ethics. They propose that, so long as we remain human, living wholly ethically will be an impossibility, and that ethical behaviour is instead always partial and contingent, a re-channelling of the flow of horror and not a complete stemming of it.

Nature, we might finally say, is Gothicised in *The Vegetarian* and *Raw* not at the moment of the human encounter ‘out there’, with an inscrutable and menacingly nonhuman natural world. Rather, nature is Gothicised at the moment the living nonhuman subject is incorporated into the human. When Yeong-hye expresses the loathing she feels for her husband, she explains to him that it is because of ‘The meat smell. Your body smells of meat’ (Kang, 2015: p. 17). These remarks cut two ways. On the one hand, like Jonathan Harker’s before him, the body of Mr Cheong signifies through its relationship with that which it has consumed: meat permeates the body, it seeps from the pores, and the bodily self is elided with the dead flesh that sustains it. On the other hand, the human body *is* meat, it is conterminous with the flesh it consumes, indistinguishable from it.

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BIOGRAPHY

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‘A Stern, a Sad, a Darkly Meditative, a Distrustful, if not a Desperate Man, did he become, from the Night of that Fearful Dream’: Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Nocturnal Gothic

Sarah Cullen

ABSTRACT

This article examines the implications of what Q. D. Leavis has termed Hawthorne’s ‘night journey’. I argue that this journey is an ecoGothic one, as it requires a nocturnal environment in which to function. In order to demonstrate what this dream journey entails, the article focuses on Hawthorne’s perennial example of the dream journey which takes place in ‘Young Goodman Brown’ (1835). By doing so it identifies some of the frequently occurring features of Hawthorne’s ‘nocturnal gothic’ work and observes how they appear throughout his short stories and romances. The night is the ultimate battleground for his protagonists, as the literal darkness and chaos of the night becomes the metaphorical arena for their moral uncertainty. Hawthorne’s night, then, frequently challenges, but must be faced if one wishes to achieve spiritual growth. Following from Hyatt Waggoner’s (1967) observations regarding the importance of light and darkness in Hawthorne, this article demonstrates that night in Hawthorne represents death. This first night journey represents the first death that each individual must endure: that of the death of youth. Hawthorne’s gothic fiction, then, illustrates the night as a space for metamorphosis. A single night is a transformation period in which his youths encounter their own shortcomings or sins of the past for the first time. How they come to address these sins—frequently represented as literal demons and their hellish followers—indicates their future comportment and how they will ultimately encounter their ‘final night’, which is their death. The culmination of a successful life, as seen in Hawthorne’s sketch ‘The Village Uncle’, (1837) in which the elderly protagonist has learned to ‘love the moonlight hour’, or matured on his night journeys, is a lofty aim which many of his protagonists fall short of in the ecoGothic chaos of the American night.

This essay seeks to address Nathaniel Hawthorne's nightscape as an ecoGothic environment: one which highlights many of the key themes in his work and which influence his characters' lives, such as facing one's demons, the dangers and importance of dreaming, and night as death. These themes take on an ecocritical dimension when considering Roderick Nash's (2014) definition of American wilderness as 'Any place in which a person feels stripped of guidance, lost, and perplexed' (p. 3). This descriptor could easily be applied to Hawthorne's nocturnal gothic wilderness, which frequently destabilises or distorts the world view of his characters, forcing them to question the validity of their dreams or the trustworthiness of those they encounter. As a result, this essay proposes a new method of ecoGothic reading, which I have termed the 'nocturnal gothic', and it will explore how Hawthorne's gothic characters respond to their nocturnal environments.

The archetype for Hawthorne's nocturnal gothic journey can be seen in a summary of 'Young Goodman Brown' (1835). Brown is a young, impressionable member of the Puritan community, who decides to leave his newly-wedded wife Faith alone one evening to travel into the forest outside the boundaries of Salem. This journey, he tells his disappointed wife, 'must needs be done 'twixt now and sunrise'. The road into the forest closes '[immediately] behind' him and soon he encounters an old man who may be the Devil, who chastises him for being late. This elder man accompanies Brown on his walk and he is shocked to discover that this man knew Brown's forefathers and accompanied them on similar journeys. Brown is further outraged when he recognises many of his upstanding neighbours making their own journeys through the forest. When he finally discovers that Faith is part of the proceedings he becomes enraged, becoming the 'chief horror of the scene', who 'shrank not from its other horrors'. What Brown finds at the centre of the forest is a witches coven, comprised of many of his neighbours and friends, where he and Faith are to be 'taken into communion'. Brown cries out to his wife to 'look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one'. Suddenly, he finds himself alone in the clearing, as if everything that had just happened was a dream. When he arrives back in Salem the next morning, Brown no longer trusts anyone in his community, not even Faith. He is unable to ever escape from the memories of that forest night: 'a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate man did he become from the night of that fearful dream' (pp. 276-89).

Q. D. Leavis' (1951) succinct summation of Brown's journey expanded to take in many of these elements, calling it

‘The journey each must take alone, in dread, at night, is the journey away from home and the community, from conscious, everyday social life, to the wilderness where the hidden self satisfies, or is forced to realize, its subconscious fears and promptings in sleep.’ (p. 195)

She furthermore recognises that the elements of this journey were *not* exclusive to ‘Goodman Brown’, something which this essay will explore with regard to Hawthorne’s wider gothic canon. These elements include an impressionable young man, with little experience of the world, who encounters temptations from the devil, and a secret sin which the impressionable youth is ashamed to admit, even to himself. There is also a choice or string of choices which the protagonist makes to determine whether they will be able to emerge from the metaphorical gloom of the night, or whether this night will define the rest of his existence. A further element is that of ambiguity. As Jerry A. Herndon (1975) writes, ‘[characteristically], Hawthorne used dream imagery to indicate his conception of man’s mortal life as a ‘dim sphere of half development’ in which good and evil blend ambiguously’ (p. 538). Even in some of Hawthorne’s stories which appear to eschew the ‘night journey’ template, the characters follow a similar trajectory, in which they attempt to make sense in a world that perpetually challenges their perceptions.

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s world is frequently dusky, poorly-lit but occasionally interrupted by rays of strong sunshine and darkness. The importance of light and darkness in the author’s work has been well observed throughout the last sixty years of scholarship, particularly the focus on the intersection of the two (Barker, 2002; Goddu, 1997; Levin, 1958; Arvin, 1950). It also did not go unnoticed in his own time: Herman Melville (1850) famously admired Hawthorne’s ability to show America’s ‘blackness, ten times black’, writing that ‘this darkness but gives more effect to the ever-moving dawn, that forever advances through it, and circumnavigates his world’ (p. 240). Melville here seems to suggest that Hawthorne utilises dark shades in order to better illustrate the brightness of a light. Similarly to *chiaroscuro* or the recently-invented daguerreotype, Hawthorne uses the contrast of light and darkness to produce strong effects in his writing. The prominent theme of night in Hawthorne’s work has often been implied in scholarship, but never overtly stated. Furthermore, it is clear that the Hawthornean night plays a crucial role in the formation of character: Hyatt Waggoner (1967) writes that

‘the man under the umbrella had to leave the snug comfort of his brightly lighted chamber and brave the discomforts of a dark, cold, and rainy world, to see the world at its worst, before he could affirm that a proper faith could be trusted to lead us home through the encompassing darkness.’ (p. 259)

Recent scholarship has identified strong ecoGothic themes in Hawthorne’s writing. Building upon Andrew Smith and William Hughes’ work in their highly influential edited collection *EcoGothic* (2013), Lesley Ginsberg (2018) has argued that ecoGothic readings of the environment permit critics to make connections between seemingly disparate texts, such as ‘The Birth-Mark’ (1843) and ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’ (1844). Despite the tonal differences found in these stories, ‘nature in these tales is clearly “a space of crisis” linked to larger concerns about the status of humans in nature, a crisis refracted through gothic extremes of power and abjection’ (p. 115). Matthew Wynn Sivils (2014) has contrasted wilderness in Hawthorne and Emerson as a way of delineating the gothic world view from the transcendentalist. Following Charles L. Crow (2009), he argues that ‘Hawthorne’s fiction promotes the idea that America’s dark past results in a haunted landscape that exists beyond all reason’ (p. 125). EcoGothic frameworks therefore enable new critical understandings of Hawthorne’s canon and American gothic as a genre.

This article furthers this conversation, concerning itself with Hawthorne’s night journeys. While there has been some recent movement within gothic studies to explore the connection with the literary night, as seen in Elisabeth Bronfen’s *Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature and Film* (2013) and Maria Peker’s chapter in the edited collection *Dark Nights, Bright Lights: Night, Darkness, and Illumination in Literature* (2015), the gothic literary night has yet to be identified as an ecoGothic environment, something which this essay attempts to rectify. Some of the reasons for exploring the nocturnal gothic are straightforward: gothic literature illustrates the unreliability of the human senses and the night, more than any other wilderness space, is directly connected with loss of sight (and therefore control) (Ekirch, 2005: p. 8). Relating this idea more closely to Hawthorne, the night is often related to a lack of control as his protagonists come to discover how chaotic and unpredictable the world is. Michael Cody (2012), quoting Robert S. Levine (1989), hints at this nocturnal reading when he observes that, ‘Goodman’ serves as a microcosm

‘through which to explore the continuities and diversions found in [Hawthorne’s] Gothic practices. [‘Goodman’] features a journey into the dark wilderness, suggests the perils of misperception and reveals an anxiety arising from the troubled psyche on a frontier that is “unsettled and unsettling”.’ (p. 103)

Indeed, the core text scrutinised here is ‘Young Goodman Brown’ as it is in many ways the ecoGothic template of the night journey which is explored throughout many of the other stories. These stories are not representative of Hawthorne’s oeuvre: as Waggoner (1967) points out, many of Hawthorne’s works are able to affirm the light or the daytime and, in doing so, ‘reveal a side of Hawthorne that Melville missed – or was not interested in’ (p. 30). However, the texts discussed are significant and are often his best-known. Alongside ‘Goodman Brown’ this essay focuses primarily on Hawthorne’s most famous romance, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and a collection of his short stories including ‘My Kinsman, Major Molineux’ (1832), ‘Roger Malvin’s Burial’ (1846), ‘Ethan Brand’ (1850), and ‘The Hollow of the Three Hills’ (1851). It will be supported with quotes from some of his more relevant sketches, most notably ‘The Haunted Mind’ (1837) and ‘The Village Uncle’ (1837).

There is a great deal of truth to Barker’s (1987) assertion that:

‘Although Hawthorne often wrote of the artist as a shadowy character who preferred the filtered light of a windowsill to the open light of day, his concern is still nevertheless that an alliance between the artist and ‘dark’ forces results in an unhealthy and destructive alienation from the healthful, normal world of the sun – and of course, from God.’ (p. 16)

Night is unquestionably aligned with sin and evil, as evinced in the numerous examples of the devil-like figures and hellish followers which emerge almost exclusively at night. Many confused protagonists lose their way, both literally and spiritually, thanks in part to the murky nature of the darkness and the untrustworthiness of the moonlight. Although Hawthorne rejected Puritan beliefs regarding punishment and lifestyle, his writing accords with their Calvinistic fears regarding sin. As Nash observes, Hawthorne’s work ‘suggests the persistence into the nineteenth century of the Puritan conception of wilderness. For him wild country was still “black” and “howling” as well as a powerful symbol of man’s black and untamed heart’

(p. 39). Much like his Puritan forefathers, Hawthorne viewed the world, particularly the New World, as a place of trial and tribulation (Donohue, 1985: p. 4). America, for Hawthorne, is a wilderness site in which his characters must struggle with their human failures, and the nightscape is where his Adams and Eves could, and most likely would, fall.

There are many ways in which, initially, Hawthorne's views regarding the natural world do appear to take the form of a binary between good and evil, light and dark, day and night. However, Hawthorne ultimately saw the night as a time of necessary growth, in which everyone should be exposed to their own failures and shortcomings in order to mature and develop as individuals and artists. Hawthorne spent much of his life until his marriage at thirty as a recluse, leaving his family home only at night to 'mingle anonymously with a crowd or to watch a fire' (Donohue, 1985: p. 9). This suggests that he saw an attraction to the night, as somewhere in which he could learn more about himself at the remove of regular society. It is also important to recognise that, although evil is a feature of the night time, it is not an abstract and external evil, but an internal evil made manifest in the nocturnal environment. The evil that is being encountered is the cruel thoughts and lingering guilt plaguing one's own soul (Murphy, 2013: p. 2). 'It is a sin that grew within my own breast', cries Ethan Brand when addressing his midnight crowd, perhaps like the kind Hawthorne himself joined. 'A sin that grew nowhere else!' (pp. 1056-7). Hawthorne's protagonists must undertake a journey to confront this evil, and this article concerns itself with this journey.

The nocturnal gothic in Hawthorne is particularly conducive to encounters with evil because it is the time natural defences are down frequently in sleep. Hawthorne's characters unsurprisingly find themselves at their most susceptible to the evils of the world, while in their most indefensible position. According to A. Robert Ekirch, this is when humans were most vulnerable, both physically and mentally, particularly before the modern era. Not only are deaths 'most likely to occur during the early morning hours [...] In general, we become most vulnerable when the body's "circadian cycle is at its lowest ebb"' (p. 14). It is little wonder that in 'The Haunted Mind' the narrator describes the fear of awaking one's own inner demons as something most likely to happen at night:

'In the depths of every heart, there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or prisoners whom they hide. But sometimes, and oftenest at

midnight, those dark receptacles are flung wide open. In an hour like this, when the mind has a passive sensibility, but no active strength; when the imagination is a mirror, imparting vividness to all ideas, without the power of selecting or controlling them; hthen pray that your griefs may slumber, and the brotherhood of remorse not break their chain.’ (p. 201-2)

The ambiguous nature of many of Hawthorne’s tales lends them a dreamlike quality, whether this is the midnight forest in ‘Goodman’ or the nocturnal Boston in ‘My Kinsman’, in which both characters question the veracity of their experiences, wondering if they have been dreaming. This uncertainty also plays out in more metaphorical terms in Hawthorne's other works. Leslie A. Fiedler (1966) notes that *The Scarlet Letter* ‘is finally dream-like rather than documentary [...] evoking the past as nightmare rather than fact’ (p. 231). Much of Reverend Dimmesdale's experiences are related in terms of nightmare imagery. Following his forest encounter with his former lover, Hester Prynne, he observes how the world around him seems changed; ‘Mr. Dimmesdale's mind vibrated between two ideas; either that he had seen it only in a dream hitherto, or that he was merely dreaming about it now’. His guilt, at having never admitted to his affair, has up to this point forced him to live much of his life in a fugue or trance-like state. Earlier, when he approached the town pillory (the site of Hester's public shaming), he is described as ‘Walking in the shadow of a dream, as it were, and perhaps actually under the influence of a species of somnambulism’ (1850: p. 163, p. 110). Dimmesdale, in a nocturnal zombie-like state, is doomed to ever remember and even recreate the scenes of his own failure until he can find a way to redeem himself and escape his perpetual dream journey.

However, much as dreaming may lead characters down terrifying paths, it is an essential aspect of Hawthorne’s nocturnal gothic. Dreaming is the time, outlined in ‘Haunted Mind’ during which man's imagination is open to ‘all ideas’ without the bias or ‘power of selecting or controlling’ that usually leads to daytime prejudices. Disturbing as these nocturnal experiences are, there is something undeniably honest about them: a suggestion that everyone must confront these realities about themselves, or never become fully rounded individuals. This is clear regarding gothic characters who do not dream: they are missing a vital part of their existence. Judge Pyncheon's self-admission in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) that he does ‘not belong to the dreaming class of men’ (p. 235) may explain why he is little more than a carbon copy of earlier incarnations of the Pyncheons, such as the original Colonel Pyncheon himself (1964: p. 193). It is also telling that Ethan Brand claims he ‘cannot sleep’ (p. 1063). In

revoking his membership to the human race he has given up the ability to dream. He remembers, 'how the stars had gleamed upon him', but now he is beyond even the influence of the darkneses that all men are subject to:

'He had lost his hold of the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer a brother-man, opening the chambers or the dungeons of our common nature by the key of holy sympathy, which gave him a right to share in all its secrets; he was now a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment, and, at length, converting man and woman to be his puppets, and pulling the wires that moved them to such degrees of crime as were demanded for his study.' (pp. 1063-4)

Brand cannot access humanity as in 'Haunted Mind': he is not privy to the mechanisms through which men realise their guilt. His inhuman omniscience has pushed all ability to dream of other worlds out of his head. Similarly to Judge Pyncheon, he is too preoccupied with this world.

An active engagement with one's dreams and nightmares is at the heart of Hawthorne's nocturnal gothic. This, I argue, is what delineates a story such as 'David Swan: A Fantasy' (1837) from Hawthorne's gothic canon. Within this story the eponymous protagonist seeks a shady spot along the side of a road and falls asleep. He is observed by various wayfarers, who project their own thoughts onto the sleeping figure, two of whom are even thwarted in an attempt to rob his prone body. We are never made privy to Swan's own dreams, however, and the story concludes on a cautiously optimistic note: 'Does it not argue a superintending Providence that, while viewless and unexpected events thrust themselves continually athwart our path, there should still be regularity enough in mortal life to render foresight even partially available?' (p. 434). 'David Swan' is, therefore, not the story of Swan's night journey (aesthetically or otherwise) because his dreams are not the mechanism through which to explore his psyche or challenge his worldview, and it concludes with a note of certainty absent in Hawthorne's nocturnal gothic.

Unlike Swan, who can sleep deeply and soundly, Hawthorne's gothic characters walk a fine line between dreams and the waking world. In such texts, dreaming is a connection that can lead one astray from the collective understanding of humankind. If an individual becomes too taken up with the subject of their dreams they can become divorced from their humanity as

they begin to ignore the realities of the waking world. On the other hand, dreaming itself is also a human characteristic. The ability to dream means that one is not wholly occupied with the waking (or material) world, which leads to a lack of imagination and wonder. Not dreaming is significantly more dangerous than dreaming: it is the symptom of an unfeeling and unconscionable individual, be they devil-man or banker.

Many of these night journeys are populated by supernatural nocturnal figures that try to convince the protagonists to join them. As Donohue (1985) observes, 'Hawthorne's use of devil imagery, devil characters, witchcraft, the demonic, and the supernatural are too numerous to recount' (p. 31). There are many variations of Brown's journey with the Devil throughout Hawthorne's work: indeed, these experiences suggest that his characters are all variations of Brown. When Brand is warned not to summon the devil he replies 'what need have I of the devil? I have left him behind me, on my track' (p. 1056). This evokes Brown's night journey but suggests a man who joined the coven at the heart of the midnight forest, and has risen to the top ranks, rather than returning (at least bodily) to the daytime community. In contrast is Hester's response to Mistress Hibbins, the local witch-woman, who invites her to join her coven: 'Wilt thou go with us to-night? There will be a merry company in the forest; and I well-nigh promised the Black Man that comely Hester Prynne should make one' (1850: p. 87). Just as Brown's journey is precipitated by an arrangement to meet in the forest as evinced by the fact the devil chides him for being late, so is Hester invited to be a guest at the midnight proceedings. Meanwhile in 'My Kinsman', Robin continually encounters an individual who is described as being dressed up like a devil: 'One side of the face blazed an intense red, while the other was black as midnight' (1832: p. 84). We learn that this man is a conspirator working towards the political upheaval of Robin's relative, Molineux, the unpopular English-appointed official of Boston. As Leavis points out, however, the infernal language used to describe him suggests that Hawthorne intended him to be thought of as more than simply a man (p. 202). The end of the story leaves the reader uncertain of whether Robin has made a deal with the devil. The Americans may have justifiable reasons to reject British rule, but the way in which Robin gives into the frenzy of the night-time rabble suggests his ability to become like the very tyrants they are opposing: Robin's own laughter, we learn, is the loudest.

Witches or devils do not appear in all of Hawthorne's night journeys. Others eschew the template of the single night. However, there remains the element of the temptations of sins and the influence of the evils of night. In 'The Birth-Mark', resisting the natural cycle of day

and night proves to be fatal. The scientist Aylmer, believing that he can avoid the pitfalls of humanity, has set up his own laboratory so that it '[excludes] the sunshine, which would have interfered with his chemical processes, had supplied its place with perfumed lamps, emitting flames of various hue, but all uniting in a soft, impurpled radiance'. This enables him to maintain a perpetual but false twilight in his own little world, ignoring the realities of the one beyond. This removal from the real world leads to Aylmer's dream-induced state in which he believes that he can similarly control the fate of the humans around him by removing the birthmark that, he believes, blemishes the otherwise perfect beauty of his wife, Georgiana. It is not until Aylmer draws aside the curtains 'and suffered the light of natural day to fall into the room' (1843: pp. 770-779) that his dream of perfecting humanity escapes him. Once sunlight touches his wife Georgiana her birthmark recedes, but it also results in her death. Aylmer's midnight journey did not require him to leave his own home; it was, instead, a self-imposed night. A similar case appears in 'The Minister's Black Veil' (1832) in which the protagonist Reverend Hooper perpetually wears a black veil that covers his face. David Morse (1987) suggests this story as evidence that 'the puritan mind creates a semiotic wilderness' (p. 187). Hooper's veil becomes a metaphoric night which creates a divide between him and the rest of his congregation.

In 'Roger Malvin's Burial', the night which plagues the protagonist, Reuben Bourne, is even more nuanced. Like Dimmesdale, he endures decades of guilt and is unable to leave his self-imposed night. However, in 'Burial', Bourne, like Hooper, has manufactured the night: lying to his community and himself, he tells a story in which he cares for a dying man, Roger Malvin, throughout the night, before giving him a Christian burial. In reality, he had abandoned the dying Malvin long before it became dark. This leads to tragedy as, years later, Bourne unintentionally kills his own young son (who is Malvin's grandson) in the very place Malvin remains unburied. Bourne forfeits his lineage as a result of his fabricated night time. Bourne, then, just like many of Hawthorne's protagonists, is drawn inexorably toward narratives which paint him in a favourable light, on literal journeys which are entwined with a metaphorical night journey which may never end (Fossum, 1973: pp. 5-12). The frame of mind, represented by night-like darkness, which has become intrinsically linked to a specific sin, will not leave the youthful protagonist until they are spiritually strong enough to admit their sin. Failure to do so can be tragic.

The night journey is also intimately connected to the past in Hawthorne. As outlined above, the journey is often undertaken (frequently unknowingly) to discover a secret guilt or sin related to the protagonist's past. This may be Brown's complicity in the hypocrisy of Puritan society, Hester and Dimmesdale's affair, or Brand's search for the 'unpardonable sin'. The night acts as a conduit through which past sins are brought to the forefront of one's mind. In 'The Haunted Mind', Hawthorne asks:

'See! those fiendish lineaments graven on the darkness, the writhed lip of scorn, the mockery of that living eye, the pointed finger, touching the sore place in your heart! Do you remember any act of enormous folly, at which you would blush, even in the remotest cavern of the earth? Then recognize your Shame.'
(p. 202)

The personal shame that can be ignored or forgotten during the day manifests itself at night. In 'Haunted Mind' it is personified as a cruelly laughing individual looking back at oneself, much in the way that the witch congregation which stares back at Brown at the centre of the forest, or the old woman laughs cruelly at the failure of the young woman in 'The Hollow of Three Hills'. The journey goes into the depths of remembrance, where an individual's guilt comes or perhaps more accurately is forced to the forefront of their consciousness. The darkness is so conducive to remembrances that, as Fossum (1973) writes, 'Frequently, the setting of the narrative is in itself the historical past, a dusky region correspondent in Hawthorne's fiction to that psychic territory where temporal categories fuse, overlap, and become ambiguous' (p. 2).

A further reason that the past is represented by the night in Hawthorne is because the night obscures as well as reveals. Any decisions these young protagonists make are hampered by their own inabilities to ascertain what is right or wrong at any instance. Fogle (1964) has observed of 'Goodman' that so much of the story's ambiguity springs from visual motifs regarding the intermingling of light and dark at the crux of the night (pp. 16-21). Even as the protagonists try to make sense of their nocturnal history lessons they are losing their grasp in what Hawthorne (1835) in 'Alice Doane's Appeal' terms the 'Twilight [...] congenial to the obscurity of time' (p. 215). Hawthorne recognises the difficulty in achieving spiritual metamorphosis. The only time which appears to any degree clear is what Hawthorne dubs in his sketch 'The Prophetic Pictures' (1837) 'that narrow strip of sunlight, which we call Now'

(p. 467). It is in the dark of Hawthorne's night that one is forced to face their personal demons. Past failures weigh them down and prevent them from appreciating the daylight of the present.

A further element of the gothic night journey is that the traveller is almost always a youth, more often a young man than a woman (Waggoner, 1967: p. 65). If they can come to terms with the reality that they are complicit in the evils of the world, there is the possibility that they can live in the world as imperfect beings, learning to be cheerful in the daylight and embracing the chill of night time. The aim is to emulate the elderly narrator of 'The Village Uncle' whose 'past [appears] to mingle with the present and absorb the future, till the whole lies before me at a glance'. His ability to live in the present while fondly remembering his past and accepting that the future will include the final inevitable night time, that of death, means that he can watch 'the sun, going down, but not in gloom'. Admittedly, this patriarch had a significantly easier life than Hawthorne's tragic protagonists, but his ability to 'love the moonlight hour' (pp. 222-6) means he has achieved a level of well-rounded completion that most can only aspire to. The fact that the darkness of the night time is particularly distressing to the more naïve and impressionable characters suggests that the night is in fact a projection of these characters' own fears and prejudices. The night changes as individuals grow and learn how to cope with their insecurities.

Insecurities appear at every turn on these journeys. In particular, false lights often lead characters astray. Lanterns and other man-made lights add ambiguity to a situation rather than enlighten the reader or the character involved. As observed in *The Marble Faun* (1860), 'The unhappy are continually tantalized by similar delusions of succor near at hand; at least, the despair is very dark that has no such will-o'-the-wisp to glimmer in it' (p. 353). In a previous article, I argued that light in Hawthorne's work can be seen as power itself, used to distort and bend the truth for one's own benefit. Indeed, we see this in Hawthorne's short story 'The Birth-Mark'. Aylmer uses light he himself has created in an attempt to remove his wife's birthmark. This light creates scenery and figures which 'were perfectly represented, but with that bewitching, yet indescribable difference which always makes a picture, an image, or a shadow so much more attractive than the original' (Hawthorne, 1843: p. 771). These light projections are much more attractive than reality but are *not* reality. The procurement of artificial light is the preserve of those who are interested in progress purely for personal gain (Arvin, 1950: p. xvii). If both light and darkness are required to make sense of the world, light can become dangerous when used by the powerful for their own selfish ends. This problem of a dictator-

like control over viewpoint in Hawthorne's work is brought up convincingly by Patricia Ann (1975). Observing the importance of the lamp in 'The Wives of the Dead' (1831), she notes 'it is a visual projection of the conscious state of the widows – anxiously expectant and unable to accept the reality of death. The lamp signifies a psychic condition very susceptible to illusions, and it is within Carlson the light of this lamp that all the action of the tale takes place' (p. 63). The light does not illuminate the world as it is, instead projecting an image of what the widows wish to see: the return of their husbands. Because they are not able to accept that their husbands are dead, they use the lamplight to construct alternative narratives, in which they do not have to realise the 'reality' of their situation (Cullen, 2014, pp. 4-5).

Observing that Hawthorne often 'places his characters in that loneliest and most isolated of spaces - the great chasm between them and the remote God of absolute justice', Donohue (1985) argues they end up '[wandering] fruitlessly in the labyrinths of their minds' (p. 2) One of these most lonely and isolated spaces is night time. During this time Hawthorne's characters are physically and mentally lost, as well as spiritually. In 'My Kinsman', Robin finds himself homesick: imagining what it would be like if he were home instead, he envisions his father 'holding the Scriptures in the golden light that shone from the western clouds; he beheld him close the book, and all rise up to pray' (Hawthorne, 1832: p. 80). There is comfort not only in the thought of being with his loved ones, but in the thoughts of the familiar heavenly light of day that gives him a sense of certainty. At night there is no one to interpret the signs to determine whether they spring from the God or the devil. The terror springs from the fact that these characters never know and never *can* know whether the lights that entice them will lead them towards or away from God. The most disquieting example of a false light can be found in *Letter* in the forest scene. Hester and Dimmesdale discuss escaping from Salem and restarting their lives guilt-free elsewhere; the sunshine which suddenly appears and seems to advocate their behaviour may be another attempt by the Devil to tempt them further from the path of redemption. As Fogle (1964) observes:

'There is no hue of heaven in *The Scarlet Letter* which really offsets [the shades of hell]. Sunlight is the nearest approach to it, and its sway is too fleeting to have any great effect. In the forest scene of chapters XVI-XIX sunshine, 'as with a sudden smile of heaven', bursts over Hester and Dimmesdale, but this is merely a momentary relief. The hope which accompanies it is short-lived, delusory, and dangerous.' (p. 134)

This sunlight may, Fogle continues, be ‘false and even sinful’ (p. 138). Occasionally even natural light cannot be trusted in Hawthorne’s universe. In romantic texts, such as ‘Night Sketches: Under an Umbrella’ (1837) light is more closely aligned with that of a heavenly power. That sketch concludes with a sense of certainty that the gothic texts lack, with the belief that if humans (referred to as ‘night-wanderers’) ‘bear the lamp of Faith, enkindled at a celestial fire, it will surely lead us home to that Heaven whence its radiance was borrowed’ (p. 549). In Hawthorne’s nocturnal gothic narratives, there is never any certainty of whether a light is a display of heavenly power, a dream-induced illusion, or something more sinister. This suggests Hawthorne was aware of how each person experiences the night differently, depending on their personal outlook. What one takes to be a challenge to their faith could for another be perceived as an affirmation of evil. The reaction of Hawthorne’s characters to their own personal night-time is as varied as there are stories told.

In the absence of certainty in the gothic text, the night often takes on the effects that the protagonist projects onto it. Talking more generally about the wilderness in ‘Roger Malvin’s Burial’, James McIntosh (1988) notes that the landscape ‘increasingly takes on the role of a surrogate for fate’. The protagonists ‘keep guessing its meaning but they fail to understand it’ until finally, ‘the wilderness exercises its power and draws Reuben back to the scene of his imagined crime’ (pp. 200-1). The night, as one facet of this ecoGothic landscape, similarly projects the prejudices of the protagonists. Cody (2012) explains that ‘Goodman Brown’s experiences in the external darkness surrounding Salem village reveal that he, internally, is in spiritual darkness, and his externally perceived religious social structure collapses due to his ignorance’ (p. 108). The darkness of the nightscape reflects Brown’s own personal failings. He will inevitably find the night chaotic and terrifying because he does not have faith required to view it otherwise. This is why the night takes on its most foreboding atmosphere, and why a rejection of the rest of humanity means Hawthorne’s characters will be haunted by the night eternally. Crucially, the night takes on its most terrifying form only when Brown’s own ‘Faith’ is gone. When he has decided that ‘There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name’ the cries of the night forest reaches a crescendo: in the ‘heart of the dark wilderness’,

‘[the] whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds—the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians; while sometimes the wind

tolled like a distant church bell, and sometimes gave a broad roar around the traveller, as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn.’ (p. 284)

The night mirrors Brown’s own conception of the world as a place void of piety and goodness, a sinful place in which beasts and Indians wait to pounce at every corner, where nature conspires against the innocent and honest who alone are trying to remain pure in a godless world. In other words, Brown feels his very identity, that of being a ‘good man’, perhaps the only good man, is literally under attack from all sides. Similarly, the description of the night-time hollow in ‘Hollow’ is indicative of the unnamed protagonist’s misanthropy:

‘One of these masses of decaying wood, formerly a majestic oak, rested close beside a pool of green and sluggish water at the bottom of the basin. [...] The chill beauty of an autumnal sunset was now gilding the three hill-tops, whence a paler tint stole down their sides into the hollow.’ (p. 7)

The ‘midnight’ of the hollow is at odds with the ‘autumnal sunset’ taking place at the top of the three hill-tops: the fact that Hawthorne has mentioned them simultaneously emphasises that the midnight in which the two women choose to meet is a state of mind as much as a literal one. This is further supported by the description of the hollow (‘decaying’, ‘sluggish’, ‘putrid’) which suggests that the woman is herself in a state of decomposition now that she has severed ties to family and community. The pale tints of sunshine still observable from the hill tops above indicate that the young woman's salvation may lie in re-establishing links with the three strands of community that she has abandoned: Fossum (1973) observes that she has violated her ties to the present by dishonouring her parents, breaking her marriage vows and leaving her child to die and in doing so she is ‘locked in the depths of her isolated self, where the dark, immutable past is continually present. [...] Her face remains in darkness’ (p. 13). The night wins in the end, as the woman dies without making amends. This is represented by ‘deep shades’ which obscure ‘the hollow and the pool, as if sombre night were rising thence to overspread the world’ (p. 10). Writing about ‘Hollow’, Waggoner (1967) observes that Hawthorne could ‘find ways of making outward and inward reality, history and dream coalesce and reinforce each other’ (p. 48). In ‘Hollow’ there is an externalising of the young woman’s guilty history which manifests itself as a crepuscular rock bottom. Thanks to the strong negative feelings American audiences associate with darkness and decay, the nocturnal gothic is

therefore one arena in which Hawthorne's symbolism can most fully coalesce with the American landscape.

Conversely, characters can emerge from the night wiser by accepting responsibility for their actions. Hester's response to her own night journey is more positive than most. Unlike Brown she does not despise her neighbours despite their coldness; neither does she reject her humanity and remain an aloof and unfeeling observer like Brand. Instead she takes up a role at the margins of the community and ensures that her influence is significant, if subtle. Acting as a nurse whenever needed, 'She came, not as a guest, but as a rightful inmate, into the household that was darkened by trouble, as if its gloomy twilight were a medium through which she was entitled to hold intercourse with her fellow-creature'. Hester finds that her vocation is best served in the night, at the time when her neighbours feel they can accept her help without embarrassment of being seen in her company. Her presence as a 'rightful inmate' approximates that of a benevolent witch or indentured slave tied to the night time. As condescending and unjust as this treatment is, it does allow Hester to reclaim a place within society: as a result of her 'helpfulness' 'many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said that it meant Abel, so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength.' Hester shows her practical nature by finding her place in the night time rather than rejecting it. We see this too when she encourages Pearl to "gather thine own sunshine'. Hester herself has 'none to give' (1850: pp. 120-1, 77).

Contrasting Hester's relationship with Pearl with that of Bourne and his son Cyrus, we see that Hester permits her child to escape the perpetually beckoning pull of midnight in a way that Bourne was unable to. In comparison with those who permanently lose their way on their dream journeys, Hester alone succeeds in maintaining a healthy relationship with her child, in stark contrast to Brown whose offspring 'carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone' or the young woman in 'Hollow' who had 'sinned against natural affection, and left her child to die' (p. 11). Rejecting the future due to an unhealthy preoccupation with the past is the most heinous act Hawthorne's protagonists commit. By becoming obsessed with their own guilty pasts which are revealed to them in their dream journeys, they risk compromising not only their own futures but the futures of their genetic line. If, like Hester, they come to terms with their own failures and recognise that that they will never again live in the broad and simple daylight of innocence, their own children will have the opportunity to gather their own sunshine. While Hester herself

cannot replicate the successes of the Village Uncle, perhaps Pearl will be able to mingle the past ‘with the present and absorb the future’ (p. 224).

Similarly, problematic are figures who have never taken the night journey to discover the hidden dimensions of their own characters. This is illustrated in *The Marble Faun* in the allegorical tale regarding the aptly named ‘Sunshine’, the wine that can be procured only at Monte Beni. Sunshine has a fragrance, ‘like the airy sweetness of youthful hopes, that no realities will ever satisfy!’ (Hawthorne, 1860: p. 223). Although it is considered one of the finest wines available, enjoyed by the higher echelons of Italian society, the Counts of Monte Beni have never been able to sell Sunshine at market, because it is ‘so fond of its native home, that a transportation of even a few miles turns it quite sour’. This implies that the path to maturity, leaving one's family home, necessitates entering the dusky world of adulthood. If a character lives long enough in Hawthorne's post-Eden world they eventually encounter the pitfalls and strife represented by the night-side of life.

Even those characters who Hawthorne is accused of simplifying or deifying for their sunny qualities are seen to be more rounded individuals once they have passed through a phase of darkness. Phoebe Pyncheon, the much derided ‘good girl’ from *The House of the Seven Gables* (1850), often seen by critics as unpalatably sweet and innocent (Fiedler: p. 292; Barker, 2002: p. 14) develops as a character after living in the gloom of the eponymous house for several months. At the culmination of the romance, a stormy night which permanently effects all the protagonists, Phoebe reflects on her new-found maturity. She has previously been ‘happier than I am now; at least, much gayer’, however, she is also ‘sensible of a great charm in this brightening moonlight’:

‘I shall never be so merry as before I knew Cousin Hepzibah and poor Cousin Clifford. I have grown a great deal older, in this little time. Older, and, I hope, wiser, and,—not exactly sadder,—but, certainly, with not half so much lightness in my spirits! I have given them my sunshine, and have been glad to give it; but, of course, I cannot both give and keep it. They are welcome, notwithstanding!’
(1851: pp. 214-5)

Phoebe’s personal growth is intrinsically linked to her thoughts on the night. She is beginning to sound like the Village Uncle in her ability to accept the ending of her youth and embrace the

moonlight. Like Hester, Phoebe also recognises that she has given some of her sunshine away, but in doing so she, again like Hester, has grown in her ability to widen her own sense of community and is more able to empathise with others. Similarly, Pearl in *Letter* is often referred to as an 'imp' or 'elf' to indicate her not-quite-human status. Hester observes that 'it was as if she were hovering in the air, and might vanish, like a glimmering light that comes we know not whence and goes we know not whither' (p. 69). Pearl is as intangible as the sunshine on which she is so dependent. As long as she is 'without a sense of temporal place' as Fossum (1973) writes (p. 114) she will be a Manichean spirit whose temperaments changes upon a whim, much like the weather. It is not until Pearl experiences personal growth following a period of night time tribulations that she is able to mature. After encountering her estranged father, Dimmesdale, at the town scaffolds at night, she is continually refused when asking him to stand on the scaffold 'with mother and me, tomorrow noontide'. Following these rebukes her father ultimately does join them, and after kissing him while on the scaffold Pearl pledges to 'grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it'. This joining up of night and day time experience ensures Pearl's survival into adulthood: in the conclusion we learn that 'No one knew [...] whether the elf-child had gone thus untimely to a maiden grave; or whether her wild, rich nature had been softened and subdued and made capable of a woman's gentle happiness' (pp. 114, 192, 196). The choice for Pearl is to die an undeveloped child of the sun or to be softened and subdued by the night-side of life and emerge into adulthood more fully formed. Unadulterated sunshine does not survive long in the world without either souring or giving way to more sombre hues.

The ability to endure the night time and emerge from the journey a better individual springs from Hawthorne's conceptualisation of night representing death. This first night journey represents the first death that every individual must endure: the death of youth. 'The Haunted Mind' concludes with the narrator observing that sleep is a 'temporary death':

'Your spirit has departed, and strays like a free citizen, among the people of a shadowy world, beholding strange sights, yet without wonder or dismay. So calm, perhaps, will be the final change; so undisturbed, as if among familiar things, the entrance of the soul to its Eternal home!' (p. 204)

This conclusion suggests that each night is in effect a dry-run for the final departure into the afterlife. However, if bodily death is the 'final change', it follows on that these nightly

temporary deaths are more than just warm-ups. They are a series of changes, all of which must be undertaken to achieve spiritual metamorphosis. This is illustrated in the short story title 'The Wedding Knell' (1837), a portmanteau of 'wedding ceremony' and 'death knell'. The final death is dependent upon how one has prepared oneself for it. Because Brown was never able to reconcile his time in the twilight forest of Salem with his everyday existence, his final 'night' is similarly devoid of hope: 'Goodman' concludes with the damning words that 'his dying hour was gloom' (p. 289), making his prospects in the afterlife similarly dire. The literal and figurative night coalesce to an even greater degree in 'Hollow' as the young woman's first night, the death of her youth, also proves to be her final one, her literal death. The story ends with her dying in the hollow as she witnesses images of her own funeral in which her sins against her kin are whispered amongst the community. Her failure in the first night has led directly to the final night. Her inability to survive into maturity is underscored by the fact that she dies in the lap of a much older woman who laughs at her demise. Symbolically, Brand too is dead, having parted ways with his humanity when he abandoned kinship to the human race. As a result, he can only appear, ghostlike, at night: the dead, we are told, 'would have had more right to be at home, in any familiar spot, than he' (p. 1055). Brand has damned himself by refusing all spiritual metamorphosis, choosing instead to become an immortal being, all-knowing but tied forever to the Devil. As such he has failed his steps towards maturity. His arrested development means that he can only occupy the death-space of the night.

We can therefore conclude that what makes a nocturnal gothic journey different from other night journeys is that the gothic night journey continues indefinitely. As has been seen, with a brief consideration of romantic nights, 'The Village Uncle' and 'Night Sketches', the night can be tamed, and certainty can be found within them. In comparison, after encountering the gothic night, characters in Hawthorne's gothic stories are perpetually negatively defined by them. Even in Hester's relatively positive night journey, she shares some of the unfavourable traits of Brand. In highlighting Hawthorne's claim that Hester, spirit-like, roams the 'moral wilderness ... as freely as the wild Indian in his woods', (p. 150), René Bergland suggests that Hester's position as an Indian-like spectre has cut her off from citizenship within Salem society, rendering her socially dead. In this way, Hester has only softened the effects of the gothic night rather than escaping it, something highlighted in Bergland's (2000) observation that *Letter's* 'success at replacing soul-destroying ambivalence and abhorrence with the self-sanctifying forces of internalization, ambiguity, and compromise' (p. 147). Indeed, a complete break from Hawthorne's gothic night requires a break from the gothic genre itself: this is perhaps why *The*

Scarlet Letter cannot follow Pearl as an adult: she has either died a gothic death, or else is no longer bound by the conventions of the story.

Waggoner (1967) claims that ‘Death haunted Hawthorne [...] as the most striking evidence of evanescence in a world where all was slipping and sliding into ruin’ (p. 24). Life for Hawthorne is represented by a sequence of dark nights of the soul in which individuals gradually become duskier, losing their innocent sheen as the darker side of life increasingly affects them. If a character is to mature successfully into old age, they must, like the Village Uncle, ‘love the moonlight hour’, or learn to mature alongside the night. It is not healthy to attempt to forget the tribulations of the past either by ‘dismissing the shadows of dead or distant people’ or by dreaming away one’s life ‘from youth to old age’. It is important that one lives in the ‘wintry blast’ of life. By cheerfully accepting that he has reached his final hour, the Village Uncle believes that it is also his happiest: ‘sweetest of all is the hour of cheerful musing and pleasant talk, that comes between tile dusk and the lighted candle, by my glowing fireside’ (p. 227). Death itself, just like this late hour, is a welcome end to a long and fruitful day. By focusing on variations of the night journey, Hawthorne illustrates the trajectory of an individual’s life and death. How his protagonists respond to being confronted by their own demons in the ecoGothic realm of the night represents how they navigate their way more generally in the post-Eden America, in which the will of God can never be known for certain.

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BIOGRAPHY

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**‘On the Border Territory Between the Animal and the Vegetable Kingdoms’:¹
Plant-Animal Hybridity and the Late Victorian Imagination**

Marc Ricard

ABSTRACT

The increasingly comprehensive scope of the natural sciences in the Victorian period often yielded discoveries that complicated the sureties of past centuries, with few more so than the discipline of botany. From the phenomena of carnivorous plants, to animal organisms that seem to photosynthesise, there were a string of new discoveries that seemed to undermine traditional definitions of the ‘Animal’ and ‘Vegetable’ kingdoms. This article explores these perceived instances of animal-plant hybridity in both the scientific writing and Gothic fiction of the Late-Victorian period. Approaching both the factual and fictional accounts through the lens of contemporary ecoGothic criticism, it unpicks the mutual preoccupation that both forms felt in regard to the threatened collapse of the long-standing binary of plant/animal. In doing so, it suggests that speculative scientific work by figures like John Hogg, Ernst Haeckel, and T.H Huxley provided a wealth of inspiration for writers of sensational popular fiction of ecological horror, including Maud Howe Elliott, Lucy H. Hooper, and Algernon Blackwood. Their Gothic tales in turn proved to be the ideal medium through which the unsettling consequences of these discoveries could be articulated, with tales of plant-animal (and plant-human) hybrids, depicting the newly compromised terrain of plant/animal hybridity in the popular imagination. In considering the hybridised imagination of the period in this way, the article demonstrates the extent to which ecoGothic concerns permeated nineteenth century fictional and scientific conceptions of the natural world, inviting reflection on the relevance of these narratives to the ecological concerns of today.

¹ The title of an 1876 lecture by Thomas Huxley, as it appears in (Huxley, 1902, p.162-195).

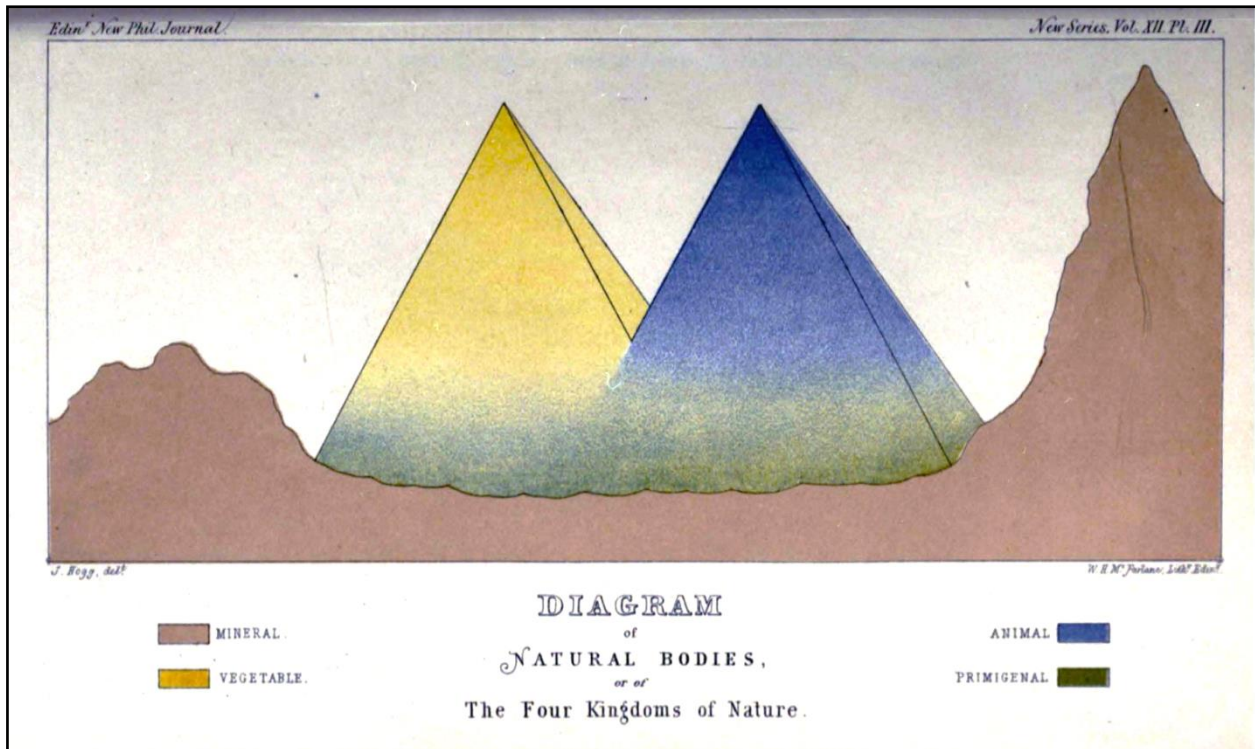


Figure 1: Plate 3 from John Hogg’s ‘On the Distinctions of a Plant and an Animal, and on a Fourth Kingdom of Nature’, which appeared in *The Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal* volume 12, 1860 – the diagram attempted to map out the terrain of the ‘kingdoms of nature’ with animal, vegetable and mineral forming three distinct peaks and Hogg’s own ‘Primigenous’ kingdom forming the indistinct base.

Regnum Animale, Vegetabile, and lapideum: more commonly known to us as the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms. These were the three orders of life laid out in 1735 by Carl Linnaeus, the ‘father of modern taxonomy’ (Schiebinger, 2003: p.5), to encompass all natural phenomena on the planet. The aim was to provide an ordered system of categorisation, characterised by a series of clear divisions and distinctions. This task, however, would prove anything but simple. The unruly complexities and contradictions of the natural world were immediately evidenced by Linnaeus’ addendum to his kingdoms, like the subclass of ‘zoophytes’—ambiguous leftover organisms, like coral or protozoa, which are seemingly plant *and* animal at once—and then further underlined by the reams of taxonomic literature produced in the following centuries, in which scientists struggled to wrangle countless new species into Linnaeus’ rigidly compartmentalised system, demonstrating that what were once thought of as absolute and impassable boundaries between forms of life were actually far more permeable. This article examines the discursive merging of plants and animals that took place in the late nineteenth century, highlighting its relevance to theorisations of the ecoGothic and its impact on the collective imagination of the period. Recent scholarly interest in the subject of plants in

the nineteenth century has unearthed increasingly fluid conceptions of nature, with Lynn Voskuil (2017) in her study of nineteenth century orchid literature demonstrating ‘the readiness of many Victorians to conceive of boundaries between species as fluid rather than absolutely fixed’ arguing that these can be viewed ‘as a prescient example of interspecies awareness’ (p.20). With the possibility of inter-species connections slowly coming to the fore, late Victorian Gothic fiction thrived on this fertile source of inspiration, imagining the arboretum of horrors that could emerge from the breakdowns in special boundaries. Read alongside contemporary ecoGothic debates, we see how both well-known figures such as Algernon Blackwood and Ernst Haeckel, as well as more marginalised authors like Maud Howe Elliott and Lucy H. Hooper, engaged with the fears provoked by the crumbling of conventional ideas of organic categories and hierarchies. In doing so, we are able to interrogate how these texts captured the popular imagination, feeding a new vision of the natural world that saw plants merging with animals and humans in increasingly complex and terrifying ways as the century wore on.

With its dual-attentiveness to uncanny portrayals of non-human life and the latent terror they can inspire, the contemporary critical discourse of the ‘ecoGothic’ has often been retroactively applied to Victorian ecological anxieties. The term, understood here as a formal and critical acknowledgement of the overlapping of natural phenomena with the malignant visions of the Gothic imagination, is particularly useful in its unravelling familiar and ‘natural’ renditions of ecology. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils’ introduction to *Nineteenth Century Ecogothic* (2018) highlights the consistent splicing of natural elements within the ecoGothic, ‘interpenetrating’ and ‘intertwining’ species together in unfamiliar and sometimes violent ways that ‘challenge humans’ own vaunted ability to shape their world’ (p.7). A process that, as we shall see, was commonplace in the fiction of the period. In ‘Defining the Ecogothic’, the introduction to their 2013 collection *Ecogothic* (2013), Andrew Smith and William Hughes highlight the ‘crisis of representation’ (p.2) in nature as a constitutive feature of the ecoGothic, citing a fear of an ‘ambivalent’ and ‘blank’ natural world devoid of rational meaning or governing principles.

Plants in particular are noted by Smith and Hughes for their disturbing evasion of definition – an idea that has been later explored by other critics working within the field of the ecoGothic. Dawn Keetley (2016), for example, makes the case for an especial consideration of ‘Plant Horror’. She argues that the plant world’s ‘refusal of known categories’ enables them to

‘lurk perilously close to the very definition of the monstrous’ (p.8). Such monstrosity is not strictly the kind embodied by the large, anthropomorphic creatures most readily associated with horror and the Gothic, but can more accurately be understood as a latent threat or complication to systems of knowledge, or to quote Georges Canguilhem’s ‘Monstrosity and the Monstrous’ (2008), ‘the existence of monsters calls into question the capacity of life to teach us order’ (p.134). This indecipherable nature of plants stems in part from their sheer difference from humans as organic beings; their lack of a discernible face or body, their static nature, apparent passivity and their unique means of nutrition mean that they are existentially estranged from human beings in a way that is far more pronounced than any animal. It is precisely this ‘alien nature of the plant’, as Elizabeth Chang (2017) argues in ‘Killer Plants of the Late Nineteenth Century’, which is able to ‘challenge the gap between vegetable and human’ in narratives that confront the reader with agentic plant-life (p.85). When imagining a being that simultaneously inhabits both the plant and animal kingdoms, one is presented with a living contradiction: something that is both familiar and otherly, sentient and inanimate, inert and predatory – a wholly ecoGothic subject.

This essay provides insight into the shifting terrain of biological knowledge in the late nineteenth century by interrogating the scientific and literary imaginings of plants of the period through the lens of the ecoGothic. It also seeks to contribute to the emergent and ongoing interrogation of literary uses of plant life in the late-nineteenth century by scholars like Cheryl Blake Price, Jane Desmarais, Katherine E. Bishop, Elizabeth Chang and Jim Endersby, as this long-neglected facet of literature enjoys a critical renaissance. Beginning with specific examples from scientific debates of what constituted an animal, vegetable and everything in between, it reads these early speculative as an ancillary precursor for the ecoGothic imagination – tearing down old categories and opening up room for new theorisations of the two kingdoms and humanity’s place within them. The second section examines the relationship between these taxonomic conflicts and the literature of the period, especially the Gothic’s sensational and disquieting tales of animalistic plants. Texts have been chosen to illustrate the various ways that discoveries in biology of the period were reconfigured into a veritable garden of hybrid vegetable monsters, teasing out the unity of fictional and non-fictional works in serving to complicate long-held anthropocentric belief in humanity’s place as being above the biological entanglements of animals and plants. In doing so, I set out to contribute not only to a more nuanced picture of the shifting terrain of the Victorian understanding of nature, but also to demonstrate how these nascent ideas of the natural world

continue to persist, even up to our own historical moment of ‘biogenetic revolution’ (Žižek, 2011: p. x).² Though separated by a century, what emerges when examining the scientific accounts alongside Gothic stories of the late nineteenth century is the familiar feeling of a perceptible departure from the sureties of the Enlightenment: a depiction of a natural world with blurred edges – from which all manner of strange and ‘unnatural’ beings could materialise.

I. *The Middle Kingdom*

To understand how this paradigm of a hybridised natural world emerged, it is worth dwelling on the unique historical contexts of the nineteenth century. As a result of advancing strides in areas like global exploration, microscopy and palaeontology, specimens from previously unknown times, scales and places were converging on the scientific institutions of Europe. This deluge of bio-diversity problematised the precepts of established taxonomy and exposing the narrowness of preconceived categories. Interestingly, over one hundred years later, noted ecocritic Stacy Alaimo (2010) argues that we *still* need ‘more capacious epistemologies’ (p.2). Alaimo’s theorisation may seem anachronistic within the historical contexts of the nineteenth century; however, as will be demonstrated, many of the primary sources detailed here reward—and in some ways even anticipate—a retrospective reading using modern ecoGothic parlance. Alaimo’s, theorisation of ‘trans-corporeality’ is especially useful in conceptualising the ‘interconnections, interchanges, and transits’ (p.2) that were found to exist between previously incompatible lifeforms such as plants and animals in the nineteenth century. Her definition of ‘trans-corporeality’ from *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010) describes the enmeshing and inter-penetration of ‘human bodies and nonhuman natures’ (p.2). However, by expanding the term from the explicitly anthropic, to a relational entanglement of all living natures, ‘trans-corporeality’ can be used to capture the fears of chaos that accompanied the various theories of inter-species relations and universal common descent that abounded at the time.

Though the term ‘trans-corporeality’ is a recent invention, many of its essential ideas—such as the inevitable imbrication of the human and the non-human—find expression in the Victorian period. For instance, in 1859 with the publishing of Darwin’s theory of natural

² Meaning the application of scientific breakthroughs of genomic mapping through the alteration or synthesis of organisms; identified by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek as one of the potential ‘four riders of the apocalypse’ (Žižek 2011 p. x).

selection, that organisms were defined by their adaptation to their environment, and the ensuing view of a disorganised natural world in a constant state of flux. The implications of Darwin's theory dealt a significant blow to classical taxa, already buckling under the combined weight of new and unaccountable species, and the vacuum of understanding that followed provided an opportune moment for issuing challenges to previously unquestionable classificatory systems. One such proposition came a year later from the naturalist John Hogg (1800-1869), who published a paper adding a fourth kingdom to Linnaeus' triadic system in order to properly house and organise the intermediate beings that strayed between plants and animals. Hogg was careful to frame his proposition not as an attempt to undo the work 'of the illustrious Swede' (Hogg, 1860: p.220), but merely as an update to reflect changes in understanding. By Hogg's own admission, 'the *definitions* given by Linnaeus must at this day be considered as insufficient and much too concise' (p.220); therefore, in order to maintain the project of classification, it was necessary to make allowances to accommodate the fugitive species caught between kingdoms.

Hogg's solution to this perceived deficiency was to create a new precinct of classification, the '*Primigenal* kingdom'. The name, a variant on the Latin *primigenius*, meaning literally 'first birth', was chosen as the kingdom was to contain the most primitive, indistinct microscopic and unicellular organisms that make up the 'lower' or 'primary organic' lifeforms, including 'those formless or amorphous beings' (p.223) that permeated the boundaries between vegetable and animal. Hogg imagined his fourth kingdom existing 'beneath' or 'between' the two kingdoms of vegetable and the animal at the point where the 'line of demarcation between [...] these two kingdoms' (p.223) was at its most blurred. To illustrate his point, Hogg translated these abstract taxa into a graph (*fig. 1*: Hogg, 1860: pl.3), constructing the two great pyramids of organic life. Hogg harnesses the gradation of angle and hue to show the degrees by which the two classes of animal and vegetable diverge or mingle at different stages:

'The *blue* indicates the animal kingdom; the upper or dark blue signifies the more perfect condition of animality; whilst in both pyramids, as the beings descend toward their base, they lose by degrees their chief characteristics respectively; and this is designated by the paler yellow and paler blue; and at length these two colours gradually blend or unite, and so constitute together the colour *green* in the base, common to both pyramids.' (p.224)

Though intended to shore up the distinctions between plant and animal, Hogg's graph can also be read as an indictment of attempts to definitively separate the animal from the vegetable. Indivisible from the immediate scientific context of Darwin's *Origins*, it displays a distinctly *evolutionary* progression of natural selection in the two kingdoms of 'animal' and 'vegetable' in organic life. Having the murky *Primigenal* kingdom as the common ground from which the two pyramids spring forth suggests that they share a common ancestry; the name *Primigenal* establishes the proposed kingdom's position as progenitor of both orders of life. With these indistinct and ambiguous kingdoms peopled by amorphous and mysterious organisms acting as the mutual base, the more 'perfect' specimens higher up the pyramid necessarily rest on shaky foundations. They are not only born, originally, from disturbingly 'imperfect' and nebulous life forms, but seem—when we look at the graph's open and intangible variations in colour—potentially vulnerable to degeneration and transmutation.

In this respect there is more than a touch of the *trans-corporeal* about Hogg's diagram. As Alaimo (2010) states, the inclusion of '*trans* indicates movement across different sites', thus the shared point of contact between the two kingdoms becomes a conduit, 'emphasising the movement across bodies' and 'reveal[ing] the interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures' (p.2).³ The fourth kingdom—much in line with some of the themes of this journal—served as a challenging, indistinct, almost '*Gothicised*' classificatory space, providing avenues into both animal and vegetable subjectivity, it potentially allowed beings to occupy, or even colonise parts of the other kingdoms' territories. A concept now long-familiar to modern audiences of science fiction, but a profoundly novel phenomenon in the nineteenth century and one that would go on to inform a whole host of ideas about nature and the Gothic.

³ Such a reading is enriched when one considers which 'bodies' are being referred to in Hogg's diagram; if we read Hogg's pyramids themselves as two inter-mingling combinatory bodies, there is an obvious shared co-mingling that can be read as transcorporeality. But it is worth noting the pyramids are representative and are, therefore, constituted of all the millions of different species that fill the respective taxa of 'animal', 'vegetable' and 'primigenal', who are themselves transcorporeal, blurring into one another through evolutionary progress and in the case of the primigenal, often living inside other larger organisms. Thus, both on the macro- and micro- scale, the graph demonstrates the repeated inter-penetration and complex co-relations between the three kingdoms.

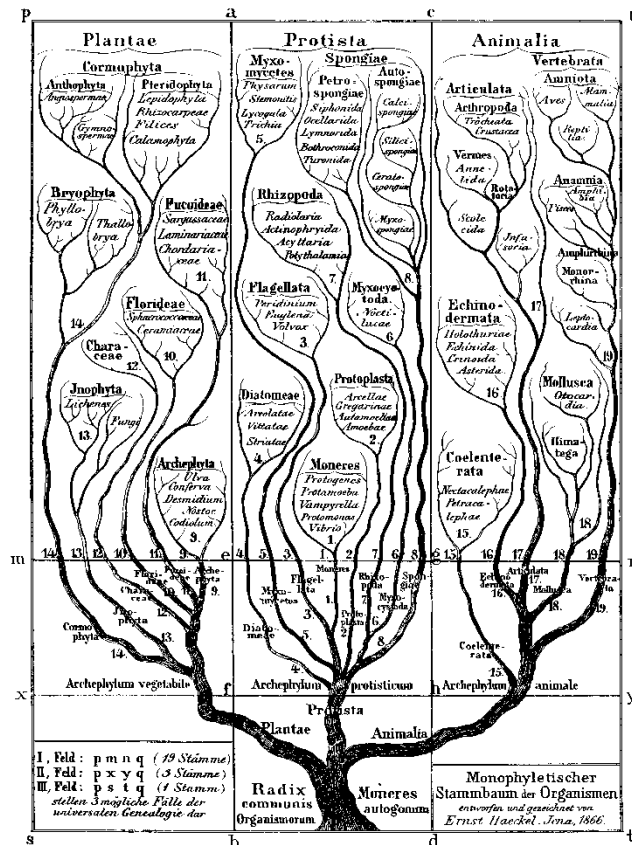


Figure 2: Monophyletischer Stammbaum der Organismen
 from Haeckel's *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen*
 (*General Morphology of Organisms*) (Berlin: Georg Reimer,
 1866)

Following Hogg, many aspiring biologists attempted to stake their claim as to exactly where the two kingdoms diverged and which extant characteristics of plants and animals could be preserved. One such attempt was made by Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) in his works *Generelle Morphologie* in 1866 and *The History of Creation*, appearing in English in 1876. Haeckel adopted a similar approach to Hogg, proposing a modal shift in classification with his own kingdom of *Protista*, this time from Ancient Greek: *prôtos*, meaning first or original, an early or primitive approximation of existing forms. Like Hogg's, this kingdom contained the troublesome indeterminate beings that were neither immediately plant nor animal, like sponges and micro-organisms. Haeckel likewise placed the kingdom at the boundary between animals and plants, displaying them as branches of a tree—interestingly drawing on plant life itself in his classificatory structure—as opposed to Hogg's shaded pyramids (fig.2 Haeckel, 1866, pl.1). All three branches spring from a common root, a kingdom for 'single-celled organisms' he

called *monera*,⁴ from which ‘*all many-celled animals and plants were originally derived*’ (Haeckel, 1876: p.40). Despite providing an intermediate kingdom and suggesting a common ancestor, Haeckel maintained that the divisions between the kingdoms remained absolute ‘in several distinct lines’ (Sapp, 2009: p.40). These conceptual lines prevented branches from crossing and intersecting, curtailing the disquieting nuances of cross-kingdom transcorporeality that are possible in Hogg’s model.

Haeckel’s (1876) conception of these natural kingdoms with hard borders can be understood in connection to his commitment to what he called ‘knowledge of “the Natural System”’ or ‘the *pedigree* of organisms’, which he considered the ‘highest problem of biology’ (p.37). He described natural history as ‘structural’; a network of ‘*blood relationships*’ (p.36) that could be traced, understood, delineated, and most importantly, categorised. Haeckel took particular issue with Darwin on this ground, stating that he only expressed ‘his conjecture[s]’ and treated the issue of origins ‘in a general way’, with no attempt to ‘carry it out specially’ (p.37) – that is, systemically. Haeckel’s tree of life conveyed an idea of clear progression and association, the organic form showing a recognisable line of evolution, with each kingdom and stage remaining neatly within its ordained quadrants, bypassing the blurred entanglements of plant-animals in Hogg’s pyramids.

Haeckel’s systematic division, however, becomes impossible to maintain when one reaches the base of the tree and the *monera*, ‘the most ancient root of the animal and vegetable kingdom’, which Haeckel admitted was ‘common to both’ (p.41). In order to retain his divisions, Haeckel downplayed the living credentials of this ancient root, ‘considering [*monera*] to be more closely related to inorganic crystals than to nucleated cells’ (Sapp, 2009: p.37). What is more, he argued that the very nature of *monera* meant that they have disappeared for ever from the Earth, explaining: ‘We lack, and shall ever lack, the indispensable paleontological foundations’ on account that ‘the original parents of all subsequent organisms’, were formless blobs of matter ‘not in any way capable of being preserved in a petrified condition’ (1876: p.39). With this permanent erasure, Haeckel simultaneously explains away the lack of fossil record evidence for his theory and relegates the only beings that posed a threat

⁴ Again, adapted from the Greek *mónos*, meaning ‘single’ or ‘solitary’, reflecting their single-celled composition.

to his organised ‘pedigree[s]’ of life – all while maintaining the neatly divided system of organic life and sustaining the incumbent hierarchies and anthropic exceptionalism therein.

Haeckel’s rationalising and compartmentalising of these evolutionary lineages can be interestingly connected to theorisations of the ecoGothic. Keetley and Wynn Sivils (2018), unpick how the ecoGothic is able to establish a ‘dictum that the present remains in thrall to the past’ by presenting us with an alien and discomfoting view ‘into our pre-human (and nonhuman) origins’ (p.5). They argue that such considerations lead us to the discomfoting realisation that our ‘inexorably inherited’ past ‘marks us in particular *as animals*, and it is a past that persists vestigially within us’ (p.5). However, as demonstrated, the imagined evolutionary timeline could extend back far beyond Darwin’s apes, so that people could just as easily consider their origins *as vegetables*, an even more dehumanising and existential threat than the kinship of primates. Applying this ecoGothic reading to Haeckel’s writings, we see an awareness of potentially unseemly evolutionary entanglements as he dexterously manoeuvres our common origins, the *monera*, into the darkest recesses of prehistoric time. To put it in psychoanalytical terms—so often utile in discussions of the Gothic—the super-ego of classificatory discourse pushes the traumatic idea of a shared progenitor of plants, animals [and people] into the pre-historic id, allowing readers to retain a sense of distance and superiority to the rest of the natural world. This reassuring narrative may have been part of the reason for the popularity of Haeckel’s theories,⁵ but despite his public acclaim he failed to gain institutional acceptance by the scientific community.

The inability to settle on the criteria for an intermediary kingdom did not address the problems of taxonomy and the spectre of hybrid forms continued to stalk popular and scientific discussions of animals and plants. The complication gave rise to the classificatory group ‘*problematica*’ in the period, used to describe organisms that did not fit into existing orders of animals and plants. Thomas H. Huxley in his essay ‘On the Border Territory Between the Animal and Vegetable Kingdoms’ (1876) dubbed the eponymous borderline a microscopic ‘no-man’s-land’ (1902: p.177) where none could authoritatively tread, affirming that ‘the advance of biology [...] tended to break down old distinctions, without establishing new ones’ (p.169). What many came to view as an insurmountable problem echoed Hogg’s own struggle

⁵ His 1876 work *The History of Creation* was republished in all the major European languages and became a sensation, eclipsed only by his follow-up work *The Riddle of the Universe* of 1899, which sold ‘100,000 copies in its first year’ (Sapp, 2009, 29).

sixteen years earlier and Huxley remarks in his conclusion ‘that the difference between animal and plant is one of degree rather than of kind, and that the problem whether, in a given case, an organism is an animal or a plant, may be essentially insoluble’ (1902: p.195). The rhetorical ‘degrees’ used by Huxley echo the visual gradients of Hogg’s diagram, suggesting that the problem of ambiguity in classification could not be confined to those mysterious, indeterminate beings that explicitly embody both animal and vegetable characteristics. Like a contagion, the exposure of one group compromises all, and therefore all plants and animals are implicated by association, creating a cloud of uncertainty that obscured their true origins and relations.

While the vegetable and animal kingdoms were haemorrhaging species at the base thanks to the ambiguity of their ‘lower’ organisms, they faced an equally damaging assault from the top. The research by Darwin into higher plants that ‘ate’ live animals, ultimately published as *Insectivorous Plants* in 1875 seemed to bestow upon plants the power of predation and even a primitive kind of will. The work also presented further evolutionary trouble by highlighting the ‘remarkable accordance’ in the power of digestion between the gastric juice of animals and the acids secreted by certain carnivorous plants – implying, if not a common ancestor for animals and vegetables, then at least an analogous evolutionary process, with each being ‘adapted for the same purpose’ (1875: p.134). Darwin described the discoveries as ‘a new and wonderful fact in physiology’ (p.135), but with their novelty also came new potential to disrupt and distort the perceived ‘natural order’ and consequently the figure of the carnivorous plant soon became a fixture of the Gothic imagination.

The ability for plants to consume and ‘eat’ proved so significant because of the threat it posed to established points of differentiation between plants and animals. For instance, Hogg’s definition of animality hinged on the exclusivity of digestion in animals and the progressive divergence of flora and fauna as they attained ‘higher’ stages of biological complexity; both of these claims were to be disproved in the ensuing decades. As the American botanist Asa Gray (1889) questioned in his review of *Insectivorous Plants*: ‘when plants are seen to move and to devour, what faculties are left that are distinctively animal?’ (p.308). He expands:

‘It is the naturalist, rather than Nature, that draws hard and fast lines everywhere, and marks out abrupt boundaries where she shades off with gradations. However opposite the parts which animals and vegetables play in

the economy of the world as the two opposed kingdoms of organic Nature, it is becoming more and more obvious that they are not only two contiguous kingdoms, but are parts of one whole.’ (p.289)

Though it is dangerous to infer the intent or individual reception of these works, the impression they create is one of vanishing sureties. The visual and written language of commentators like Hogg, Huxley, and Gray constantly refer to an idea of indistinctness, blurring or gradual shading, where one being, or class of being, imperceptibly can blur into another. By these accounts, the idea of plants and animals merging became increasingly easier to conceive.

By the turn of the century these ideas had reached their fever pitch. Francis Darwin, son and collaborator of Charles, became one of the most vociferous exponents for a new view of biology that placed plants and animals in ever closer relation. In 1880 he had co-authored a study with his father, *The Power of Movement in Plants*, where both Darwins (1881) concluded that ‘it is hardly an exaggeration’ to say the roots of plants function ‘like the brain of one of the lower animals’ (p.573) – allowing plants to encroach on sentience, the final frontier of exclusively animalian characteristics. These themes were later developed in a lecture titled ‘The Movements of Plants’, delivered to the British Association in 1901 and reprinted in the journal *Nature* that same year. The lecture builds on this analogy of a ‘plant-brain’, claiming that within the vegetable ‘we may recognise the faint beginnings of consciousness [...] rudiment of desire or of memory, or other qualities generally described as mental’ (Darwin, 1917: p.51). ‘There is nothing unscientific’, he continued, ‘in classing animals and plants together from a psychological standpoint’ (p.53), hinting at, as described by Chang (2017), the ‘possible thoughts of plants’ (p.86) and the psychic unity of animal and vegetable life. By entering, even speculatively, into the idea of a plant psychology, Francis Darwin’s claims go further than any other author examined here in arguing the extent to which animals and plants are kin. His ideas signified a departure from more rigorously evidence-based studies towards a more conjectural approach to the inner-workings and origins of organic life, expounded by figures like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Tapping into this appetite for the esoteric, Francis’ lectures caused something of a sensation and were extensively reported on in both international newspapers and esoteric periodicals like *The Theosophist*, the famous Madame Blavatsky’s journal of the occult. In all such reports there was a recurrent fascination with the potential forms that sentient or otherwise remarkable plants could take, and as new discoveries pushed

at the limits of botanical knowledge, it became clear that such speculations could no longer be contained to strictly scientific modes of enquiry.

II. *Hybrid Fictions*

The seed of plant speculation was found to be ideally suited to the murky climate of Gothic fiction and captured the imagination of a number of writers. Much of the recent critical engagement with historical plant fictions have focused on how discoveries in plant science directly influenced in such narratives. Jane Desmarais, in her recent work *Monsters Under Glass* (2018), makes the case that Darwin's discoveries 'stimulated [...] writers to use monster plants to encode evolutionary anxiety' (p.167). Such an assertion is clearly evidenced by Algernon Blackwood's 1912 Gothic novella, *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*, which explicitly engages with contemporary scientific theories and discourses. The story, a masterful work of what Dawn Keetley (2016) has termed 'plant horror'(p.1),⁶ sees the protagonist David Bittacy literally consumed by the love felt for him by a sentient forest, set into motion when Bittacy reads an article in *The Times* describing 'an address by Francis Darwin before the Royal Society', whom we are told is 'president, you know, and son of the great Darwin'(Blackwood, 1964: p.79).⁷ Quoting Darwin's lecture, Bittacy recites: "'If we accept this point of view [...] we must believe that in plants there exists a faint copy of *what we know as consciousness in ourselves*'" – emphasising the latter part, we are told at this point by the narrator that Bittacy 'had italicised the last phrase' (p. 80). Blackwood's meta-textual dual-emphasis of formally italicising the text and then, in an aside, adding that it was Bittacy himself who placed the emphasis signifies the full import of Darwin's words on the progression of the narrative. Indeed, Darwin's conjecture clearly had an influence on Blackwood himself, as he takes pains to directly quote from *The Times* article, clearly marking it as a source of inspiration for this tale of sentient vegetality.

In terms of its role within the plot of the story, the article in *The Times* 'bridge[s]' the 'gulf' (Blackwood, 1964: p.133) separating the animal and vegetable, or rather *human* and

⁶ Keetley defines plant horror as such: 'At its most basic, plant horror marks humans' dread of the "wildness" of vegetal nature' (2016, p.1) and within this article I take any instance of fiction that signals this vegetable 'dread' as an example of 'plant horror'.

⁷ Darwin was in fact president of the British Science Association, not the Royal Society, however *The Times* article and the speech it was covering were both real, and Blackwood's quotations are exact: see *The Times* September 3rd 1908, p.7

vegetable, creating a point of access for the forest to advance, embracing and absorbing Bittacy in mind and body (p.143). It is with particular reference to the merging of consciousness that Elizabeth Chang (2017) notes the efficacy of ‘fantasies of unification between plant and human’ in producing sensations of horror, with the ‘resulting hybrid [being placed] at the far outer limits of not only the narrative, but consciousness itself’ (p.93). In this vein, Blackwood takes the superficially rather romantic concept of ‘losing oneself in nature’ and applies it literally, subverting it into a Gothic vision; creating a conscious environment that overpowers the solitary human psyche and subsumes it. The drama of the story centres on the ascendancy of the unorthodox ideas about human-vegetable relations, which manifest in the sentient and animate forest. Crucially, the malign presence of vegetable life is acknowledged as ‘something that usually stands away from humankind, something alien’ (p.133). It is only when the malign vegetable presence insinuates itself into Bittacy’s home, heart, and mind through the novel ideas of cross-species communication, it is able to assert itself, growing in size and influence and usurping the natural order of plant passivity.

The Man Whom the Trees Loved serves as something of a warning against the power of new ideas and the way they are able to transform our environment, giving it a new and terrifying power over the characters of the story. Blackwood’s story was not alone in this regard however, and speculative fiction of the late-century abounded with tales of pursuing a unification or perversion of natural forms. This plot was often given form through characterisation in the figure of the mad scientist, who serves as an embodiment of the pernicious effect of meddling scientific influences on the natural order. I want to examine how this figure of the ‘mad scientist’ is used to personify new ideas of the natural world that sought to conflate the animal, vegetable and human, introducing them into the fictional universes of Gothic stories. Since the hubris of Victor in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), the mad or over-ambitious scientist has been a mainstay of Gothic fiction, only gaining in traction as scientific cultures became more broadly disseminated in the periodical press. Anne Stiles’ (2009) examination of the trope, ‘Literature in *Mind*: H.G. Wells and the Evolution of the Mad Scientist’, establishes the archetype as symptomatic of a ‘cross-fertilization between literature and scientific ideas’ (p.320). In Wells’s case in particular, he was shown to be ‘greatly inspired by his biology teacher [...] Thomas Huxley’ and ‘his emphasis on the brutality of natural selection’, depicting the Mad Scientist as a product of a ‘massively over-evolved brain’ (p.319) with the cold logic of the evolutionary struggle for existence. It is worth appending here that although ‘Huxley’s pessimism’ (p.319) over the cosmic process of natural selection was

certainly an influence on Wells and others, the debates on hybridity, of which Huxley was an active participant, played an equally integral role in the composition of the Mad Scientist figure, who literally eroded the distinctions between species that their real-world counterparts were effacing discursively. The most obvious instance of this is *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), with the eponymous character being perhaps the archetypal mad scientist of the late Victorian era. Moreau's attempt to blend and merge animal and human consciousness, and subsequent exploration of the 'perplexities of entanglement' (Glendening, 2002: p.592) in Darwinian ecologies, have been the subject of critical inquiry for many years. However, Moreau was not alone in his mission to merge or unite organisms in abominable bodies, with other individuals reaching further afield—beyond the animal kingdom—for their experiments.

Four years before Wells' *Moreau*, a horticultural pre-cursor of sorts appeared in the form of a short story by Maud Howe Elliott, *Kasper Craig* (1892). The titular botanist is portrayed as a singular obsessive and the product of an intellectual climate seeking to deconstruct the boundaries of animal, human and plant. From the beginning of the narrative 'at a London flower show' (p.189), the story conflates and mingles different species through simile and metaphor. The 'gorgeously-dressed ladies' pass among the flowers 'like so many brilliant butterflies' (p.189) and are soon figuratively transformed through the talk of the protagonist, Leonard Ebury, and Kasper Craig into 'human flowers' (p.190). It is here that Craig reveals his belief in a vitalistic affinity and unity between natural beings that transcends the common boundaries of animal, vegetable and mineral – again taking his cue from the personal adornment of a member of the crowd:

'The lady and the bird belong, indeed, to the same class of beings. She wears the colors of his plumage, and imitates his graceful posturing – and see, further, how this woman has found her kin in the other kingdoms. She wears diamonds, hard, sparkling stones, whose glitter masks their shallowness; and she carries camellias: Showy, scentless, heartless as herself.' (Elliott, 1892: p.190)

Craig's cosmology reflects the scientific debate of the time, albeit rather crudely, in his apparent advocacy of what Gray (1898) termed the 'law of continuity' (p.190), 'solidarity of organic Nature' (p.323), or to use Craig's own terms: 'the great law of harmony, which runs through all nature' (Elliott, 1892: p.190), connecting subjects in the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms. Elliott's presentation of these ideas however, packaged as they are with

Craig's own hostile misogyny, immediately signal the dangers of his worldview to Ebury and the reader. Despite being a self-professed 'student of nature' (p.190), he holds much of it in contempt, showing disdain for flowers and gemstones esteemed by many, not to mention his preternatural hatred of women. It is this disdain he feels that allows him to violate social and scientific norms in the treatment of both his prized experiment and close female relative.

'Somewhat perturbed by the botanist's eccentricities, Ebury is nevertheless enticed by the promise of money and the affections of Craig's niece, Mary Heather, and agrees to assist him in a prospective orchid hunt to Sumatra. In anticipation, Ebury is shown the orchid collector's specimens, with the most prized being a 'savage-looking flower!' with petals formed in the shape of an 'open mouth and throat', appearing to 'almost have a human look' (p.197).

Seeing Ebury's fascination, the Professor explains the origin of the flower:

'It is allied to the *dionaea muscipula*, which, as you know⁸, feeds upon insects. But this flower has a much more highly-developed organism. In evolution, it is as far from the Venus's fly-trap as you are from the river-drift man⁹. Linnaeus, and Gray, and all the famous botanists between them, have failed to establish the line between animal and vegetable life. There is a good and sufficient cause for this: the line does not exist. There is no break in the chain of creation. ... This hybrid is the result of the experiments of thirty years of my life. Step by step, I have raised the standard of its race's organism ... If we could produce an animal-flower, with more animal attributes even than the *dionaea*, should we not have found the link in the chain that binds the two kingdoms together? Would not the man who should produce that flower, be remembered with Galileo, with Newton, with Darwin?' (Elliott, 1892: p.197)

Craig's frenzied monologue reflects a desire for fame and knowledge often seen in the Gothicised Faustian scientist; what is significant is the referral again to real botanists, Gray and Linnaeus, and the touchstone of contemporary evolutionary parlance and the idea of filling in

⁸ And indeed, Elliott's readers would have known, for it was one of the species cited by Darwin in *Insectivorous Plants*, describing it as 'one of the most wonderful [plants] in the world'.

⁹ A then-common term for pre-historical or Neolithic man.

‘missing links’¹⁰ in the fossil record. The Professor’s project of finally uniting the two kingdoms of plant and animal resonates with the gradational vision of the ‘origins of species’ as shown by Gray and Hogg above and is seen in the formal anthropomorphism of the flower’s gaping ‘mouth’ connoting a floral-human subject with the means of consumption, communication and even [sexual] desire.

These various floral embodiments of social and taxonomic transgressions ultimately coalesce into a scene where the plant vampirically feeds off Mary Heather’s blood. Visiting her days later, Ebury sees that the flower has become ‘a robust and vigorous plant, standing boldly forth from the bark on which it bloomed’, the ‘faint rosy tinge’ has ‘deepened and spread over the whole flower’, its mouth is ‘scarlet’ and its ‘throat with its cruel spikes’ is ‘spotted here and there with flecks of dark red’ (p.200). In contrast, Mary herself is pale, cold to the touch and near-death as the plant draws life from her – the Stokerian tableau corroborating with recent criticism that states that ‘the terror of the monstrous hybrid [plant] fixates on its penetrative capabilities, and in this respect it shares attributes with other aggressive hybrid monsters, including the vampire’ (Desmarais, 2018: p.167). With *Dracula* being published just five years earlier, the signalling of the figure of the vampire is of particular symbolic value as a byword for the refutation of natural order. Simultaneously alive and dead, human and animal, of the past and the present and sexually perverse – by evoking the vampire in connection with the orchid, Elliott is able to signal through a kind of teratological shorthand the level of abomination Craig has been able to produce.

However, the orchid is not solely reliant on the borrowed plumes of other anthropic monsters and Elliott also takes pains to demonstrate its innate monstrosity that is uniquely vegetal. One means of achieving this is the language of sexual indeterminacy that surrounds the plant, with it varyingly embodying both an overbearing phallus, ‘standing boldly forth’, and a *vagina dentata*, with its open throat and ‘cruel spikes’. The hermaphroditic quality of the orchid reflects the long-standing knowledge that plants possess the equivalent of both male and female sexual organs, which, as Maja Bondestam (2016) notes in ‘When the Plant Kingdom Became Queer’, were often ‘charged’ with ‘sexuality and sometimes objectionable lechery’ (p. 123). The sexualised description of the plant’s newfound virility in tandem with its menacing

¹⁰ The term was coined in 1890s, after the discovery of *Homo Erectus* by Eugene Dubois and quickly appeared in works by Charles Lyell, T.H. Huxley, Darwin, and Haeckel.

vampirism is able to invoke a spectrum of fears and anxieties: as a potent and parasitic being drawing the vitality from innocent subjects, as an embodiment of contemporary fears of sexual transience and decadence, and as evidence of an unknown, malign environmental sentience. In T.S. Miller's *Lives of the Monster Plants* (2012) he proposes that 'the monster plant may point to a deep unease about the boundary between taxonomic kingdoms' (p.461) and this is certainly substantiated by the kind of monstrosity seen in *Kasper Craig*. In the context of the debate surrounding the evolutionary proximity of human and vegetable, the vegetable 'vampirification' signifies a parasitic hybridity where the plant subject draws closer and closer to the human in form and likeness while robbing its prey of their vitality, showing a new ghastly form of evolution where plants may be more 'alive' than people. Confronted by this horrifying prospect, Ebury seizes the orchid and tramples it 'into a bleeding mass' beneath his feet (p.200), destroying the only surviving subject of the Craig's lifework. Ebury's extirpation of the troublesome plant functions as an act of foreclosure, forcibly removing it from the narrative and actively curtailing all further mention of the orchid in an effort to re-establish social and biological norms, symbolised by his anticipated union with Mary. As they flee the house, Mary's brother begins to insist on the Gothic hybridity of the plant, stating "'You and I know the flower was a-'", before Ebury interrupts him with a warning of "'Hush, boy'" (p.202), urging him to forget, or at least repress, the ordeal. The refusal to admit mere mention of the plant as *creature* enforces a level of forced closure and denial amongst the characters, implying that with the foiling of Kasper Craig's designs, natural order is restored, reinforced and is once again unquestionable.

Numerous other narratives from the period similarly focus on obsessive scientists, plant monsters, and the destruction of anything that threatens the stability of ordered nature as we know it. 'Carnivorine' (1889) by Lucy H. Hooper appeared in the women's periodical *Peterson's Magazine* and details another everyman adventurer, Ellis Graham, here sent to Rome by a woman desperate to retrieve her son, Julius Lambert, who she believes has been seduced and entrapped there by a young woman by the name of Carnivorine. It transpires that the titular character is no woman, but a monstrous plant of Lambert's own creation. This initial misapprehension, whereby the mother mistakes her son's entanglement for a romantic tryst, is further emphasised throughout the story in order to consistently draw attention to the questionable status of the Carnivorine itself, as well as to the dubious nature of Lambert's obsession with it. This indeterminacy is the seat of 'the horror and the hysteria' found in 'Carnivorine' and plant horror as a whole, as Jane Desmarais (2018) notes, such affect

was ‘generated by the dissolution of boundaries—female/male; human/plant—and uncanny resemblances between ostensibly different categories of organism’ (p.167). Tellingly, on discovering the plant, Graham, in surprise, muses: ‘this, then, was the object of my poor friend’s affections – this ghastly shape, not yet wholly animal, yet scarcely vegetable, with the form of a plant and the appetites of a beast of prey’ (p.338). Even by the story’s close, Graham still looks on the creature as a disturbing hybrid: a ‘vegetable-animal or animal-vegetable’ (p.339), the struggle of deciding which kingdom’s characteristics get precedence reflecting the extent to which the Gothic Carnivore confounds conventional classification.

Much like Kasper Craig, Lambert ‘tried to perfect a demonstration of the link between the vegetable and the animal kingdom’, believing mythical creatures like hydras and dragons *were* real, but had ‘degenerated into trees and plants’ (p.337-338). His subsequent method to ‘resuscitate the animal in the plant’ (p.338) involved putting the plant on a high-meat diet, drawing from a common contemporary belief that protein, especially meat, could impart a kind of savage virility to the beings that consumed it, reintroducing the carnivorous vitality that had been lost in the evolutionary process. His methodology, though undoubtedly un-scientific, has a basis in the scientific literature of the period and Hooper explicitly mentions that Lambert has ‘studied the discoveries of Warming¹¹ and Darwin’ (p.338), demonstrating an awareness of contemporary figures in plant science. Beyond these direct references, there is also an awareness of a deep genetic past, akin to Haeckel’s tree of life, which animates the evolutionary backwaters and streams that bisect the two kingdoms in Lambert’s experiments. By redirecting life through these forgotten channels, it is imagined that Lambert can re-establish a connection between the two kingdoms and even migrate a being from one to the other. The result is a picture of evolutionary lineage, not as neat lines of descent, but chaotic and sprawling networks that bisect classifications; a disturbing view with the potential to yield deeply unsettling hybridised forms of life.

Shortly after tracking down the errant Julius, Graham is soon faced with the titular specimen, seated in a giant tub at the centre of a glasshouse:

¹¹ Eugenius Warming (1841-1924) was a Danish botanist and Ecologist. His 1895 textbook *Plantesamfund* (*Oecology of Plants*) was cited by many in the 1890s including Arthur Tansley and helped establish the discipline of ecology with an English translation of Warming’s work appearing 1909.

‘...a strange plant – a hideous shapeless monster: a sort of vegetable hydra – or, rather, octopus – gigantic in size and repulsive in aspect and in coloring. So immense were its proportions, that it filled by itself the whole space of the conservatory. It consisted of a central bladder-shaped trunk or core, from which sprang countless branches—or, rather, arms—[...] Each arm terminated in an oval protuberance which had a resemblance to the human eye.’ (Hooper, 1889: p.338)

Unlike in *Kasper Craig* or other similar narratives, Lambert’s monster does not immediately resemble an orchid or flytrap and its ‘spongy’, ‘shapeless’ body actively resists identification. The first description the reader receives is of its sheer alien otherness, ‘gigantic’ and ‘hideous’ before trying to assign organic characteristics to its various features; even then, Graham has to variously borrow from both animal and vegetable traits, oscillating between the two as he fumbles to recognise ‘branches’, ‘arms’, a ‘trunk’, and a ‘bladder’.¹² It is not until Lambert tells us that it ‘is a *Drosera*’,¹³ which he has carefully ‘developed into this unheard-of size’ (p.338), that the plant’s genetic origins are ascertained.

Lambert only intends to further pervert the form of his creation by next endowing it with the power of locomotion, providing the creature with, ‘a pair of paddle-like feet or paws like those of some misshapen antediluvian animal’ (p.339). This final bipedal detail, added to the already abominable form of the Carnivorine, causes it to more closely resemble a medieval grotesque than any modern scientific subject. The anachronism of its hideous shape is further emphasised by the reference to its ‘antediluvian’ appearance – referencing the time period before the great biblical flood when all manner of strange and abortive creatures were thought to have roamed the earth, before they were drowned by God, who saved only the ‘good’. This epithet marks the Carnivorine for imminent destruction¹⁴ and once Graham sees it tearing apart Lambert’s corpse, he promptly fires a pistol into its central core, killing it instantly. In death,

¹² Indeed the bladder, a superficially animal organ, was at the time also synonymous with carnivorous plants. The *Utricularia* or ‘bladderwort’ was an aquatic plant famously described by Darwin and Asa Gray in the 1880s. Gray in particular remarked on its abject nature, describing in detail its ‘bladdery sacs’ (p.323) and that the plant ‘prey[ed] on garbage’ [i.e. dead flies] unlike its non-carnivorous ‘relatives [who] “live cleanly” as nobler plants should do’ (p.324-325), marking the bladderwort as something of a deviant.

¹³ Commonly known as a sundew.

¹⁴ The language shows the plant to be an aberration not only from a biblical standpoint, but also a scientific one. To quote from the above-cited Eugenius Warming and his *Plantesamfund*, ‘Every species must be in harmony, as regards both its external and internal construction ... when these undergo a change to which it cannot adapt itself, it will be expelled by other species or exterminated’ (Warming, 1909, p.2).

the reader is treated to a last, visceral union of Lambert and the Carnivorine as the plant spews forth ‘a stream of reddish sap that looked like blood’ that ‘mingle[s] [...] with a ruddier crimson – the life-blood of my unhappy friend’ (p.339). Returning again to Alaimo, the merging of the fluids achieves a final and very literal ‘trans-corporeality’; joining the human and monster plant in a bodily union foreshadowed by the initial mistaken sexual misdemeanour between Lambert and the Carnivorine. The mixing of blood provokes a sense of physical horror at the idea of contamination, allowing the life-forces of the two beings to ‘mingle’ and permeate, while Hooper’s focus on the chromatic similarity of the hues of ‘reddish’ sap and ‘crimson’ blood posits the extent to which Lambert had succeeded in bringing a plant into the realm of animality.

The narrative concludes with Ellis righteously burning the remains of the hybrid, lest it should be resurrected ‘by curious scientists of the future’ (p.339), concluding that though ‘the annihilation of my friend’s discovery may be a loss to science ... humanity will only have cause to rejoice in the destruction of the Carnivorine’ (p.339). The text again presents the idea that the interests of humankind are at odds with the fatal and meddling curiosity of scientists who seek to conflate and combine incompatible beings. In this light we are able to see the other more mitigating and self-containing effect of the ‘mad scientist’ trope at work, clearly marking the hybrid creatures they produce as artificial and bred under the most perverse conditions to undermine the otherwise normative rules of nature. The mad scientist is thus rendered as something of a conservative plot device, a straw man for the perceived deviance or perversity of modern scientific thought. In other words if, according to Lambert, ‘for science, there is no such thing as a monster’ (Hooper, 1889: p.338), for nature and society, there still most certainly is. If monstrous plants are a human-made phenomenon, as opposed to a freak occurrence of nature, it is possible to maintain, or even reaffirm, human control of the hierarchies and boundaries of nature by policing and attenuating the malign, or merely eccentric, caprices of a few individuals. Characters like Julius Lambert and Kasper Craig provide a means of mollifying the ecoGothic anxieties of hybridity and hostility in nature thrown up by phenomena like carnivorous plants, deflecting the issue by having vegetal monstrosity develop from a flaw in character, rather than a flaw in nature – making it far more easy to correct, or even laugh at.

It is easy for narratives to veer from an exploration of complex and insurgent plant-life into a good-natured romp, or even farce, as in H.R. Garis’ ‘Professor Jonkin’s Cannibal Plant’ (1905), summarised in *The Argosy* where it was published as ‘a triumph in cultivation

which threatened a tragedy in mastication' (p.164). Once again, we have an over-ambitious and mal-adjusted man of science, here in the form of Professor Jephtha Jonkin. Jonkin is described as an almost over-productive botanist and plant breeder, 'continually striving to grow something new in the plant world' (p.164) – here, of course, this 'something new' taking the form of a flesh-eating plant. He develops his giant pitcher plant by 'dieting the blossoms' on incrementally larger fare – progressing from flies to minced beef, then diced pork, 'choice mutton chops' and finally several 'porterhouse steaks' (p.166) a day. His methodology, fantastic as it may seem, was actually common practice in the period, with even Darwin (1888) himself feeding his insectivorous plants on cubes of 'roasted beef' (p.245). In Garis' tale the swelling portions of pig, sheep, and cow increase the plant's strength and vitality, changing its physical composition. By deriving its biomass exclusively from animal, specifically mammalian, proteins, the plant becomes a hybrid of sorts: in line with the aphorism 'you are what you eat', the vegetable monstrosity is disturbingly composed entirely of animal flesh.

As one might expect, this expansion of appetite persists until it is the Professor himself that is on the menu. A scene of comic violence ensues, wherein Bradley Adams, a friend of the Professor, walks into the greenhouse to see him leaning over the plant trying to feed it before observing: 'He went head first into ... the eating apparatus of the strange plant, his legs sticking out ... Then he disappeared entirely. Adams didn't know whether to laugh or be alarmed' (Garis, 1905: p.167). The farce continues as Adams is commanded to use chloroform to sedate the plant to spare it any violence or harm from the axe, proclaiming 'I would rather have let it eat me' (p.168), as he protects his prize specimen. In his explicit privileging of his force-grown plant-pet above his own life, Professor Jonkin is the most extreme of the several mad plant scientists here shown, and thus the narrative veers towards parody. Any suspense or fear of mortal danger is perpetually frustrated by the caprices of the Professor, which inject a mediating layer of humour to alleviate the tension, even as he is suspended within the very jowls of the plant monster. When Adams prepares to leave, he sees Jonkin 'dreamily' examining the flower before admonishing it as 'naughty', declaring that it will not get 'any supper or breakfast' (p.168). This infantilisation of the monstrous plant confirms the limited impact that this kind of plant horror can elicit. The absurdity of both the plant itself and its creator inhibit a meaningful interrogation of the boundary between plant and human – with any potential danger firmly confined to the vicinity of the fictional hothouse.

Examining similar narrative trajectories, both in the nineteenth century and elsewhere, T.S. Miller (2012) identifies the inhibitive element as an inherent characteristic of Gothic plant stories. He argues that ‘vegetable monsters in fiction represent a disruption that also works to contain itself’, suggesting that ‘the narratives reinforce hierarchy by positioning the monster as evil, aberrant, an error to be corrected’ (p.462). However, to read *all* monstrous plants as inherently self-defeating is potentially misleading as it ignores the narrative contexts from which these plants arise. Certainly, in the instance of *Kasper Craig* and other similar stories, the plants are confined by their status as artificial beings – in some respects literally confined as plants raised in the manufactured environment of glasshouses. Katherine Bishop in her analysis of the role of monstrous vegetation in detective fiction has noted how in keeping monstrous plants of exotic origin in ‘liminal spaces such as scientists’ laboratories’, narratives can fulfil an imperialist mandate of enforcing an exclusionary policing of nature, where such plants are not allowed ‘here ... not where the wilderness has been cultivated and thus defanged’ (p.11). Their status as hybridised products of non-native horticulture means they are in effect ‘against nature’ and as such are marked for destruction or containment, with the human destroyer fulfilling the corrective role of natural selection by removing them from existence. However, in the case of stories like *Blackwood’s*, where plants develop their monstrous or otherly qualities in the wild, such innovations cannot be regarded as ‘unnatural’, but rather the result of evolutionary progress. A far more disquieting and effective form of ecological horror is thereby unearthed through the interpolation of the revelations of Gray, Darwin and others into the vegetable kingdom – as Elizabeth Chang (2017) notes, ‘the fear is not that the petted plant specimens in the kitchen garden will evolve *into* sentience, but that they possess sentience already’ (p.91).

Conclusion

When trying to come to terms with the full impact of Darwin’s findings in *Insectivorous Plants*, Gray (1898) asked his readers ‘what is now to be thought of the ordinary [plants]’ in light of these discoveries? ‘No one ever imagined’ [sic] that so many plants could possess the power of digestion (p.326), and yet here they were. His language expresses an urgency to redress a misrepresentation in plant physiology, but more than this, he also implies an awareness of a poverty of imagination in the contemporary conceptualisation of biology. For too long taxonomists had been clinging to the structured sureties of Linnaean, Enlightenment natural history and were therefore made blind to the sometimes nuanced and intermediary forms that

exist in an evolutionary paradigm. To fully articulate and appreciate said forms, it is necessary to embark on something of an imaginative leap in order to encompass the spectrum of species that can exist in the natural world. Though failing to gain much traction with scientific authorities, this experimental means of viewing nature resonated with other speculative cultural phenomena, like the Gothic fiction and psychical movements of the *fin-de-siècle*, latching on to the idea of latent connections between drastically different species and enabling a kind of communion between lifeforms, previously thought impossible. In this respect, the projects of experimental plant science and speculative, Gothic fiction are one-in-the-same: to imaginatively acquaint readers with ‘the interconnections, interchanges, and transits’ (Alaimo, 2010: p.2) that link all forms of organic life together. Both involve a suspension of disbelief and a departure from the sureties of conventional natural history; the only difference being in the case of Gothic fiction, those connections were seldom benign.

This essay has argued that, in the context of the ecoGothic, these instances of cross-kingdom hybridity in Victorian science and fiction reflect a period of biological uncertainty, when the new frontiers of Darwinian heredity threatened long-held ideas of anthropocentric exceptionalism with our ‘nonhuman ancestry’, a fact ‘the Gothic is wont to remind us’ (Del Principe, 2014: p.2). The readiness with which texts and ideas of the late Victorian era are able to engage with, or even anticipate, the recent discourse of the ecoGothic is testament to their potential relevance to the ecological anxieties of the contemporary moment. In the current century we are still discovering rogue, hybrid species of ‘Problematica’ (O’Brien & Carron, 2012) and genetically modified organisms implanted with DNA from a host different animals and plants populate laboratories the world over. By continuing scholarly engagement with these imagined biologies of the nineteenth century and beyond, writers and theorists may be able to anticipate, describe and understand the strange new problems and subjectivities created by an ever-more hybridised natural world.

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BIOGRAPHY

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EcoGothic, Ecohorror and Apocalyptic Entanglement in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Tales of the Black Freighter*

James L. Smith and Colin Yeo

ABSTRACT

This essay explores the ecoGothic resonances of *Tales of the Black Freighter*, a dark pirate tale embedded within *Watchmen*, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' 1986-87 postmodern DC graphic novel. By providing a grim prism for themes such as nuclear paranoia, the monstrous transformation of the self, and the horrifying possibilities of scientific solutions to social ills, *Black Freighter* provides a vocabulary of horror that echoes the grim post-modern alternate 1980s of its host narrative. The Gothic gives a voice to the subsumed existential dread exuded by the escalating nuclear tension and apocalyptic imagination of *Watchmen*, and the environmental entanglement and degradation of the body at sea serves as an ecocritical lens through which to view a corresponding societal degeneration in the face of a moribund social and political ecology. It is the technique of metatextual commentary, separating and intertwining, that brings the ecoGothic themes of *Watchmen* to light.

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' fatalistic *Tales of the Black Freighter* depicts a shipwreck survivor's voyage across the sea on an improvised life-raft made from bloated corpses and driftwood. As he floats, the mariner is beset by the gruesome spectres of an unwholesome seascape on all sides and is tainted psychologically and physically by the experience. The story is set in a period reminiscent of the Golden Age of Piracy, steeped in the tropes and idioms of the Gothic. *Tales of the Black Freighter's* fictional comic universe places the theme of piracy, rather than superheroes, at the forefront. The fictional pirate genre has been content to provide escapism and harmless derring do to its readership, yet this story is different. In a metatextual wink to *Watchmen* itself, the dark fiction of the mariner complicates and disrupts the comic industry that it represents. Its readership experiences a complex of macabre tropes that mirror

the socio-political horror story they inhabit. The mariner is haunted by sea and self, while a world tearing itself apart reads on, desperate to forget.

Horror surfaces through the environment via a series of unwanted ecological entanglements that distort and disturb. The (un)natural is a core element of the text, articulated through the protagonist's struggles with the sea and his excruciating undertaking of a desperate race to save his family from pirates. This sea is traversed by the unnamed shipwreck survivor's precarious journey, a voyage that involves numerous obstacles that are of the natural world, but with a gruesome twist. It is resonant with core ecoGothic themes: affective ambivalence towards the natural world, a conviction that nature can estrange as much as remediate, and a disjunct between utopian idealism and dystopian results (Smith and Hughes, 2013: p. 2). The protagonist of the text finds himself changed by the world into a Gothic monstrosity, with a 'huge, deformed' hand and a scream that sounds like the 'black language of gulls' (X, 12, 7). To the disturbed 'hero' Rorschach, the New York of *Watchmen* matches the dark cry as it 'screams like an abattoir full of retarded children' (I, 14, 3). Ecological torment given human voice.

Continuing the critical conversations initiated in Matthew Green's *Alan Moore and the Gothic Tradition* (2013) and the edited collection *Ecogothic* (2013), this essay expands on the interplay on monstrous environment and monstrous human nature, reflected through the peculiar device of the embedded narrative. Set primarily at sea and narrated in the first person, *Tales of the Black Freighter* (hereafter *Black Freighter*) offers an interesting depiction of the sea as a site of terror and horror not unlike the settings castles in eighteenth-century Gothic texts. When embedded into *Watchmen*—the seminal DC 1986-87 graphic novel—the classic tropes of the Gothic adumbrate and modify modern (and postmodern) tropes. *Black Freighter* is a meta-text, contained within the broader narrative of Moore and Gibbons' acclaimed graphic novel *Watchmen*. As a metatextual narrative, the depiction of the natural and its associated horrors in *Black Freighter* serve as a form of escapism for the characters in the fictional world imagined by Moore and Gibbons in *Watchmen*. In a world dominated by rapid and unassimilated technological advancement and populated by superheroes, *Black Freighter* offers the inhabitants of *Watchmen*'s universe an emphasis on how the natural world, despite human mastery over technology, retains much of its currency as a source of terror and horror.

This essay begins by situating *Black Freighter* in its context as a Gothic metatext within *Watchmen*, and a reading the dark pirate comic as a self-contained, ecoGothic narrative. The second section of this essay considers the implications of *Black Freighter's* themes in a broader context as part of Moore and Gibbons' *Watchmen*. We suggest that *Black Freighter* can be read as both an ecoGothic text, as well as a metatext that exposes the implications of a fictional world teetering on the brink of self-annihilation and lacking the language to express its subsumed paranoia. In a political ecology that bears an increasingly stark resemblance to the nightmare 1980s imagined by Moore and Gibbons, reassessing this unsettling and suffocating mire of dark emotions is more important than ever.

Tales of the Black Freighter in Context

Black Freighter is a comic-within-a-comic that is read by the characters in *Watchmen*. The narrative is laid out in text boxes that are drawn to resemble sections of parchment, ostensibly to present the protagonist's narrative account as a set of diary entries. These parchment-like fragments of dialogue signify the various moments in *Watchmen* where the core narrative is interrupted or juxtaposed by the narrative of *Black Freighter*, a persistent and intrusive presence. Some of these moments are followed up with visual panels that convey the thrust of *Black Freighter's* plot. For example, following a section where a main character makes the remark, 'hell and damnation', the narrative switches to the narrator of *Black Freighter* exclaiming that 'Hades is wet' (V, 20, 1). Elsewhere, the moment where a fatalistic twist is revealed coincides with a key part of *Watchmen's* narrative, a section where *Watchmen's* central 'villain' Ozymandias explains his motivations (XI, 8, 7).

The narrative appears laid upon the surface of the *Watchmen* plot arc, emerging from the pages of a comic read by a young man, Bernie, lounging on a street curb next to a newspaper stall. The middle-aged newspaper seller, also named Bernie, is a loud and opinionated mouthpiece of the political events unfolding around him. The two Bernies do not interact except to snipe at each other, the former frequently complaining that he is trying to read, and that the latter is disturbing him. And yet it is no coincidence that these very different men have the same name, just as the comic within the comic and its host are improbably the same, yet different in form. They exist side-by-side on a New York street corner: one escaping into the

world of pirate comics and the other loudly proclaiming a running spiel about his world. And yet, as this essay argues, they are both entangled in the same dark web of tropes and themes.

The depictions of violence and gore in *Black Freighter*, along with its twist ending, is framed like a typical EC Comics publication from the 1950s (Hoberek, 2014: p.76). Indeed, *Black Freighter*'s narrative parallels *Watchmen* in the same way that EC Comics' anthologised stories paralleled the rise of DC superheroes such as Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman during the Golden Age of Comics in the late 1940s. It is tongue-in-cheek franchises such as *Pirates* and *X-Ships* that dominate the comics market (I, 4, 3). These connections are a deliberate and cynical critique. A character comments that the reason for pirate comics such as *Black Freighter*'s success is because superhero comics have diminished in popularity in a world where superheroes exist in real life, and often disappoint (III, 25, 1-3). This is a world with no catharsis, and the Gothic seeks to provide a coping mechanism. Young Bernie has good reason to avoid looking up from his engrossing comic at the mess unfolding around him.

Black Freighter's post-modern, metatextual narrative came about by accident, and yet became intrinsic to the broader arc in which it participates. Interviewed by Barry Kavanagh of *Blather* in 2000, Moore said of *Watchmen* that he tried to make it 'like this kind of jewel with hundreds [...] of facets and [...] each of the facets is commenting on all of the other facets'. The story takes on the challenge of the ecoGothic within its own narrative, and 'examines the construction of the Gothic body—unhuman, nonhuman, transhuman, posthuman, or hybrid—through a more inclusive lens, asking how it can be more meaningfully understood as a site of articulation for environmental and species identity' (Del Principe, 2014: p.1). The characters of this apocalyptic drama are constantly probing their own ethics and identities, their agency, and the meaning of their actions. They are ecologically entangled with the Morton-esque 'hyper-object' (Morton, 2013: p.28) of nuclear war, and it corrupts them just as the mariner of *Black Freighter* despairs and is corrupted by the harsh and dehumanising seascape. Finding one's individual and collective sense of environmental identity becomes a matter of survival.

The fragmented style in which *Black Freighter* is presented through *Watchmen* has stylistic similarities with 'first wave' eighteenth-century Gothic novels such as M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) or Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). The text's 'backwards-looking' gaze, a call back to the Early Modern (late fifteenth century to the early eighteenth)

period's Golden Age of Piracy, acts as a nostalgic fragment not dissimilar to the Gothic's eighteenth century 'first wave'. The fragments that make up *Black Freighter* are like the various poetic fragments inserted into Radcliffe's *Mysteries* or Lewis's *Monk*. The key difference is that unlike the 'self-contained' poems in Lewis and Radcliffe's novels, the narrative fragments that make up *Black Freighter* flow from one fragment to another, making up a complete metatext that spans the course of *Watchmen*. Geoff Klock (2002) suggests that *Black Freighter* operates as a symbol of the horror comic tradition within a superhero comic, an inclusion that is suggestive of an anxiety towards the nature of comic book history and tradition (p. 68). In the context of Gothic literary history, the nostalgia of *Black Freighter* in the modern-day setting of *Watchmen* can therefore be read as analogous with the first wave Gothic novels' nostalgia for poetry and poetic forms (such as the sonnet and the ballad) that pre-date the eighteenth century.

The Gothic and the genre of comics have much in common, as pointed out by Julia Round (2014) in *Comics and Graphic Novels* (p. 112), and *Black Freighter* is no exception. Round proposes several points in her consideration of a 'gothic model' of reading comics that allows for the interrogation of meaning through formal elements of a text. She proposes an application of the concept of 'haunting' that is characterised by numerous intratextual levels of a text's embedded levels. Indeed, the various text boxes that make up the narrative of the comic can be read as fragments that 'haunt' Moore and Gibbons' core text. This technique serves to reinforce the metatext's role as highlighting the natural world as a seascape of fear. Another point raised by Round (2014) is the use of excess in comics and graphic novels as an aesthetic function that echoes the strategies of the Gothic (p. 75). Depictions of the natural such as images of human bodies and images of animals, are sections of *Black Freighter* that are illustrated rather than presented as text boxes. These illustrated elements of Moore and Gibbons' metatext not only focus on, but exaggerate and highlight, to excess, the grotesque and disturbing facets, of the natural world.

***Black Freighter* as Gothic Eco/Metatext**

In this section, we seek to not only to explore both the function of the ecohorror and ecoGothic within this fictitious narrative, but also to understand its function as an embedded narrative within a larger whole. Taken together, the narratives of the two texts try to fulfil the function of ecohorror, defined by Joseph J. Foy (2010) as an attempt to 'raise mass consciousness' about

the threats of environmental incaution (p. 167). Through the cynical lens of postmodernism, they imply that there is something laughable and impossible about this task. As the character of the Comedian in *Watchmen* exclaims, what is the point of being the smartest man on Earth if one is simply the smartest man on the cinder? This turn of phrase haunts Ozymandias across the years, creating the seed of his master plan. The joke meant to belittle human agency becomes the ultimate fruit of a god and hero complex combined (XI, 19, 4-6).

The natural world, with its many horrors, is brought into focus at the very start of *Black Freighter*. From typical depictions of castles in eighteenth century Gothic to, specifically, representations of the natural world in ecoGothic texts, landscapes are a crucial facet of the Gothic mode. Angela Wright (2007), for example, reads the role of landscape and the setting of a castle in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as different aspects of the text that are 'conjoined' (p. 38). *Black Freighter* emphasises natural threats rather than artificial ones, such that in place of the oppressive medieval castle that typifies eighteenth century Gothic, instead, seascapes of the natural world in Moore and Gibbons' text are rendered as terrifying and ontologically unsettling settings. The text is a form of nautical Gothic (Alder, 2017) that populates the deep of the ocean with the lightless uncertainty of mental state, space, time, morality and identity that it provokes.

The nautical mode nuances the wider *Watchmen* narrative by suggesting that the Earth, too, is adrift in a degenerating world in which finding one's bearings is eternally problematic. A 1980s form of what Steve Mentz (2015) has termed 'shipwreck modernity', the link between 21st-century ecological collapse narrated by the vocabulary of the blue humanities. The haunted ship-at-sea becomes humanity at sea, haunted by glimpses of its inadequacies in the face of crisis. As the character of Bernie the newspaper seller puts it, echoing the apprehension and despair of the mariner, 'You never know what's bearing down on you [...] I mean, all we see is what's on the surface [...] I bet there's all kinda stuff we never notice [...] until it's too late' (V, 17, 6-9). As he comments on the uncertainty of life and darkly echoes future nuclear calamity and collapse, the mariner notices that he too is becalmed, with something sinister—in this case, sharks—lurking beneath the waves.

Yang and Healey (2016) argue that landscapes embody the Gothic's ability to challenge tradition and liberate anxieties. Landscapes, in their formulation, contribute to the creation of ambiances of uncertainty, delusion, fluidity, isolation and instability, ambiances that are all

present in *Black Freighter* (p. 5). To the protagonist of *Black Freighter*, the natural world is likened to Hell, with a host of horrific sights and sounds. As the first narrative section begins, Moore and Gibbons' use of the phrase 'beach-head' to describe the setting of the first sequence lend an organic, almost natural feel to the setting where the narrative takes place (III, 2, 1). Following from this, the narrator describes a hellish landscape littered with dead bodies and the body parts of dead men. This first phrase primes a reader to what happens next, as the narrator's initial reference to a head is followed up by him witnessing birds picking out the 'thoughts and memories' of his dead crewmate (III, 2, 2). Moore and Gibbons accentuate the effect of being devoured by the natural world by describing the birds' actions using an abstract metaphor. Their use of this abstract metaphor highlights the threatening and unnerving implications of being at the mercy of nature.

Faced with a situation made untenable by nature, the protagonist contrives of a response that is deemed horrific yet necessary. He tries to rely on the natural world for escape from his predicament by making a life raft out of wood. He then realises that the island that he is marooned on lacks the trees to supply him with enough wood to make his craft float. He resorts to a gristlier substrate, relying on the lashed-together and bloating corpses of his crewmates to make his raft float. The disturbing effect of the protagonist's utilitarian approach towards the bodies of his deceased fellows can be best summed up by Aldana Reyes's (2015) description of the Gothic body:

'Gothic bodies produce fear through their interstitiality: they are scary because they either refuse human taxonomies or destabilise received notions of what constitutes a 'normal' or socially intelligible body.' (p.5)

In contemplating the horrific use of bodies to create a life raft, the protagonist justifies his actions by stating that his choice is made necessary by the 'nature' of his situation (V, 8, 9). Moore and Gibbons emphasise the word 'nature' in bold, a fatalistic acknowledgment of the extent to which the protagonist's actions are driven by being isolated from society and having to cope with the horrors of the natural world.

Disturbing imagery is used in the scene where the protagonist creates his grotesque life-raft. This moment is also important as it signifies the start of the protagonist's downward spiral from victim to his eventual role as the text's tragic villain. Moore and Gibbons draw attention

to the protagonist's actions by devoting an entire page of the graphic novel to this sequence. The Gothic bodies of the protagonist's dead crew form a focal point of the protagonist's change from victim to villain. The first frame on page 9 of Chapter V depicts the protagonist exhuming his crew 'from underground, sand trickling from their sockets' (V, 9, 1), a grotesque description that symbolises how nature has taken over and conquered the bodies of the protagonist's dead fellows. In place of blood, the bodies of his crew bleed sand. The act of exhuming the dead for a utilitarian purpose is also framed in an unnerving manner, as the protagonist becomes occasionally 'entranced' by the physical defects and markings on his dead crewmates' corpses (V, 9, 2). The protagonist's final touches to his raft are also described using an ambiguous phrase, as he cuts down/off some 'young palms' to build the deck of his raft (V, 9, 3). It is implied that 'palms' refers to pieces of wood, but in this particular context, its meaning is left ambiguous.

It follows from this that the threats that are foisted onto the protagonist are natural ones. In a particularly gripping scene that takes place after he has set sail, the protagonist realises that using the bodies of his dead crewmates to keep his raft buoyant has attracted a hungry herd of sharks to his life raft. As in the scene where the protagonist builds his raft, this episode also accompanies a full page of *Watchmen*, a framing and narrative choice by Moore and Gibbons that reflects the intensity and immediacy of the encounter. Fending the sharks off, the protagonist's conflict culminates in a struggle with what appears to be the herd's alpha, a monstrous shark with 'pale and mottled' yellow skin, one of the biggest sharks he has ever encountered (V, 3, 20). Blinding the shark, the protagonist then proceeds to use its dead body in place of the bodies of his crewmates.

The protagonist's use of the shark's dead body symbolises the *effect* that nature has had on him. Moore and Gibbons' depiction of the sea can be read as a haunted house of sorts, replete with numerous terrors that serve as obstacles to the protagonist's voyage, obstacles that change him irrevocably. However, the protagonist's very act of taking to the sea earlier on in the narrative, 'borne on the naked backs of murdered men', is arguably the turning point in the text (V, 6, 9). Having earlier commented on the seagulls feasting on his dead crewmates, the protagonist, from this point forth, becomes a predator himself. The final frame of Chapter V, page 9 reads as a 'close-up shot' of the protagonist, his mouth dripping with blood from a live seagull he has just eaten. Focusing on his face, the red colour scheme in this frame emphasises a change in his character, in this case for the worse.

The final frame of Chapter V, page 9 is important because it signposts to the reader the effects of nature on *Black Freighter*'s hapless protagonist. Left on his own and immersed in a Gothic seascape, the protagonist himself becomes increasingly co-opted into the heterotopia that is the sea. Fred Botting (2012) proposes that landscapes in Gothic texts can be read as heterotopias, mirrors of the world that reflect and disturb depictions of reality (p. 19). The sea in *Black Freighter* is a literal mirror to the protagonist that reveals to readers of the text, and to the protagonist himself, the extent to which he has been changed by being at the mercy of nature:

‘Light-headed, I gazed into the inverted world beneath where drowned gulls circled. A madman with blood-caked lips stared back at me. His eyes, his nose, his cheeks seemed individually familiar, but mercifully, I could not piece them together. Not into a face I knew.’ (V, 12, 8-9)

While Moore and Gibbons emphasise in this passage the physiological deterioration of the protagonist, in a broader thematic perspective, the sea also foreshadows the protagonist's downward spiral, and more importantly, his eventual transformation into a tragic villain. Nature, in this instance, distorts the relationship between the protagonist's 'civilised' past and 'barbaric' present state (Botting, 2012: p. 20). On one hand, readers are primed to sympathise with the protagonist whilst on the other hand, witness his gradual decline and tragic fall. The intersection of materiality and psychology generates a very distinct form of Gothic-tinged horror. Stephen A. Rust (2014) explains this eloquently in the context of the postmodern ecohorror film:

‘Human bodies’ affective responses to the material environment and environmental discourse inform our perceptions of the conditions under which we alter the environment and transform our bodies through industrial and consumerist practices. The discursive trope of bodies illustrates the affective capabilities of horror films to invite critical spectatorship on the part of viewers, capabilities that are generated by the combination of psychology and materiality as special effects and sounds operate textually to penetrate the body of the viewer and disrupt cognition.’ (p.552).

Rust's comments, while framed in the context of the horror film, is nevertheless salient in the context of reading about the mariner's physical degeneration in *Black Freighter*. The desperate mariner struggles to fend off the monstrous life of the ocean and descends into a J.G. Ballard-esque archaopsychic regression and physical degeneration, perhaps best characterised by the phrase 'my raft grew increasingly grotesque, reflecting my own gradual transformation' (V, 21, 8). Indeed, Moore and Gibbons draw on the affective capabilities of the grotesque by inviting readers to identify with the mariner's condition by using a frame that positions the mariner's face squarely in the middle. This framing creates a dual effect: the mariner is both staring into the frame as he is staring out of it, at readers of the text, highlighting the effect of his physiological deterioration to a reader at an affective level.

The mariner's moments of realisation are paralleled in the narrative of *Watchmen*. Both texts end with a grim dawning of self-deception. For the protagonist of *Black Freighter*, the initial vision of his wasted and hideous physical appearance foreshadows his final realisation that occurs later in the text. He murders an innocent man and assaults his family, convinced of a delusional fantasy of a pirate invasion. The mariner understands that he is damned, and swims to the looming inevitable bulk of the demonic and hellish Black Freighter to join his fellow lost souls. Similarly, the protagonists of *Watchmen* are ensnared by the realisation of the cynical pragmatism of the scheme to coerce world peace enacted by the character of Ozymandias. The moment of dreadful self-knowledge for the hero-turned-villain mirrors that of the mariner as he sits in meditation, taking in the mass murder that he has wrought in the name of life, declaring that 'I've struggled across the backs of murdered innocents to save humanity' (XII, 27, 2). He too is convinced that his delusion is real as he mutilates both the population and psyche of his world.

Intertextuality empowers the interplay of the two narratives as they subvert expectations. In one notable juxtaposition (VII, 25, 1-6) the existential trauma of nuclear crisis is made particularly apparent. The *Black Freighter* text 'our damnation: it obsessed the sodden dead, dominating their bubbling dialogues' appears as the marooned man imagines the bloated corpses of his crewmates talking to each other below the waves as the fish gnaw at them. This is contrasted with the hysterical babble of a gang of street punks known as the Top Knots. The scene is intercut with scenes from *Black Freighter* where the mariner contemplates; 'they spoke of a heaven, where once we all lived and died for our sins to this pandemonium we call the world', as the Top Knots' squabbling continues, their actions are juxtaposed with the mariner's

contemplation; 'truly, life is hell and death's rough hand our only deliverance'. Subsequently, the Top Knots invade the home of Hollis Mason, a retired costumed hero, and brutally murder him. The Top Knots' actions read as a twisted version of the unsanctioned adventures of superheroes that echoes in the *Black Freighter* text, where the mariner-turned-murderer returns to his home, 'a spectre of revenge, riding the flow tide home' (VII, 26, 6). Both *Watchmen* and *Black Freighter* are grim trojan horses that have infiltrated their framing genres, promising adventure but bringing despair.

The Ecohorror and Ecophobia of Nuclear Paranoia

The parallel between *Black Freighter's* protagonist and the character of Ozymandias is but one of many entanglements with *Watchmen*. These connections are used to illustrate the text's broader message of ecophobia and the dark entanglements of global panic. *Black Freighter* lurks as a menacing intradiegetic whisper in the troubled minds of *Watchmen's* central characters, an explicitly didactic Gothic nature designed by comic book writers to entertain and thrill, and the world for which it is created is a grim political ecology desperately in need of a voice. The text is a mess of confused emotions and ambiguities: only the world of comics can critique it.

The USA of *Watchmen's* 1985 is lost and adrift, five minutes from nuclear midnight. A long-serving and hawkish Richard Nixon, sans Watergate, still leads the nation and right wing 'red menace' ideology is rampant. The powers of Dr. Manhattan enabled a victory in Vietnam, denying the American imagination the self-reflection of defeat. There is no US-Soviet détente. The status quo is fast deteriorating on the global stage and all concerned seem paralysed by complacency and cynicism. Dr. Manhattan is the only guarantee of stasis and the world assumes (naively) that he is a constant. The mariner's fear of the destruction of his hometown by the *Freighter's* marauding crew parallels the ecophobia of nuclear paranoia that is prevalent in *Watchmen*. Michael Egan (2018, p.21) proposes that '...the human spirit resists the prospect of catastrophe to the bitter end', but that 'though horrors are impossible to conceive of, that doesn't prevent their occurrence'. It is within the Gothic that we find the most well-articulated suspicion of hope and disorientation within complacency, of utopian and dystopian dreaming in the face of nuclear war.

The paranoia that infuses this 1980s USA is characterised by hundreds of small acts of defiance against despair; it is a story of men and women broken by truth, but also of the potential horrors of both wide-eyed optimism for the future and hard-eyed pragmatism. It is a world in profound denial, clinging to the myth of a saviour in the form of the character of Dr. Manhattan, the only individual in *Watchmen* who demonstrates what might be deemed as ‘superhuman’ abilities. Dr. Manhattan’s godlike abilities make him the lynchpin of the text, as he is the one character who can ensure peace between the USA and Russia. At a pivotal plot point, he discards the Earth for Mars, leaving behind a vacuum that leads to chaos and instability. Reading the text in conjunction with *Black Freighter* provides the perspective necessary for the reader to recognise the cruelty of hope, but also the resilience of human nature in the face of horror. It environs the emotions of the narrative, leaving humanity trapped in a haunted house populated by memories and regrets.

Both the mariner and the characters of *Watchmen* struggle to make meaning, but it is the mariner that understands the ecological horror of his situation, bitterly self-aware of his plight: physical and psychological degeneration, the horrors that combine and intermingle to derange him, the lurking threat of the hellish Black Freighter, and his gradual drift away from reality and morality. The genre of pirate novel provides the language to bemoan his situation, a vocabulary of the Gothic. He embraces his doom, while fighting against it; he is disgusted by his environment and enveloped by it. The dark arc of the *Black Freighter* narrative serves as a companion to the wider arc of *Watchmen*: the experience of ennui, horror and psychological trauma in the face of an impending catastrophe.

Like the mariner, humanity in *Watchmen* cannot escape its self-created island of the mind without cannibalising that which it loves, perverting itself in the process. Everyone in the world of *Watchmen* treads water in a dark Gothic manifestation of what Steve Mentz (2012) has termed ‘swimmer poetics’, an imagined way of being ‘for our storm-filled world [that] can generate unsustainable but engaging narratives’ (p. 590). The ecoGothic frames the realisation that nobody can build anything that lasts in the face of annihilation (be it through death at sea or nuclear fire) except an ad hoc mode of grim survival in which the boundaries shift and blur. Dark aesthetics and imagery are uniquely appropriate for a human race barely treading water in a vast and horrid ocean of time, unmoored from agency and adrift in an all-consuming moral panic.

The bonds between the two narratives allow them to interweave, grimly augmenting each other. Both stories take care to establish the weight of precedent, of circumstance, a sense of hopelessness and lack of agency. Both stories stew in morbidity, self-loathing, introspection, complacency and guilt, but only one narrative is aware of its ecoGothic entanglements. *Black Freighter* seeks to give voice to the dark latent emotions of *Watchmen*: the people of Earth cannot give voice to their terror in the face of the twin forces of nuclear annihilation and Dr. Manhattan's power, with all the uncertainty and mortal dread that this entails. As a deterrent to the Soviets' nuclear arsenal, Dr. Manhattan is characterised very much as a destructive, apocalyptic force himself. Schneider (2013) highlights the register of bleakness that permeates both texts:

‘Traditionally, superhero comics are very much dominated by clear-cut action sequences, allowing the protagonists to use their powers to perceive, act and react, while their actions have direct consequences, altering and advancing the plot. In *Watchmen*, however, the heroes are not in a position of control; they must subject themselves to the rule of time, mercilessly leading them and the rest of humanity towards the apocalypse. In the end, the comic evinces a prototypically Gothic bleakness, expressed thematically as well as formally.’
(p. 94)

Like superhero comics in our world, the pirate franchises of the *Watchmen* world seek to capture the zeitgeist of their intellectual culture. What could be a more fitting metaphor for the human condition as imagined in *Watchmen* than a brutally bleak Gothic nightmare of boundless ocean, monstrous life, human impotence, moral degeneration and the horror of failure? Just as a more optimistic Western world imagined itself through the roseate lens of the golden age of comics and the latent worship of power and prowess found a voice in the superhero, so too does the psychological horror of *Black Freighter* meet the needs of its audience, a dark lens for their failings, but also a form of escape. In a fitting parallel: *Weird Fiction* magazine authors such as H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard and Clark Ashton Smith were the voice of a distinct 1930s Depression-era cynicism, creating cosmic horrors that ruthlessly interrogated the scientific narrative of humanity while simultaneously entertaining with an aggressive masculine pulp adventure. The pirate comics of the *Watchmen* 1980s give voice to an equally bitter complex of emotions: this a world that has been shown the hope and optimism of heroism

and the golden promise of the American dream, only for the dream to come true and become a nightmare, as the character of the Comedian puts it. A world of heroes taken to its natural conclusion is an environment of abiding mistrust and ecophobia. Fear of a horrifying Gothic nature of predators, corpses, rot, madness and decay is made synonymous with the wallowing terror of an impending nuclear end.

How, then, is this psychologically troubled pre-apocalyptic world on the brink a form of ecoGothic? The answer lies within our notion of ecology, and the affective registers of such a web of interconnections (see Weik von Mossner, 2017; Bladow and Ladino, 2018). As Hillard (2009) points out succinctly, the role of Gothic nature is to shine an unflattering light on the source of our fears and contradictions, to create a sense of place for our paranoia, causing us to ask questions such as ‘Why do we fear what we fear? What role do such fears play in the day to day choices we make in our social, political, and personal lives? What consequences does ecophobia have for the way we treat the environments we live in?’ (p. 694).

Hillard’s observations become extremely apt at the start of *Watchmen* Chapter XII, when the doomsday clock that has been ticking along during the narrative reaches midnight. We are presented with several pages of unfolding carnage: piles of bloodied corpses, scenes of a monstrous creature sprawled across the ruins of civilisation, its mutilated tentacles penetrating the buildings of New York. Everyone is violently murdered, destroyed by the creature created by Ozymandias to fool the world into believing that an alien invasion is underway. The monstrous nature of nuclear annihilation has given way to an even more Gothic horror, a Cthulhu-esque creature from the stars. Despite all of this, it is the human motivations behind this act that are the true horror.

The regression of identity and corruption through psychological isolation and survival appears in both the story of Ozymandias, who severs his ties from society in order to enact an amoral master plan, and the marooned mariner, who survives in the face of a savage and unforgiving nature, in exchange for both his sanity and his humanity. The differences in depiction of Ozymandias and the protagonist of *Black Freighter* are stark – one man meditates on his actions from a distance, while the other has caused his damnation in a direct manner, literally with his own hands. Despite these differences, both Ozymandias and the doomed mariner are similar in that they have effectively isolated themselves from society. Brad Ricca (2013) contrasts the ‘end of the progressive hopes that initially inspired the protagonist’s

actions' (pp. 186-87), replacing the coterie—membership of the community of costumed heroes for Ozymandias, membership of civilisation for the mariner—with the opposite condition, a reflective Gothic solipsism marked by the replacement of affective bonds with melancholy.

By monstrously intertwining the body, the material world, the membranes between cultural forces and the logics of environmental behaviour, the postmodern frame of *Watchmen*, and within it *Black Freighter*, focuses a disturbing and unflattering lens on the ideas and mores that have led to this warped and fearful 1985. The tendrils of the ecoGothic have wormed their way into the thought-world of the characters, explicitly narrated in the mariner's subversion by his own ecological hellscape, but implicitly roiling beneath the surface in *Watchmen*. The affective palette generated by this process builds a sense of crawling socio-cultural dread at the callous and paranoid ennui that grips the novel's characters. It generates endless questions: How did the world become so broken? Are we simply another reflection of the same theme? What would we do to save humanity? Who is the monster? *Watchmen* answers these questions but punishes the reader with a destabilising barrage of grim relativism for every truth they extract from its pages.

The Gothic ambiguities of the text are best encapsulated by the psychological world of Ozymandias. The tragic villain of the piece is a Victor Frankenstein-like character who understands the monstrosity of his creation, stating boldly that 'I engineered a monster, cloned its brain from a human psychic, sent it to New York and killed half of the city' (XII, 9, 2). He deliberately engineers a Lovecraftian wave of psychic horror, claiming that 'no one will doubt this Earth has met a force so dreadful it must be repelled, all former enmities aside' (XII, 10, 5). The macabre images implanted into the brains of the sensitive are a staged production, a collage of science fiction imagery and dreadful media soundscapes. It is the biggest joke of them all, a theme that reverberates across *Watchmen*.

At the beginning of the stories, both the marooned mariner and the world of the comic are not perfect, and in terrible peril. However, they still have hope. By the end they are devoid of hope and deformed beyond recognition. The mariner has assaulted his own family, crazed and delusional from isolation and privation; humanity has become coerced into peace by a lie, millions dead so that billions can live. An alien foe has been invented to sow a terror in the hearts of humanity worse than its hatred of itself. As the hero Nite Owl puts it with horror,

‘how [...] how can humans make decisions like this?’ (XII, 20, 6). It is not clear in context whether this means ‘how can humans make decisions in this context’ or ‘how can humans make a decision such as this’ and perhaps the answer is deliberately ambiguous, as is its moral message. It is this bleak psychological horrorscape that *Black Freighter* mirrors perfectly, giving voice to a deep and abiding wellspring of dread and cognitive dissonance. Estok’s discussion of reading ecophobia is apt:

‘Reading ecophobia means identifying the affective ethics a text produces, means having the willingness to listen to, to think about, and to see the values that are written into and that work through the representations of nature we imagine, theorize, and produce.’ (Estok, 2010: p.76; see also Estok, 2018)

If *Black Freighter* and, by extension, *Watchmen* is ecohorror and ecoGothic based on the themes and registers outlined above, then what are its affective ethics, and how do Gothic emotions and literary aesthetics promote them? It teaches us that a relentless focus on an imminent disaster creates a culture of paranoid precaution, be it the massacre of one’s family by pirates or the end of the world in nuclear fire.

In true Gothic style, fear of human frailties such mortality, sickness, death, ignorance leads to a technocratic solution: Ozymandias engineers world peace at the cost of free will. Only through the corresponding resonances of *Black Freighter* can we truly appreciate that this is every bit as monstrous an end as the mariner murdering the citizens of his hometown and terrorising his family, made hideous and deranged by absorption of a Gothic seascape. Survival is not salvation, but further damnation. The narrative teaches us that fear of death can lead to actions that are worse than death. Vogelaar et al. (2018) understand that the prospect of societal collapse can result in toxic and self-destructive emotional communities:

‘By anticipating an end, collapse orients us to the future in ways that may be problematic for the present: to think that there is no future risk embracing either hedonism or apathy; on the other hand, to focus too much on the future risks eliding or not acting in the present.’ (p. 2)

Only the one-man nuclear deterrent of Dr. Manhattan, belief in or fear of a new American super-being, has held off the psychological degeneration until *Watchmen*'s present. His actions have held off the inevitable: after all, as the Comedian put it, losing the Vietnam war would have driven America crazy as a country. The gift of real, failed, heroes to this world is the realisation that there is nobody to guard the guards, that Ozymandias is unaccountable, powerful, and utterly convinced of his moral right to avert apocalypse. He, like the mariner, has paid the cost for his sense of moral guardianship over a community. It is here, in the harsh critique of world peace and a Nietzschean *übermensch* able to bring it about, that the Gothic dwells most strongly. This sentiment is echoed by the last scene of *Black Freighter*, an image of a hand grasping from the water, taking the rope that leads to a life of eternal hell aboard the ship of the damned. The words: 'The world I'd tried to save was lost beyond recall. I was a horror: amongst horrors must I dwell' (XI, 23, 1).

Conclusion

The valorised figure of the superhero exists and is compromised by its encounter with *Watchmen*, extended to its natural conclusion of imperfection, disillusionment and irrelevance in the face of destruction. Something is needed to distract the people of this world from their fate: to thrill, to entertain, to horrify. It is the Gothic and, in the case of *Black Freighter*, the ecoGothic, that provides that escape for the figures of *Watchmen*'s parallel 1985. They, like the mariner whose travails they follow, are marooned in a terrible fashion, cut off from each other and enveloped in a suffocating climate of fear. The heroes, alienated and dysfunctional, are the most isolated of all. Because the medium of comic books is presented as the dominant metaphor for the suppressed existential horror of the society in which it is produced—just as superhero comics mirror and critique our own anxieties—Moore and Gibbons are making the Gothic themes of the microtext the language of the macrotext. Thus, the horror of *Black Freighter*'s ecological entanglements can say what the characters of *Watchmen* cannot, just as our cli-fi speaks for us in our own suffocating Anthropocene.

In the case of the ecoGothic, this means that a Gothic nature is exuded by a narrative world in which there is a macabre sense of wrongness and alienation, even when the source of that alienation is not a monster or monstrous in the traditional sense. A camp science fiction monster is confectioned by Ozymandias through gruesome genetic experimentation to provide a real horror for the world to fixate upon, yet the real horrors are social in origin. This

environment cannot be fully understood unless translated into Gothic by a commentary upon it, just as ecocritics interpret the Gothic functions of texts and thus propagate new manifestations. Gothic is not defined by tropes alone, nor by emotions, but by compromised ideals. It dwells in the lacuna between ideal and hideous reality, between the world dreamt of and the nightmare of its realisation. It is not the 'evil' of *Watchmen* that makes it Gothic, but the sheer weight of corrupting influences at distorting work on the supposed protagonists. The scenario makes its own monstrosities.

The Gothic thrives when a narrator doubts or fails to explain and is deluded by their environment and their putative connection to other actors in it. The world is initially misunderstood, but a hint of its reality emerges, glimpse by nauseating glimpse. The *Watchmen* vein of Gothic is encapsulated by the image of the Comedian, a man blithely convinced that he knows how the world works and that others are fools, weeping at the foot of his former enemy Moloch's bed, baring his soul to a stranger because he has nobody else left to talk to. The Comedian is destroyed by the horror of realising that the Gothic is not funny, traumatised by the realisation that his place in the world is not what he imagined. He has stepped outside of the narrative in true post-modern style and seen that the machinations behind the screen are more hideous than anything he had imagined.

The two narratives recombine as the chapters of *Watchmen* count to twelve and the end comes. As Bernie the comic-reading street kid finishes his issue of *Black Freighter*, the world descends into conflict and madness around him. Only the arrival of Ozymandias's mutant destroyer can end the torment, wiping out half the population and the reader with them. The two Bernies die in an embrace as the old man attempts to shield the young man from the end; the narratives that they represent merge back together in the face of death. Their outlines become one, a grim nuclear shadow backed by blinding white light. They are consumed, and then there is nothing (XI, 28, 7-13). Later, we see their corpses on the street, bloodied and smoking but still intertwined (XII, 6, 1).

It is the technique of metatextual commentary, separating and intertwining and then merging in death, that brings the ecoGothic themes of *Watchmen* to light. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons understood the dark potential of their narrative but reasoned that an explicit articulation of these principles through a pseudo-text would be both biting postmodern and philosophically illuminating. By shedding an unwelcome and unforgiving light on internal

schisms and suppressed emotions, they reveal the unwholesome contours of our own self-delusions. In a late 2010s where the suffocating ennui of a fraught political climate has created an environment of suppressed paranoia and the threat of nuclear proliferation and Anthropocene climate change rear their heads and our heroes fail us, we are well-equipped to understand *Tales of the Black Freighter*. Sometimes the only way to represent horror is to transpose it.

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The Value(s) of Landscape: The Sublime, the Picturesque, and Ann Radcliffe

Garland D. Beasley

ABSTRACT

Critics and scholars have long noted the way Ann Radcliffe makes use of landscape aesthetics throughout her Gothic novels, especially *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Despite this, there remains a striking dearth of scholarship on Radcliffe's use of landscape within the realm of eco-criticism. This paper seeks to fill that gap and to begin to reposition Gothic landscape within the eco-critical debate. Tom J. Hillard (2009) and Simon Estok (2009), among others, have theorised Gothic landscape as spaces within which terror and horror are achieved, produced, and enacted. To be sure, Radcliffe's 'On the Supernatural in Poetry' finds value in such spaces, at least for the purposes of terror, yet Radcliffe does not offer only one vision of landscape in her Gothic. Instead, she insists on a distinction between Gothic sublime landscapes, which are patriarchal spaces that seek to control, dominate, and subjugate both women and nature, and picturesque landscapes, which seek harmony between genders and balance between humans and nature. The Radcliffian heroines' preferment of the picturesque then becomes more than just an aesthetic choice because Radcliffian landscape choices reveal moral and ethical character. In sum, Radcliffe offers two visions of nature: one in which human beings can continue to attempt to dominate and control nature, and an alternative in which they attempt to live in harmony with it. Such a reading of an important early Gothic practitioner like Radcliffe suggests that we may want to broaden our conception of Gothic landscapes.

Introduction

Any discussion of the role of nature in Gothic fiction must eventually wend its way to the works of Ann Radcliffe. Radcliffe's novels, especially *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794),¹ have long been looked to as novels rich in eighteenth-century aesthetic theorisations, specifically the sublime of Edmund Burke and the picturesque of William Gilpin. The scholarship of Charles Kostelnick (1985), Jayne Lewis (2005), Donna Heiland (2004), and Maggie Kilgour (1995), among others, has come to see much of Radcliffe's work as deeply informed by and invested in these aesthetic theorisations. Yet little has been said in the way of how these aesthetic theorisations can inform our readings of Radcliffe when it comes to *gender* and *ecocriticism*. What I wish to suggest in the following pages is that Radcliffe positions the sublime and the picturesque not only as competing aesthetics in the novel but as the foundations of competing worldviews between the human and the nonhuman world. Through the use of Burkean masculine sublime, Radcliffe illustrates the patriarchal reality for women in the eighteenth century, rendering the sublime as a space that sees both women and the natural world as little more than resources to be exploited. On the other hand, through the picturesque, Radcliffe offers us a vision of a different kind of world: one that insists on a place for the feminine and an appreciation of natural landscape not for its capitalistic value, but rather for its beauty, its majesty, and its spiritual consolation.

In her essay 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', published posthumously in 1826, Radcliffe makes explicit what her novels had made implicit: she was intimately familiar with and fully invested in the aesthetic theorisations of the sublime and the picturesque. Most likely written around 1802, the essay was intended as a prologue to her posthumously published novel, *Gaston de Blondville* (1826) and as an apology for its use of the supernatural. Using Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* as her literary guides, and Burke as well as, to a lesser extent, Gilpin as her aesthetic guides, Radcliffe describes in her essay what I call an 'atmospheric sublime' that insists on the use of certain consistent elements to create terror in

¹ In order to avoid confusion, I have placed the original publication date of eighteenth-century works in parentheses after their first appearance in the text. With the exception of William Gilpin, whose works have not been printed in modern editions, all page numbers and other citations are from the modern editions of the texts listed on the References page.

the mind of the reader.² Radcliffe looked to Shakespeare as the master of the atmospheric sublime, arguing that Shakespearean terror, like her own, thrives upon the use of consistent elements: darkness, obscurity, dreariness, solemnity, and the like. Radcliffe (2000) writes that in order to achieve this kind of sublime, the author can ‘never shock the understanding by incompatibility’ (p. 166), but rather that all elements must come together in order to create terror in the mind of the reader.

Radcliffe’s contemporaries also responded to the use of landscape in her novels, particularly her utilisation of the atmospheric sublime and Gilpin’s theorisation of the picturesque. Perhaps the best example of this is to be found in Jane Austen’s satirical Radcliffian Gothic novel, *Northanger Abbey* (1818), a novel that Austen first began in 1798,³ just four years after the publication of *Udolpho*. The experiences with landscape and place of Catherine Morland, Austen’s heroine, while at the modernised Northanger Abbey pale in comparison to the sublime terror imposed upon Emily St. Aubert, the heroine of *Udolpho*, by Udolpho castle, which is described by Radcliffe (1998) as ‘gloomy and sublime’, and seems more of a fortress than a home (p. 216). When read against Radcliffe’s text, Catherine’s entrance to Northanger Abbey can be described as both satirical and anticlimactic: ‘To pass between lodges of a modern appearance [...] without obstacle, alarm or solemnity of any kind, struck her as odd and inconsistent’ (Austen, 2005: p. 127). Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s review of *Udolpho* in the August 1794 edition of *The Critical Review*, while not altogether flattering of the novel or Radcliffe’s extended landscape descriptions, picked up on her use of the picturesque, and noted that the novel contained ‘much elegant description and picturesque scenery’ (2000: p. 361). Yet despite the modern and contemporary emphasis on landscape in the novels of Radcliffe, the Ecocritical community has surprisingly not turned its attention to her work or the work of many Gothic novelists – hence the introduction of this journal.

² Radcliffe’s (2000) notion of what I am calling her atmospheric sublime is held together by a unity of elements, or what she calls ‘a sublimity of attendant circumstances’ (p.164). For Radcliffe, when certain elements are consistent and unified throughout a piece of literature, each element engages in a reciprocal process of ‘heightening their effect’ on one another (p.163). Take her description of the relationship between the sublime and the natural world that surrounds the witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* for example: ‘Shakespeare delighted to heighten the effect of his characters and his story by correspondent scenery: there the desolate heath, the troubled elements, assist the mis-chief [sic] of his malignant beings’ (p. 164). She goes on to object to contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare that made *Macbeth*’s witches look like ‘mere human beings’ and ‘downright Scotch-women’, thus ‘withdrawing [...] that strange and supernatural air which had made them so affecting to the imagination’ (p. 165). For Radcliffe, to withdraw any single element that contributed to the sublime was to diminish the ability of all remaining elements to create the sublime at all.

³ When Austen began writing what would become *Northanger Abbey* in 1798, the Gothic was the most dominant literary form in England, representing approximately 30 percent of the market share of novels published in England between 1788-1807 (Miles, 2002).

The lack of attention paid to the Gothic by the Ecocritical community is at least in part, as suggested by Tom J. Hillard (2009), an avoidance of what he, following the lead of Simon C. Estok, calls Ecophobia.⁴ According to Hillard, ‘Throughout its relatively short life, ecocriticism has largely overlooked representations of nature inflected with fear, horror, loathing, or disgust’ (p. 688). Hillard goes on to suggest that the Gothic is ripe for this kind of Ecophobic interpretation: ‘the Gothic provides a useful lens for understanding the ways that many authors—regardless of when they are writing—represented fears and anxieties about the natural world’ (p. 689). Hillard is, I think, correct for the most part in this assessment, but another contributing factor to the lack of EcoGothic studies is the difficulty of defining ‘Gothic’. Certainly, the late eighteenth-century Gothic novels produced by Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, Matthew Lewis, and Radcliffe observe, even as they help to define, the conventions of an emerging genre, but from the nineteenth century onwards, the Gothic has existed as more of a mode than a genre. And even when we think of it as a mode, defining it is akin to attempting to nail Jell-O to a wall. Timothy G. Jones (2009), in his attempts to wrestle with the term Gothic, borrows the notion of habitus from Pierre Bourdieu, and proposes, ‘Perhaps the Gothic is something which is *done* rather than something that simply *is*’ (p. 126).⁵

Radcliffe’s novel (1998) suggests as much with the inclusion of a valuable environmental counterpoint to the Ecophobic sublime in *Udolpho* with her inclusion of the picturesque. As earlier noted, much of Radcliffe’s work is invested with the aesthetic theorisations of Burke and Gilpin, but *Udolpho*, with its lush landscape descriptions, is almost an aesthetic treatise in its own right. The novel tells the story of Emily St. Aubert, who is raised at the picturesque La Vallée by her mother and father. After the death of her mother, the health of her father, St. Aubert, begins to fail, and she undertakes a picturesque journey with him in the hopes it will improve his health. Along the way, she meets Valancourt, her eventual husband, who begins a courtship with her shortly after St. Aubert’s death. Although Emily and Valancourt share much in common, her aunt, Madame Montoni (Cheron) forbids the match and insists Emily travel to Italy with her aunt’s new husband, the villainous Montoni. Montoni

⁴ Here, I should point out that this is beginning to change. Recent scholarship such as the edited collection of Dawn Keetley and Matthew Sivils, *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2017), is beginning to move the ecocritical conversation towards the Gothic and its landscapes of terror.

⁵ What I mean to suggest is that the problem of definition by its nature indicates that the Gothic is roomy and inclusive, able to adapt and transform over time, thus my hesitancy to give credence to any one ecocritical theory as the means by which *the* Gothic can be explained or interpreted.

attempts to auction Emily and her control of La Vallée, the family home St. Aubert made her swear to never sign over on his deathbed, to a potential suitor. This eventually falls through, and Montoni takes Emily to the sublime Udolpho Castle, his own personal stronghold. While there, Emily encounters a number of terrifying elements and discovers the true nature of Montoni's villainy, which is most clearly revealed in his callous treatment of Emily's aunt before her eventual death. After the death of her aunt, Emily escapes from Montoni and Udolpho, originally to take up residence in a picturesque convent. At the convent, she meets Count de Villeforte and his daughter, Blanche. Ultimately, she reunites with Valancourt and they are married and take up residence at the picturesque La Vallée.

Whereas the sublime world of Udolpho castle functions as a site of patriarchal control and domination of both nature and the female body, seeing both as a resource to be exploited for personal gain, the picturesque La Vallée, the ancestral home of Emily St Aubert and the place she and her husband Valancourt ultimately return to, is constructed as a space of gendered harmony that seeks a balance between male and female and humans and nature. Here, Ecofeminism can be a useful critical tool for understanding the picturesque world envisioned by Radcliffe. David Del Principe (2014) observes that Ecofeminism works 'by exposing interlocking androcentric and anthropocentric hierarchies, misogyny and speciesism', and that it 'seeks to question the mutual oppression of women, animals, and nature' (p. 1). Similarly, Mary Phillips (2016) contends that Ecofeminism seeks to reverse the Cartesian perspective that privileges the rational mind over the natural world, arguing that it is this perspective which is responsible in large part for the subjugation experienced by women and nature: 'Those things which supposedly give humanity its defining characteristics, such as rationality, freedom and capacity for abstraction (and which are all traditionally viewed as masculine), are not shared with nature or the body or the feminine' (p. 60). Radcliffe's picturesque fits nicely within this definition in that it privileges gender balance and harmony with the natural world, rather than the control and exploitation of women and natural resources found in Burkean Ecophobic landscapes.

The Sublime and the Picturesque

Before diving into a reading of Radcliffe's *Udolpho*, let me step back a moment and briefly discuss the two competing aesthetic theorisations in the novel and their relationship to gender and the natural world. Radcliffe's novel presents the sublime as an overpowering masculine

force that requires and indeed forces the feminine and the natural world into submission. Radcliffe presents the picturesque, on the other hand, as a space of harmony between genders that allows the empowerment of the feminine and envisions a sustainable natural world.

Radcliffean sublime is heavily influenced by the aesthetic theorisations of Edmund Burke (see: Norton, 1999; Heiland, 2004; and Kilgour, 1995), outlined in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Although the sublime had been a subject of great discussion in the eighteenth century prior to Burke, his aesthetics differ markedly from the theorisations of Longinus (1739),⁶ John Dennis (1704), and Joseph Addison (1712), which had dominated eighteenth-century theorisations of the sublime before the publication of his *Enquiry*. Samuel H. Monk (1935) describes the effort undertaken in the *Enquiry* as almost wholly original, marking Burke as ‘original as none of his predecessors had been’, and praising the *Enquiry* as a ‘new departure in aesthetic thought’ (p. 92).

Indeed, for Burke (1998), the sublime is a sudden empirical force, usually the product of terror and pain. It is produced by loud sounds, infinite objects, obscurity, vastness and other empirical experiences, many of which are found in nature (pp. 53-79). This description of the sublime lends itself quite nicely to Estok’s theory of Ecophobia, because the source of sublime terror is, for Burke, related to the idea of death (1998). Burke’s theorisations of the sublime see nature as a dangerous force that can rob of us of everything, including our ability to reason and even our lives.

For Burke (1998), the sublime astonishes the mind of the perceiver to such an extent that ‘all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror’ (p. 53). Ronald Paulson (1983) describes Burkean sublime as ‘alienating and diminishing’, before going on to argue that Burke sees the confrontation with power as ‘the essence of terror’ (p. 69). Paulson here makes an important point in his insistence on the sublime nature of power in Burke. Burke (1998) writes of the sublime as if it were a kind of physiological force of nature that overwhelms its object, yet for Burke the source of that overwhelming emotion is terror: ‘whatever is in any sort

⁶ The edition of Longinus that I cite here and in the References is the 1739 edition translated by William Smith. My decision to use William Smith’s translation is due to its enormous popularity in the eighteenth century. Monk (1935) notes that there were no fewer than five editions of Smith’s translation between its first appearance in 1739 and 1800 (p. 10).

terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*' (p. 36). Hugh Blair, in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), finds much to value in this theorisation, but he offers a critique of Burke on the subject of power in the sublime: 'mighty force or power, whether or accompanied with terror or not [...] has a better title [...] to be the fundamental quality of the sublime' (2005: p. 30).

For modern readers, it is no great leap to see the connection between Burkean sublime and patriarchal domination. For Burke (1998), one of the essential differences between the sublime and the beautiful is the power relationship between them. According to Burke, we submit to what is sublime, while what is beautiful submits to us. Also, Burke allows no space for the sublime and the beautiful to mix, arguing that to mix the two is to diminish them both. When we apply this to gender, it suggests that the feminine beautiful is forced to submit to the masculine sublime, and that there is no natural space in which the masculine and feminine can mix. Thus, Burkean sublime becomes a space in which Ecophobia and patriarchal domination come together to inspire terror in the female mind, to dominate the female body, and to circumscribe female existence.

Yet Radcliffe provides a counterpoint to this through the picturesque world of La Vallée. This turn to the picturesque is more than an indication of aesthetic preference on the part of Radcliffe. While the sublime is an irrational world of domination and control, the picturesque serves as a rational world of gendered harmony. The picturesque rose to prominence at the end of the eighteenth century as a result of the writings of William Gilpin, who wrote several essays and recorded his picturesque tours of the English countryside. The term itself underwent a massive aesthetic transformation from its original definition in Gilpin's 1768 *Essay Upon Prints*, which defined it as, 'a term expressive of that particular kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture' (p. xii), to its eventual definition, which combined the sublime and the beautiful and offered a kind of corrective to Burke.

While Burke claims that the sublime and the beautiful cannot be mixed, Gilpin insists upon the mixture of the two in his essay 'On Picturesque Travel' in *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: to Which is Added a Poem on Landscape Painting* (1792). Here he argues: 'Sublimity alone cannot make an object *picturesque*. However grand the mountain, or the rock may be, it has no claim to this epithet, unless it's [sic] form, it's [sic] colour, or it's [sic] accomplishments have *some degree of*

beauty' (p. 43). Gilpin is then simultaneously building on and correcting Burkean aesthetics. In doing so, he has created a space in which the masculine sublime and the feminine beautiful can and must work together. When we survey the picturesque through the lens of Ecofeminism, the picturesque, with its insistence on a balance between masculine and feminine, becomes a space which reclaims the natural order and, importantly, serves as a world diametrically opposed to the world of ecophobic Burkean sublime. In short, Gilpin's aesthetic opened a door which both Radcliffe in the eighteenth century and Ecofeminists in the twenty-first are able to peer through in order to find a truly rational space that empowers and enables women and the natural world.

Gilpin's aesthetic also represents an important break from Burke in that he encourages the viewer of picturesque scenery and the picturesque tourist (his most important works are intended as guides for tourists) to embrace the scenery rather than be overpowered by it. Unlike Burke, whose *Enquiry* is filled with dangerous Ecophobic visions of the natural world that rob the 'victim' of such landscapes of the use of the reason, Gilpin's tours are filled by a natural landscape that is enchanting and invites reflection on the part of the viewer. Writing on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, which had and continues to have devastating consequences for the natural world, Gilpin presents his picturesque tours of the English countryside as opportunities for moral, rational, and physical exercise, which offer the viewer the chance for wonder, awe, introspection, and even religious reflection. Kostelnick (1985) rightly observes of Gilpin's picturesque, 'His tours and treatises explore the interworking of a range of faculties—intuitive, intellectual and moral—exercised by nature enthusiasts, primarily through the medium of "picturesque travel"' (p. 31). In *Three Essays* (1792), Gilpin also reinserts reason into aesthetics, encouraging the viewer of picturesque scenery to engage with landscape and to view it with an eye towards 'rational amusement' (p. 41) and 'high delight' (p. 50). What emerges, at least for Radcliffe's novel, is an aesthetic that not only insists upon a place for the feminine, but also seeks harmony and balance between the genders as essential to its formation.

A Taste of the Picturesque: A Landscape of Peace

Although the picturesque world of La Vallée is not thrown into relief until the introduction of the Burkean sublime world of Montoni's Udolpho, the novel's opening at La Vallée proves important as it establishes the picturesque as a setting of harmony and equality, two things traditionally denied women in patriarchal societies. Other critics have pointed to the importance

of La Vallée in the novel and have likened it to a sort of paradise on earth: Kilgour (1995) describes it as ‘an Edenic world of innocence, and harmony between parents and child, humans and nature’ (p.115), while Kostelnick (1985) describes La Vallée as ‘the picturesque ideal in *Udolpho*’ (p. 33). That La Vallée is the aesthetic center of the novel is hardly to be debated and Radcliffe (1998) peppers the early part of the narrative with picturesque descriptions of this Edenic world, illuminating its ‘magnificence’ and ‘grandeur’ (p. 30). Radcliffe demonstrates her indebtedness to Gilpin’s ideas by slightly altering his description of the picturesque in *Observations on Several Parts of England, particularly the [...] Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland* (1786) in which Gilpin describes the picturesque as ‘Beauty lying in the lap of Horror’ (p.183), while Radcliffe describes a particularly picturesque landscape near La Vallée as ‘a perfect picture of the lovely and the sublime, of “beauty sleeping in the lap of horror”’ (1998: p. 55; see also: Norton, 1999).

Moreover, the ability to appreciate picturesque landscape serves as a litmus test for various characters throughout the novel. Those able to appreciate it, Emily and her father, St Aubert, chief among them, form what Kostelnick calls ‘an intuitive web of sensibility’ and are further linked ‘through the intuitive perception of external objects’ (1985: p. 38). Indeed, it is from St. Aubert that Emily learns to appreciate landscape, and it is also from St. Aubert’s relationship with Madame St Aubert that Emily learns about gendered harmony and its place in the natural world. La Vallée is a home in harmony with nature: St Aubert’s library opens onto a grove of trees, and Emily’s room is positioned between a lawn and a greenhouse. Emily’s ‘native genius’ is informed by the teachings of both her father and her mother (1998: p. 7),⁷ and she is taught to cherish nature and her natural surroundings as well as to reflect rationally upon them. Unlike the landscape of the Ecophobic Burkean sublime she encounters later in the novel, La Vallée is part of the natural landscape, almost built into and around it, rather than a dominating force that attempts to subjugate the landscape and those around it. It is also a space, unlike *Udolpho*, which allows for and even enables rational reflection.

⁷ One of the more interesting departures in *Udolpho* from Radcliffe’s other novels is the fact that Emily’s mother is alive at the beginning of the novel and takes an active role in her education. The Radcliffian heroine’s absent mother was such a well-developed trope that Austen, in listing the faults of Catherine Morland as an heroine at the beginning of *Northanger Abbey*, includes the following lines about Catherine’s mother: ‘She had three sons before Catherine was born; and instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as anybody might have expected, she still lived on...to enjoy excellent health herself’ (p. 9). While Austen’s thoughts on Catherine’s mother are enough to make even the most self-serious literary critic smile, the inclusion of a living mother is a bit of an oddity in Radcliffe’s fiction. One way of reading the inclusion of Emily’s mother certainly seems to suggest the importance of balance between the genders at La Vallée.

Importantly, this insistence on rational reflection opens up a space for religious devotion within the picturesque. The marriage of rationality and religion, while foreign to many modern readers, was part and parcel of Radcliffe's Rational Dissenting background.⁸ Rational Dissenters viewed advancements in science and a deeper understanding of the natural world through the early development of biology, botany, and ecology as proof of a rational creator (Fitzpatrick, 1990). Moreover, according to Mark Philp (1985), 'For Rational Dissenters natural religion and religious science [...] were seen in terms of reason gradually uncovering God's will' (p. 37). Anne Chandler (2006) argues that this kind of religious devotion engendered by the natural world is a key aspect of the Radcliffean heroine: 'we see her protagonists achieving a sense of spiritual consolation through a reverent appreciation of natural phenomena' (p. 135). Yet, as we shall see, this appreciation of nature is only possible in picturesque landscapes.

From the early pages of *Udolpho*, Radcliffe (1998) continually insists upon the connection between the spiritual and picturesque. She describes the landscape as able to produce 'sublime reflection, which soften while they elevate the heart, and fill it with the certainty of a present God!' (p. 30). She also describes the effect of the picturesque on individual characters: 'All nature seemed to have awakened from death into life; the spirit of St Aubert was renovated. His heart was full; he wept, and his thoughts ascended to the great creator' (p. 38). In *Three Essays* (1792), Gilpin himself suggests that picturesque scenery can serve as the medium of religious inspiration: if 'the admirer of nature can turn his amusements to a higher purpose; if its great scenes can inspire him with religious awe [...] it is certainly the better' (p. 47).⁹ This is indeed a key part of the picturesque communities created in *Udolpho*. When Emily and Valancourt, her eventual husband, first meet, they are on a picturesque tour undertaken by St Aubert after the death of his wife. An early scene of connection between Emily and Valancourt comes when Valancourt looks over the picturesque landscape and declares: 'These [picturesque] scenes [...] waken our best and purest feelings, disposing us to benevolence, pity, and friendship' (1998: p. 46). The reverent appreciation of natural landscape

⁸ Although little is known of Radcliffe's life, nearly all critics place her religious background and aesthetic within the confines of Rational Dissent (See: Norton, 1999; Miles, 1995).

⁹ Gilpin was not the first eighteenth-century aesthetic theorist to suggest this connection. Joseph Addison, whose much celebrated 'The Pleasures of the Imagination' (*Spectator* 411-421, June 21-July 3, 1712) brought together empiricism and the sublime, removing the sublime from the purely rhetorical conceptions of Longinus and John Dennis. Addison had made a similar point to Gilpin's in *Spectator* 413 when he writes that the delight we take in the presence of nature can have a religious aspect to it: 'The Supreme Author of our Being has so formed the Soul of Man, that nothing but himself can be its last, adequate, and proper Happiness' (1788: p. 74).

codes Valancourt within the picturesque community of the novel precisely because of this ability to find harmony and rationality with the natural world.

From an Ecofeminist perspective, such a home harmonises masculine and feminine as well as humans and nature.¹⁰ Yet Radcliffe is doing something far more radical here: Rather than attempting to destroy the worldview that has propped up Cartesian thinking, with its insistence on rationalism, as the height of humanity—a worldview that has consistently, as Mary Phillips (2016) and Val Plumwood (1991) point out, kept women and nature subjugated under patriarchal control—Radcliffe here is making space within Cartesian thinking for women and suggesting that patriarchal control and domination of women and nature is irrational and thus not sufficiently or properly Cartesian. In short, Radcliffe’s project is to associate both women and nature with rationality and suggest that anything that exists outside of a system that holds gendered harmony with the natural world as its pinnacle is irrational.

Radcliffe (1998) hints that this view is at odds with much of the world that surrounds La Vallée before she even introduces the Burkean sublime world of Montoni. During a visit from Monsieur and Madame Quesnel, the brother of Madame St Aubert and his wife, St Aubert is disappointed to learn of the ‘improvements’ Monsieur Quesnel has made to an estate he acquired some years back from St Aubert. Upon learning that Monsieur Quesnel intends to cut down trees that, in a move that would make Washington Football Team owner Daniel Snyder proud,¹¹ ‘interrupt’ his ‘prospects’ for the estate (p. 16), St Aubert expresses his outrage that he should destroy the natural scenery in an attempt at progress. That their taste should be at odds is no great surprise considering the kind of worldly concerns that dominate Monsieur Quesnel in Paris. Radcliffe’s narrator records: ‘By a man [Monsieur Quesnel] of such disposition, it is not surprising that the virtues of St Aubert should be overlooked; or that his pure taste, simplicity, and moderated wishes, were considered as marks of a weak intellect, and of confined views’ (p. 16). While Monsieur Quesnel represents the prevailing proto-capitalistic view, St Aubert understands far better the rarity and fragility of what has been created at La

¹⁰ While Ecofeminism has been sometimes criticised as essentialist, this scene cannot be regarded as essentialist precisely because it insists on a place for the masculine as well as the feminine.

¹¹ In 2004, Washington Football Team owner Daniel Snyder clear cut over 130 trees on his estate to improve his view of the Potomac River. This clear cutting included trees on federally protected land (Craig, 2006). The inspector general of the Interior Department issued a report in 2006 that, while it cleared Snyder of wrongdoing, noted that federal officials should have followed the advice of park biologists and horticulturalists, who advised against the destruction of the trees. The same report found that a Park Services employee acted inappropriately when he intervened on Snyder’s behalf (Craig, 2006).

Vallée, and it is St Aubert and Emily's view of nature—that it is worthwhile on its own and without need for 'improvement'—that rules this early part of the narrative. While Emily may be unaware of the terrors that await her, St Aubert is a man who understands too well the world of men like Quesnel and the villainous Montoni, which is why he extracts a vow on his deathbed from Emily that she should 'never, whatever may be your future circumstances, *sell* the chateau' (p. 76). This underscores both the fragility of the world created at La Vallée and its place in the novel as a bastion of physical, moral, religious, and rational reflection and contemplation.

The Sublime Udolpho: A Landscape of Terror

Although the novel is bookended by scenes in the picturesque La Vallée, La Vallée only comes into focus through its juxtaposition against Udolpho castle, a place saturated with Burkean sublime. After the death of her father, Emily is sent to live with Madame Cheron, her aunt, who marries the villainous Montoni, the owner of Udolpho castle. Just as the landscape in the early sections of the novel reveals the nature of individuals and their values, the same is true in the Ecophobic landscapes of the Burkean sublime realm of Udolpho castle. In stark contrast to La Vallée, which is situated within the natural world, Udolpho castle dominates the landscape around it: 'Silent, lonely, and sublime it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary reign' (p. 216). On this front, Kilgour (1985) calls Udolpho a 'gothic version of La Vallée' (p. 119), and Mary Poovey (1979) suggests that 'Udolpho is the sinister inverse of La Vallée' (p. 319). But La Vallée and Udolpho represent more than just a contrast in taste; they are opposing ways of theorising landscape that offer markedly different relationships and lives for women: La Vallée blends into landscape whereas Udolpho dominates it.

The values of this world become apparent even before Emily is taken to Udolpho by Montoni. Burke's alignment of the sublime with masculinity here is crucial because it codes spaces that engage in Burkean sublime as patriarchal by their very nature. Kilgour (1995) rightly posits of Udolpho castle: 'The castle's sublime rule over the natural world mirrors Montoni's total authority over Emily within it' (p. 119). Thus, Udolpho comes to represent a world out of balance, unable to engage with the natural landscape and only intent to dominate it as, in Burke's formulation, the sublime (masculine) dominates the beautiful (feminine). Here, I should pause a moment to explore the link between the oppression of women and the

subjugation of nature. Ecofeminist critic Mary Mellor (2003) argues that there is a strong connection between the two, contending that both women and nature, because they are devalued by Western socioeconomic systems or only thought of as resources to be exploited, 'are thrown into a contingent relationship as the despised and rejected by-products of (or precursors) of "modernity"' (p. 16). Read this way, Udolpho's domination of the natural world around it is a mirror image of Montoni's domination of Emily.

Like landscape, Emily—as a woman—is simply an asset that can be traded in order to further Montoni's ambitions. She is forced to submit to his will regardless of her own wishes. For Montoni, she is little more than a means to increase his own fortune, as she is due to inherit all of her father's estates on his death. Initially, it appears as if Montoni is simply content to auction her off to Count Morano, who appears to be the highest bidder, but when that plan is thwarted, Montoni removes her to Udolpho and keeps her a prisoner. Either way, she is dominated by male will and is left devoid of agency, as she seemingly has no power to determine her own fate. Count Morano, although eventually removed from the narrative, is hardly a better masculine option for Emily or La Vallée since anyone willing to participate in this kind of exchange with Montoni would almost certainly view both Emily's body and La Vallée equally as a resource to be exploited for personal pleasure and profit. In short, Morano would simply reenact the patriarchal oppression of Burkean sublime visited upon Emily by Montoni. And it is in the domination of patriarchal Burkean sublime that Radcliffe locates much of the terror in the novel.

The role of Ecophobia in this landscape comes into focus once Montoni removes himself and his 'family' to Udolpho castle. Shortly before arriving at Udolpho, which is situated on a peak in the Appenines, her carriage traverses forbidding and indeed dangerous landscapes: 'they entered a narrow pass of the mountains, which [...] exhibited only tremendous crags, impending over the road, where no vestige of humanity, or even of vegetation, appeared, except here and there the trunk and scathed branches of an oak, that hung nearly headlong from [a] rock' (1998: p. 215). To put it bluntly, this is what Yi-Fu Tuan (1979) would term a landscape of fear informed by Burke's theories on the sublime. Radcliffe's description of Udolpho includes such terms as 'solitary', 'obscurity', as 'silent' (pp. 215-216), all of which directly echo terms associated with the sublime in Burke (1998: pp. 65-66, 69). The castle and its surrounding landscape, combined with her justified fears of Montoni, render Emily's imagination uncontrollable: 'her imagination, ever awake to circumstance, suggested

even more terrors, than her reason could justify' (Radcliffe, 1998: p. 217). Despite the novel's early picturesque sections, this is the landscape that we often think of when considering Gothic nature.¹² Forbidding, foreboding, and dangerous, the landscape of Burkean sublime is a landscape of terror.

This landscape of terror and Udolpho castle itself engender Estok's (2009) aforementioned theory of Ecophobia. According to Estok, 'Ecophobia is an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world' that is often at the root of 'what makes looting and plundering of animal and nonanimal resources possible' (p. 208). Unlike St Aubert, who inhabits an estate that finds balance with nature, Montoni's Udolpho castle is reminiscent of its owner, only valuing its landscape for the ways in which it can be exploited for his own personal gain. Montoni might not hate landscape, but he is not indifferent to it either. To him, it is something to be controlled, traded, or destroyed according to his own needs. This is seen through his willingness to destroy the landscape around it when his enemies lay siege to the castle. He protects Emily in the process, but only because Emily's worth to Montoni is based on her value to him because of the estates she controls, and Montoni has no qualms about destroying the landscape around Udolpho in order to protect himself and the riches he can access through Emily from his enemies.

Additionally, the landscape creates terror in Emily and in anyone who stumbles upon it, a terror that Montoni wields as a means of control. Estok (2014) argues in another article that Ecophobia derives much of its power from its association with pain and death, contending that it is nature's ability to kill or injure us that drives our attempt to control it. Burke's *Enquiry* makes much the same point about the empirical sublime: 'For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain' (1998: p. 53; see also: p. 119). The association between death and Ecophobia, and death and Burkean sublime is a demonstration of the ways in which landscape is conceived in the minds of many: it is not something to be cherished, treasured, and nurtured, but rather it is something to be controlled, contained, and exploited for personal gain.

¹² This term was first coined by Tom Hillard (2009) in his article, "'Deep into that Darkness Peering": An Essay on Gothic Nature'.

Moreover, the landscape around Udolpho also serves to entrap Emily both psychologically and physically. On a psychological level, the landscape, by its Burkean nature, removes Emily's ability to reason, and on a physical level, both its remote location and its dangerous cliffs keep Emily within its walls even before Montoni makes her his literal prisoner. Important to this is the notion of forced submission; Madame Montoni, echoing instructions from her husband, commands Emily to '*submit* to those, who know how to guide you better than yourself—I am determined that you shall be *conformable*' (1998: p. 137, emphases added). Just as Montoni attempts to make landscape submit and be conformable to his own needs, he expects the same from Emily. Unlike other Radcliffe novels in which rape/forced marriage is the key point of terror, Montoni's goal in exploiting her body for profit has to do with the lands she controls, and her body is, nonetheless, simply another natural resource to be exploited for his own gain. Yet, like other Radcliffean heroines, Emily resists the patriarchal Burkean sublime world of Montoni. Heiland (2004) describes Radcliffean heroines as female protagonists who are forced to 'display a calculated resistance to the patriarchal plots of Burkean sublime' (p. 58), and Emily is no different from her counterparts in this regard, though perhaps her will to resist is even stronger because of her prior experiences with the picturesque world of La Vallée.

Despite Emily's best efforts to resist the patriarchal sublime, her time at Udolpho takes its toll on her and continually interrupts her ability to reason. Udolpho castle itself serves as the place where Emily is robbed of her ability to reason and Radcliffe appropriates Burkean sources of the sublime in order to describe these phenomena. Radcliffe (1998) writes of Emily's experiences at Udolpho, 'reason cannot establish her laws on subjects, lost into the *obscurity* of imagination' (p. 310, emphasis added), and later Emily thinks of Udolpho as an '*obscure* and *terrible* place' that confuses her to the point that she is 'overwhelmed with *terror*' and

becomes ‘unable to determine what conduct to pursue’ (1998: pp. 326-327, emphases added).¹³ The ability of Burkean sublime to disrupt Emily’s reason only becomes more pronounced as her stay at Udolpho continues and poses a greater threat than any other posed in the novel because she, like all good Radcliffean heroines must rely on her reason to escape.

The impact of Udolpho is the most dangerous element with which Emily must contend because her loss of reason dangerously interrupts her spiritual practice, growth and development. This comes into clearest focus just before Emily’s escape from Udolpho when she is removed because the enemies of Montoni have come to lay siege to the castle. Radcliffe takes that opportunity to lay siege to Burkean sublime and its ability to arrest religious practice. After her initial terror is removed and she leaves the Burkean landscape around Udolpho behind, she is able to experience natural landscape and the spiritual/religious renewal that comes with it: ‘The melancholy sighing of the wind among the pines, that waved high over the steeps, and the distant thunder of a torrent assisted her musings, and conspired with the wild scenery around to diffuse over her mind emotions solemn, yet not unpleasing’, yet even these thoughts are arrested by Burkean sublime and she is ‘soon interrupted by the distant roar of cannon echoing among the mountains’ (1998: p. 379). Visually, this return to picturesque landscape is striking to Emily and allows her mind to wander, indeed to be transported, towards higher thoughts.

For the first time since she arrived at Udolpho, Emily is able to positively experience the natural world and to embrace it and the godhead until it is interrupted by Burkean sublime, significantly, in the form of a cannon. In the *Enquiry*, Burke (1790) specifically points out ‘the successive firing of cannon at a distance’ (p. 76) as a cause of the sublime and employs artillery as an example of what he terms ‘excessive loudness’, which is ‘sufficient to overpower the

¹³ I should note that there is a rhetorical component to the disruption of reason. Earlier theorisations of the rhetorical sublime, such as the rhetorician known to eighteenth-century audiences as Longinus in his *On the Sublime* (1739), had indicated that truly sublime writing had the ability to transport the reader. Dennis (1704) and Addison (1712) had agreed with this conception of the sublime in at least part of their theorisations. Yet Burke removes the notion of transport entirely in his empirical aesthetic. Emily, an avid reader at La Vallée, finds herself unable to take solace in books at Udolpho. Radcliffe (1998) fills Emily’s failed attempts at reading with phrases that demonstrate her inability to focus on the text at hand, such as, ‘her attention wandered from the page’ (p. 236). Furthermore, Emily realises that she must be at peace to enjoy the rhetorical sublime that Longinus describes: ‘Emily sought to lose the sense of her own cares in the visionary scenes of the poet; but she had again to lament the irresistible force of circumstances over the taste and powers of the mind; and that it requires a spirit at ease to be sensible even to the abstract pleasures of pure intellect’ (p. 362). Such interruptions of transport can be read as yet another way that Burkean sublime disrupts the ability to engage with the rhetorical sublime for those within its grasp.

soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror' (p. 75). In short, we see the overpowering and overwhelming nature of Burkean sublime and its ability to interrupt reason. For a Rational Dissenting author like Radcliffe, religious devotion was primarily achieved through a combination of reason and revelation (Philp, 1985), so any force powerful to interrupt to reason could also interrupt religious practice.

Escape to the Picturesque: The Return of Natural Order

When Emily is finally able to escape Udolpho and the tyranny of Montoni and the Ecophobic Burkean sublime, she is almost immediately able to experience again the wonders of picturesque landscape. She is able to behold 'all the charms of sylvan and pastoral landscape united', (Radcliffe, 1998: p. 428), which leads her to become 'thoughtful and silent' (p. 429). This, when read against the passage above, makes clear the role of the picturesque in religious practice. Moreover, her travels lead her to a relationship with Count de Villefort and his daughter Blanche, who share her taste for picturesque landscape and who represent many of the same values Emily enjoyed at La Vallée, including the insistence on balance between genders that marks the earlier sections of the novel.

Blanche and Emily quickly become friends and share the joy that the picturesque landscape brings to them both. Blanche also demonstrates an ability to find religious consolation in picturesque landscape. Radcliffe's narrator records a scene in which Blanche looks out over a picturesque landscape at dusk and reflects, 'The shadowy earth, the air, and ocean – all was still. Along the deep serene of the heavens, a few light clouds floated slowly, through whose skirts the stars now seemed to tremble, and now to emerge with purer splendour. Blanche's thoughts rose involuntarily to the Great Author' (1998: p. 446). Given this similarity of spirit and the shared values between them, it is little wonder that Emily and Blanche become fast friends. Moreover, this friendship blossoms in a picturesque landscape, reiterating the relationship between the picturesque and communal bonds, especially between women.

Count de Villefort also exhibits the generosity of spirit, appreciation of natural landscape, and gendered harmony that defines the picturesque world of the novel. The Count has recently inherited the picturesque lands of Languedoc that Emily escapes to when she flees Udolpho. The Count remembers these lands from his youth and it is noted that 'the scenery had never been remembered by him with indifference' (1998: p. 437). His appreciation of

picturesque landscape and his conviction that such land should be appreciated rather than exploited recalls St Aubert. Interestingly, it is this benevolent paternal figure that reunites Emily with La Vallée and Valancourt. Here it is important to contrast the benevolence and disinterestedness of the Count with the selfishness and tyranny of Montoni: for de Villefort, neither Emily nor her lands are, as they were with Montoni, mere resources to be exploited through an Ecophobic capitalistic exchange. This is essential because it both affirms his place in the picturesque community and reaffirms this community's commitment to the equitable treatment of women and landscape.

Furthermore, because he is part of the picturesque community of the novel, the Count is able to participate in the process of reunion and recovery of rational happiness; whereas Montoni, as representative of Burkean sublime, is only able to disrupt and intercept rational happiness. This contrast can then be read as another instance of Radcliffe's aesthetic knowledge guiding the narrative and privileging the picturesque over Burkean sublime precisely because the picturesque insists on a space for the feminine and all things connected to it.

Radcliffe's last endorsement of the picturesque in the novel occurs in the final pages where we see Emily and Valancourt united in marriage at La Vallée. Radcliffe's narrator describes them as restored 'to the beloved landscapes of their native country' and links their restoration to picturesque landscape to 'aspiring to moral and labouring for intellectual improvement – to the pleasure of enlightened society', while 'the bowers of La Vallée' became, once more, 'the retreat of goodness, wisdom and domestic blessedness' (p. 632). Kostelnick (1985) observes of this scene, 'And thus *Udolpho* comes full circle: the rudimentary vision of the picturesque ideal that Emily and Valancourt indulge in with their moral innocence at the outset [...] now reaches full fruition' (p. 46). The novel has, at this point, indeed come full circle and returned to picturesque landscape.

It may seem that little has changed from the beginning to the end; after all, unlike other Radcliffian texts, we end up where we began in many senses. Yet Radcliffe seems to acknowledge her role as interrogator of aesthetic values, and she clearly privileges the picturesque over Burkean sublime. For at this point, not only has the picturesque prevailed but Burkean sublime has entirely disappeared from the novel in the person of a now dead Montoni, who, along with Udolpho, never reappears in the text once Emily makes her escape. The end

of the novel only leaves us with the picturesque because that is the only space in which the novel can end well. Gone are the solely masculine sublime aspects of Burke's theorisation; they have been replaced with an aesthetic that allows and, in some respects, insists upon rational engagement with the natural world and a harmony between male and female achieved through the picturesque.

Conclusion

Allow me to step back for a moment by way of conclusion and make a couple of final points about *Udolpho* and Gothic landscapes more broadly. *Udolpho* is unquestionably Radcliffe's masterpiece and has survived as a shining example of the so-called Female Gothic (Moers, 1976). But, for me at least, *Udolpho* is as much aesthetic treatise as it is a novel. Radcliffe demonstrates through it and other novels, most notably *The Romance of the Forest* (1791),¹⁴ her deep understanding of and engagement with the eighteenth-century aesthetic theorisations of Burke and Gilpin. In Burke, Radcliffe finds the perfect outlet for Gothic terror: a series of forces so overwhelming as to render characters helpless in the face of them. In Gilpin, however, she finds a design for rational living and a space safe from exploitation by patriarchal desires for sex and money through the possession of women and the plundering of natural resources.

Yet Radcliffe is doing more than simply rehearsing aesthetics; instead, she is using them as the basis for social commentary. Indeed, the association of irrationality with the masculine sublime may represent Radcliffe's most radical statement in the novel. Ecofeminist critics have long noted the association of reason and masculinity, and the ways that association has sought to dominate, subjugate, and exploit both women and nature. Yet Radcliffe, by coding patriarchy and Ecophobic relationships with the natural world as *irrational*, places them outside of the bounds of the Cartesian conception and, more importantly for my purposes, reiterates the need for the inclusion of women and the natural world in any rational system. In short, Radcliffe's novel suggests, its sixteenth-century setting aside, that the patriarchal status quo is not a rational system because it depends on the exploitation of women and natural

¹⁴ *The Romance of the Forest* includes many of the same aesthetic distinctions as *Udolpho* and even includes a fairly long section on the wonders of natural religion. Chloe Chard (2009) finds several resonances in these sections of the novel with Rousseau's Savoyard Vicar from *Emile* (1764). She goes on to argue that Radcliffe draws on these sections from Rousseau's text in the formation of the character of La Luc, a character not dissimilar from the Count de Villefort and St Aubert in *Udolpho*.

resources. Radcliffe, through the picturesque, offers a vision of harmony between women and men, humans and nature as the height of humanity precisely because it enables reason.

I should also point out that this view of the world seems to be a particularly eighteenth-century conception. That is, Radcliffe wrote during a brief period when science and religion walked hand-in-hand. As the Scientific Revolution wore on and helped to fuel the Industrial Revolution, religion and science became further and further divorced from each other. As Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983) points out, the early days of the Scientific Revolution were able to ‘reclaim [nature] as an icon of the divine reason manifest in natural law’, but eventually became consumed by a, ‘strict dualism of transcendent intellect and dead matter’ (p. 19). Radcliffe was an active writer in the last days of ‘divine reason manifest in natural law’. It would only be centuries later, and really only in the last 40-plus years, that we would return—and even then, only some of us—to a place of gendered harmony and respect for the natural world.

Yet Radcliffe was not naïve. She understood the world in which she lived, and she understood that world was patriarchal to its core. Little could she have imagined the horrors Ecophobic patriarchy has inflicted on the natural world for profit and for sport, and yet her novel demonstrates the sad gendered reality of the world in which she lived. Throughout the novel, sublime terror always destroys picturesque reflection. The masculine continually disrupts and defeats anything that contains rationality or femininity. The truth is La Vallée will remain an oasis and a world almost defying description due to the patriarchal dominance that surrounds it. Perhaps that is why these picturesque, protestant paradises of Radcliffe are never narrated in any of her novels. Emily and Valancourt do not go out into the world to preach the picturesque gospel, but rather they retreat from it so as not to become corrupted by it.

The final point I would like to make is that Radcliffe seems to be often remembered but seldom thoroughly read when it comes to Gothic novels. What I mean by that is that she is remembered far more for her terrifying landscapes than her picturesque ones. Too often, when we think of Radcliffe’s landscapes or of the landscapes in Gothic novels more broadly, we think of a kind-of spooky laundry list of terrifying and sublime landscapes that include something akin to John Dennis’s list of rhetorically sublime elements in his *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704): ‘Gods, Daemons, Hell, Spirits and Souls of Men, Miracles, Prodigies, Enchantments, Witchcrafts, Thunder, Tempests, raging Seas, Innundations [sic],

Torrents, Earthquakes, Volcanoes, Monsters, Serpents, Lions, Tygers [sic], Fire, War, Pestilence, &c' (p. 361), but the landscapes of Gothic novels are more than that, at least in Radcliffe. Moreover, even her terrifying landscapes are not mere parlor tricks as they are in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) or Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). For Radcliffe, aesthetic choices demonstrate character, virtue, morality, and values, and they reveal an individual's character at least as much as they shape it.

This, to me, suggests that we should broaden our understanding of the uses of landscape in Gothic fiction and come to view Gothic landscapes as more diverse than simply spooky, haunted, and damned. Part of what makes the Gothic so enduring is that it is so flexible and malleable. The Gothic can be whatever we need it to be, and it can fit into whatever mold we choose. It can be camp, and it can be serious. It can find its way into horror movies and detective novels. It can meet the needs of our own moment and, indeed, of any moment. Because it is so broad and inclusive, we should search for that diversity in our search for its landscapes and what those landscapes tell us about our own world or the one we might create. Our exploration may yield surprising results.

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BIOGRAPHY

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‘Monkey-Advice and Monkey-Help’: Isak Dinesen’s EcoGothic

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ABSTRACT

EcoGothic dramatises the leakiness of systems, the fuzziness of boundaries and the precariousness of habitats, bodies, organisms and identities, as objects, animals, acts and substances that appear to violate the laws of nature take on forms of agency ordinarily attributed only to the human subject. EcoGothic is less a new type of Gothic than it is a matter of examining perhaps very well-known texts with a new and enhanced attentiveness to their environmental significance. In this essay, I study Isak Dinesen’s ‘The Monkey’ (1935) through the lens of this emerging field of critical inquiry. I first consider the story’s haunted architectural setting, then examine the male protagonist’s fluid embodiment, and finally analyse the story’s shocking conclusion. Tackling a notoriously queer and puzzling text, I am concerned less to ‘solve’ the story’s weird mysteries than to show how Dinesen uses specific Gothic conventions—uncanny buildings, disintegrating bodies and supernatural transformations—to adumbrate a way of thinking that conceives of human existence less in terms of enclosure, separation, stability, self-sufficiency and sovereignty and more in terms of uncanny coexistence, permeability, flow, exchange, symbiosis and interpenetration.

Introduction

Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen’s breakthrough publication *Seven Gothic Tales* (1935) went through various titles including *Nozdref’s Cook: Nine Tales* and *Tales by Nozdref’s Cook* before it ended up under the rubric of ‘Gothic’ (Brantly, 2002: p. 12).¹ Dinesen’s labeling decision has often puzzled critics, especially in Dinesen’s native Denmark, where the term

¹ Working under the male pseudonym Isak Dinesen, Karen Blixen first wrote *Seven Gothic Tales* in English and later rewrote it in Danish as *Syv fantastiske fortællinger* (*Seven Fantastic Tales*). In this essay, I follow the dominant tradition among English-language publishers and academic critics, who generally refer to her by her *nom de plume*.

‘Gothic’ (‘gotisk’) primarily refers to medieval church architecture and has not traditionally been part of the literary-analytical vocabulary. Asked about her nomenclature, Dinesen later explained that ‘[w]hen I used the word “Gothic” I didn’t mean the real Gothic, but the imitation of the Gothic, the Romantic age of Byron, the age of that man [...] who built Strawberry Hill, the age of the Gothic revival’ (Cate, 1959: p. 153). Many critics have recognised Dinesen as a self-conscious latecomer and witty respondent to the rich traditions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Gothic, fin-de-siècle Gothic and female Gothic (James, 1983; Black, 1985; Stambaugh, 1985; Aiken, 1990: pp. 67-83; Rees, 2006; Kastbjerg, 2009). In this essay, I study ‘The Monkey’, perhaps ‘the most Gothic of [Dinesen’s] tales’ (James, 1983: p. 43), through the lens of the emerging field of critical inquiry known as ‘ecoGothic’ (Smith & Hughes, 2013).

When ecocriticism first emerged approximately twenty-five years ago, participants in the fledgling movement particularly gravitated towards Romantic lyric poetry, pastoral nature writing, and other forms of ‘nature-endorsing’ (Soper, 1998: p. 61) literature, but with few exceptions they tended to disregard or dismiss Gothic. More recent ecocritics, however, have discovered Gothic’s power to ‘question our vaunted humanity as well as the “nature” to which it is conventionally opposed’ (Garrard, 2012: p. 218). Inspired by Jacques Derrida and Donna Haraway, for example, Timothy Morton (2007) interprets Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) as a text of ‘dark ecology’ that breaks down nostalgic aestheticising conceptions of ‘Nature (with a capital n)’ (p. 162) and forces readers to confront ‘the sticky mess that we’re in and that we are’ (p. 187). Jeffrey Weinstock (2017) similarly reads the memorable opening scene of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), where Prince Conrad is crushed by a massive steel helmet, to suggest that ‘the contemporary nonhuman turn finds its roots precisely in the iconoclasm of the Gothic’ (p. 61) and that ‘Gothic things are finally more lively than people’ (p. 67). ‘EcoGothic’, then, is less a new type of Gothic than it is a matter of examining perhaps very well-known texts with a new and enhanced attentiveness to their significance as ‘environmental texts’ (Buell, 1995: p. 7). In Gothic fictions, ancient curses are fulfilled, integrities are compromised, materialities become insurgent, and beings believed to be dead and inert acquire a troubling, sometimes monstrous vitality. While it may lack the high cultural prestige and direct ecopolitical poignancy of more ‘biophilic’ (Wilson, 1984) genres, ecoGothic dramatises the leakiness of systems, the fuzziness of boundaries, and the precariousness of habitats, bodies, organisms and identities, as objects, animals, acts, and substances that appear to violate the laws of nature take on forms of agency ordinarily attributed only to the human subject.

‘Real art must always involve some witchcraft’ (1978: p. 181) wrote Dinesen in 1929, and in the course of her writing career she deliberately adopted the witch, a ‘key figure of European Gothic literature’ (Johnston, 2014: p. 595), as one of her alter egos (see also Stambaugh, 1988). Dinesen embraced Gothic modes and personae, I argue, because these lend themselves particularly well to questioning deeply rooted conceptions about sexual identity, embodiment, human-animal difference, the status of the natural world, the agentic power of different beings, and the special place of humans as the driving forces of history.² Against the ‘fantasy figure called the human who stands alone: dominant, controlled and powerful’ (Fudge, 2008: p. 15), Dinesen’s ecoGothic aligns itself with ‘the posthuman’, which I understand not in temporal succession to humanism, but as a critical strain that can be traced within a plurality of cultural texts and discourses interrogating what it means to be human (Wolfe, 2010; Braidotti, 2013; Nayar, 2013; Mortensen, 2018). My interpretation of ‘The Monkey’, then, supplements the strong traditions of psychoanalytic, feminist, post-feminist, and poststructuralist Dinesen criticism, even as it challenges dominant human-centred approaches with explicit consideration of her stories’ ‘dis-anthropocentric’ (Iovino and Opperman, 2014: p. 8) stratagems. To explore how Dinesen bewitches her readers, I will first consider the story’s haunted architectural setting, then examine the male protagonist’s fluid embodiment, and finally analyse the story’s shocking conclusion. Tackling a notoriously queer and puzzling text, I am concerned less to ‘solve’ the story’s weird mysteries than to show how Dinesen uses specific Gothic conventions—uncanny buildings, disintegrating bodies and supernatural transformations—to adumbrate a way of thinking that conceives of human existence less in terms of enclosure, separation, stability, self-sufficiency, and sovereignty and more in terms of uncanny coexistence, permeability, flow, exchange, symbiosis, and interpenetration. By blurring the boundaries of the human home, body and identity, I argue, Dinesen plays monkey tricks with modern self-understandings and challenges us to think beyond anthropocentricity.

The Story

Set during the early nineteenth century in one of ‘the Lutheran countries of northern Europe’ (Dinesen, 1994: p. 109), which Aage Kabell (1968) specifies as Prussia (p. 127), ‘The Monkey’

² Black observes that Dinesen used ‘the fantastic mode’ not merely to ‘entertain’ but also ‘to question, criticise, and put into doubt the moral conventions of her age’ (1985: p. 380).

recreates the Gothic's characteristic atmosphere (of unease, foreboding and mystery), reuses many of the genre's familiar physical trappings (a convent, a castle, a dark forest, a magic potion), and resuscitates some of its most familiar characters (a witchlike prioress, an obsessive count, a longsuffering virgin, a melancholic lover). Dinesen's narrative pits older and younger members of two obscurely interwoven families against each other in an amoral story 'full of unspeakable secrets' (Rees, 2006: p. 23) that self-consciously exploits the Gothic's association with seduction, madness, decadence, intoxication, monstrosity, sexual deviance, supernatural excess, and shocking revelation. At the same time, it works towards 'queering' normative conceptions of sexual difference, subjective wholeness, inviolable nature, mind-body dualism, and human exceptionalism.

The young soldier Boris comes from an aristocratic family, but he has disgraced himself by involvement in a homosexual scandal. Now he seeks advice from his aunt Cathinka, who is both the owner of the titular pet monkey and the prioress of a former convent that has been converted into a home for elderly women. Boris has decided to get married, and his aunt concocts a scheme: Boris will beguile and wed Athena Hopballehus, the daughter of a neighboring nobleman recently made wealthy by winning a decade-long lawsuit. The count of Hopballehus and his daughter live in isolation from the surrounding world, but a mysterious exchange of letters hints that there exists a prior, perhaps incestuous liaison between the two families. Boris' proposal places the strong-willed and able-bodied but sexually inexperienced Athena in the vulnerable position of the Gothic heroine, and she rejects his suit, claiming that she 'will never marry' (1994: p. 135). The prioress takes charge, and she invites Athena to a 'great supper of seduction' (1994: p. 139) that she hopes will weaken her defenses and seal the alliance. The prioress plies Athena with rich food and wine, and when she retires to her room the aunt feeds her nephew an aphrodisiac and commands him to go and seduce (or rape) Athena. Boris kisses Athena against her will, a fight ensues, and Boris retreats, having lost two of his teeth. On the following morning, the prioress' machinations are interrupted when the window is broken and her little African monkey enters. The prioress tries to escape, but the monkey pursues her, leaps onto her head and strips off her lace cap, at which point she transforms into the monkey, and the monkey into her.

Uncanny Domesticity

The vogue for Gothic began with an architectural project (the construction of Horace Walpole's faux-medieval Strawberry Hill), and Gothic fictions regularly borrow their titles from specific fictional buildings (Otranto, Udolpho, Northanger Abbey, Usher, Wuthering Heights, Bleak House etc.). The plot of 'The Monkey' alternates between two Gothic buildings: Hopballehus, a 'late baroque' family castle, 'majestic as the Sphinx itself', but 'now baroquely dilapidated and more than half a ruin' with a sense of 'doom [...] hanging over it' (Dinesen, 1994: p. 122); and the prioress' Closter Seven, a centuries-old all-women convent, where it appears to Boris that something is 'not right', 'quite wrong', and 'out of order' (p. 133).

Since the time of Matthew G. Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) and Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), abbeys, convents and monasteries have been highly conventional (if not clichéd) settings of Gothic fiction. Closter Seven is described in 'The Monkey' as a retreat

'for unmarried ladies and widows of noble birth who here pass the autumn and winter days of their lives in a dignified and comfortable routine, according to the traditions of the houses. Many of these institutions are extremely wealthy, own great stretches of land, and have had, during the centuries, inheritances and legacies bequeathed to them. A proud and kindly spirit of past feudal times seems to dwell in the stately buildings and to guide the existence of the communities.'

(p. 109)

Closter Seven is not only a house of a certain kind but also a home providing a sense of privacy, comfort and security: 'Closter Seven was a small world of its own, and moved in a particular atmosphere of peace and immutability' (p. 111). According to Mary Douglas (1991), 'home is space under control' (p. 289), while for Yuri Lotman (1990), home 'is one's own space [...] the world of the human personality, a world that stands up to the elements and to anything which belittles and denigrates the life of the individual' (p. 97). In Maria Kaika's (2004) analysis, the very idea of the modern bourgeois home is premised on the need to control and exclude nonhuman factors and influences: 'The purpose of building a home through human history has been [...] to create a familiar environment by establishing a high level of control over the interaction between the edifice and its environment' (p. 272). 'Home' is where humans feel safe, inviolable, and in command.

Closter Seven, however, is a distinctly uncanny sort of home, where the meaning of domesticity, if understood in purely human(ist) terms, is tested and challenged. For one thing, the house is not occupied by the conventional heterosexual nuclear family often deemed synonymous with bourgeois domesticity, but by a community of widows and spinsters led by a 'Virgin Prioress' (Dinesen, 1994: p. 109). In addition to its contingent of 'cloistered women' (p. 111), moreover, the convent houses a sizeable group of nonhuman inhabitants:

'[T]he convent of Closter Seven held, coordinately with its estimable female population, a whole world of pets of all sorts, and was well aware of the order of precedence therein. There were here parrots and cockatoos, small dogs, graceful cats from all parts of the world, a white Angora goat, like that of Esmeralda, and a purple-eyed young fallow deer. There was even a tortoise which was supposed to be more than a hundred years old.' (p. 109)

The nonhumans of Closter Seven comprise a complex and differentiated assortment of both traditional and untraditional pets coming from different countries and belonging to native as well as exotic species. Chief among these is the prioress' monkey, which has been brought to Europe from Africa:

'[A] little gray monkey [...] had been given [to the prioress] by her cousin, Admiral von Schreckenstein, on his return from Zanzibar, and of which she was very fond. When she was at her card table, a place where she spent some of her happiest hours, the monkey was wont to sit on the back of her chair, and to follow with its glittering eyes the course of the cards as they were dealt out and taken in. At other times it would be found, in the early mornings, on top of the stepladder in the library, pulling out brittle folios a hundred years old, and scattering over the black-and-white marble floor browned leaves dealing with strategy, princely marriage contracts, and witches' trials.' (p. 109)

Neither Denmark nor Germany, of course, has native simian species, but the prioress' monkey has made itself at home in the convent and the surrounding grounds, where it moves about as it pleases: 'From time to time, particularly in the autumn, when nuts were ripening in the hedges along the roads and in the large forests that surrounded the convent, it happened that the Prioress' monkey would feel the call of a freer life and would disappear for a few weeks or a

month, to come back of its own accord when the night frosts set in' (p. 110). The monkey's precise relationship to the prioress is the subject of much speculation among characters, but it remains shrouded in mystery until the end of the story (and even after). It is clear, however, that the monkey enjoys a special privilege as 'the Prioress' favourite', whose 'whims' are treated with 'forbearance' (p. 110).

Dinesen was interested in homes and domesticity, publishing stories in the American women's magazine *The Ladies' Home Journal* and the Danish equivalent *Hjemmet (The Home)*, and striking visitors with her eccentric style of homemaking first at her Kenya coffee farm house and subsequently in her home at Rungstedlund north of Copenhagen. In 'The Monkey', Dinesen imagines human spaces ecoGothically, suggesting the participation of nonhuman forces and the ongoing entwinement of interior and exterior, living and non-living, public and private, culture and nature. When Boris visits Hopballehus, for example, he notes how '[t]he light of the setting sun seemed to have soaked into the dull masses of stone. They reddened and glowed with it until the whole place became a mysterious, a glorified, abode, in which the tall windows shone like a row of evening stars' (p. 123). The convent parlor's windows overlooking the 'autumnal garden' are covered with 'heavy curtains which had on them borders of flower garlands done in cross-stitch' (p. 113). Supper is served on china 'painted with pink roses' (p. 134) and set on a 'table [that] was prettily decorated with camellias from the orangery', while 'upon the snow-white tablecloth, amongst the clear crystal glasses, the old green wineglasses threw delicate little shadows, like the spirit of a pine forest in summer' (p. 139). Athena's bedroom 'was filled with the scent of incense and flowers', a 'large bouquet decorat[ing] the table near the bed'. Its 'floor had a wine-colored carpet with roses in it, which, near the lamps, seemed to be drinking in the light, and farther from them looked like pools of dark crimson into which one would not like to walk' (p. 151). Rather than shielding inhabitants from the outside world, the convent's décor seems to invite it in. The prioress presides over an architecture of porous boundaries, fractured fault lines and compromising co-habitations.

By foregrounding nonhumans' (especially the monkey's) presence in the (un)making of human space, 'The Monkey' works towards Gothicising the meaning of 'home'. We may think that homes provide 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1990: pp. 92-100), and we may imagine that we are safe, inviolable, and in control of the things that surround us in our home spaces. Indeed, '[v]iews of home as a place that is separate from nature have long been central to

Western cultural understandings of home as a safe, secure, and comfortable space' (Power, 2012: pp. 6-7). But some recent thinking suggests that home is also infiltrated and shaped by the nonhuman rhythms, forces and agencies that inhabit, traverse and become part of the house-as-home. Kaika (2004), for example, argues that a home does not exist as an autonomous space separate from its environment and governed by disciplinary interiority, but emerges in a process involving the materials that it is built from, the energy flows that it utilizes and the various creatures (human and nonhuman) who come to live in its nooks and crannies. Derrida (2002) deconstructs domesticity, when he analyses how an animal's (his cat's) powerful gaze and presence in the most private space of human habitation (the bathroom) begins to destabilise the human sense of power and complacency. And Haraway (2008) imagines homemaking in terms of 'naturecultural' exchange, reciprocity and relationality always being made and remade, never finished or closed. Haraway's proposition is that homes are 'contact zones' produced by relationships between human and other-than-human 'companion species', spaces of multicity and heterogeneity where a host of agents with an array of different intentions meet, coexist and jostle.

Dinesen's Gothic tale recasts the domestic habitat as less 'an oppressive *domus*' than an 'inter-species *oikos*' (Acampora, 2004: p. 220), or even a 'bestly space' (Philo and Wilbert, 2000) where nonhumans begin to evade or resist the placements assigned to them by humans. The prioress' pet monkey is both literally and symbolically messy, disarranging the library and upsetting the structures that underpin human thinking and practice. Both wild and domesticated, African and Danish, the monkey straddles boundaries and oscillates between human and nonhuman spaces, disrupting the territorialisations associated with the social order. A foreign importation, it defamiliarises the familiar landscape of 'lawns and avenues' (Dinesen, 1994: p. 113), 'fir plantation[s]' (p. 117), and 'sunny slopes' (p. 120), and it undomesticates the homely interior of 'cozy room[s]' with 'lamps of blue china' (p. 134) and 'table[s] prettily decorated' (p. 139). It is typically seen in movement, 'swiftly mounting the branches to disappear in the crowns of the forest' (p. 110), running 'across the road and [...] into the deeper black shadows of the Prioress' shrubbery' (p. 133) or 'squirm[ing] up the doorcase' (p. 161) and 'jump[ing] onto a pedestal' (p. 162).

As an anomalous and contradictory 'man-animal' (Leach, 1966: p. 45), the monkey draws attention to the hybridity that characterises Closter Seven. A hybrid of the Danish 'kloster' and the English 'cloister', 'closter' derives from the Latin 'claustrum' ('enclosure').

‘Convent’, on the other hand, stems from the Latin ‘conventus’, which means ‘assembly’ or ‘company’. Like other privileged spaces in Dinesen’s fiction and non-fiction, Closter Seven is less a cloister than a convent, a more-than-human community where different beings convene, contend and mesh with each other. Impure and multiple, its culture is the product of several coexisting (but not always collaborating) presences:

‘It was the general opinion, or a standing joke amongst the ladies of the convent, that the Prioress, during these periods [of the monkey’s absence], would become silent and the victim of a particular restlessness, and would seem loth to act in the affairs of the house, in which at ordinary times she showed great vigor. Amongst themselves they called the monkey her *Geheimrat*, and they rejoiced when it was to be seen again in her drawing-room, a little chilled after its stay in the woods.’ (p. 110)

Dignifying the monkey as the prioress’ ‘Geheimrat’ (privy councilor) in this way suggests that Gothic houses and indeed all human *oikoi* (households) are only in part human-made and -controlled. Whether castles or convents, Gothic buildings are not the exclusive products of the human builders who designed them and the owners who inhabit them. Such structures invariably host the ‘other’ in the form of nonhuman beings, materials, elements or processes that are simultaneously inside yet outside, recognisable yet unfamiliar, homely yet unhomely. For Dinesen as for Freud, the human ‘ego is not the master in its own house’ (qtd. Royle, 2003: p. 59). Things in the domestic sphere are less domesticated than they might appear. There is always monkey business in progress and other-than-human strangers to be reckoned with.

Fluid Embodiment

In addition to making human built environments strange, ‘The Monkey’ also Gothicises the human body, foregrounding its ‘trans-corporeal’ (Alaimo, 2010) interconnectedness with other bodies and with the biological-material world. The main plot of ‘The Monkey’ centres on the prioress’ machinations to ensure the marriage of Boris and Athena to unite the two families – a scheme that can only succeed if she is able to manipulate the independent-minded Athena into compliance. This narrative recuperates familiar storylines from Gothic texts, where scenes of menace, constraint, entrapment, and violation are common, and where a vulnerable young woman, such as Emily St Aubert in Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) or Lucy

Westenra in Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), frequently finds herself beset by an older, implacable authority figure. Throughout these proceedings, Boris, who is the main focaliser of the story, is positioned in ways that trouble common humanist understandings of the human body as a bounded, autonomous, intact, and substantial entity.

The posthumanist feminist Stacy Alaimo (2010) coins the concept 'trans-corporeality' to situate the human body as always already enmeshed and entangled in material exchanges with other bodies and with the physical and biological world. As embodied beings, Alaimo argues, we are literally part of our environment, which 'is always the very substance of ourselves' (2010: p. 4). In 'States of Suspension: Trans-Corporeality at Sea', Alaimo writes about the fluids that flow within and across human bodies and nonhuman environments, as she revisits Rachel Carson's claim that 'each of us carries in our veins a salty stream in which the elements sodium, potassium, and calcium are combined in almost-the same proportions as in sea water' (qtd. Alaimo, 2012: p. 482). A certain powerful western tradition holds that human bodies are (and should be) solid, separate, stable, closed, and controlled, Alaimo argues, but thinking about flows and fluidity 'renders the human permeable' (p. 477) and suggests that we are not sovereign masters of our own bodily destinies. The fact that '[t]he sea surges through the bodies of all terrestrial animals, including humans' (p. 482) thus helps conceptualize the human self as 'substantially and perpetually interconnected with the flows of substances and the agencies of environments' (p. 476).

Seven Gothic Tales opens with 'The Deluge at Norderney', a story of watery environmental apocalypse in which fluidity overwhelms solidity both in the nonhuman and the human worlds (Dinesen, 1994: pp. 3-98). 'The Monkey' similarly contests the anthropocentric ideology of the 'sealed up, impermeable body' (Grosz, 1994: p. 199) with a 'whirlpool' (Dinesen, 1994: p. 122) or 'maelstrom' (p. 158) of flow. Streams in this story, in other words, do not stay safely on the outside. Rather, they constantly flow *into* the human body, crossing its boundaries, modifying its composition, compromising its autonomy and manifesting its material imbrication in external environments, systems, process, and substances. In the course of this story of 'wine-begotten hopes and moods' (Dinesen, 1994: p. 127), for example, characters ingest substantial quantities of alcoholic drink and other powerful fluids. During the visit to Hopballehus, the Baron compares their meeting to 'the wedding of Cana' and toasts his guest in a 'golden bottle' (p. 126) of wine. Later, during the 'great supper of seduction', Athena struggles to maintain her composure under the influence of the prioress' potent drink:

‘She had drunk very little wine in her life, and had never tasted champagne, and with the amounts which the hostess of the supper party poured into her, she ought rightly not to have been able to stand on her legs. But she had behind her a long row of ancestors who had in their time lain under all the heavy old oak tables of the province, and who now came to the assistance of the daughter of their race. Still the wine went to her head.’ (p. 140)

Boris, ‘who could drink more than most people’ (p. 140), is shown enjoying ‘two glasses [of wine], which did him good’ (p. 116), drinking ‘his wine in a happy mood’ (p. 128), and ‘pouring himself out some more coffee’ (p. 134). When Athena escapes to her bedchamber, ‘more than a little drunk’ (p. 140), the prioress orders Boris to approach her, force himself upon her, and thereby compel her to marry him. When Boris questions his ability to perform this task—“‘Aunt Cathinka”, said Boris, “you do not know, perhaps, but there is a limit to the effects of will-power in a man”” (p. 149)—his aunt prepares a liquid ‘love philter’ (p. 155):

‘The old woman kept staring at him. She stretched out her dry delicate little hand and touched him. Her face twisted in a wry little grimace. After a moment she moved around to the back of the room and brought back a bottle and a small glass. Very carefully she filled the glass, handed it to him, and nodded her head two or three times. In sheer despair he emptied it.

The glass was filled with a liquor of the color of very old dark amber. It had an acrid and rank taste. Acrid and rank were also the old dark-amber eyes of the woman, watching him over the rim of the glass. As he drank, she laughed. Then she spoke. Boris, strangely enough, afterward remembered these words, which he did not understand: ‘Help him now, you good faru’, she said.’ (pp. 149-150)

Gothic fiction is rife with scenes of poisoning, drugging, and intoxication, attesting to the genre’s preoccupation with questions of bodily (in)stability, (im)permeability, and power(lessness) (see for example Davidson, 2010). ‘Faru’ is Swahili for rhinoceros, and the story ‘The Dreamers’ tells us that ‘rhino-horn [...] is highly valued as an aphrodisiac’ (Dinesen, 1994: p. 339). As this passage of ‘Gothic pharmacology’ (Davidson, 210: p. 206) reveals, Boris’ body is less a protective armor (like a rhinoceros’ skin) than it is a permeable membrane

allowing for constant ‘trans-corporeal’ traffic. When Boris ingests the prioress’ compound, external substances enter his bloodstream, alter his body’s chemical balance, and cloud his judgment: ‘His blood leapt up to his brain; he hardly knew where he was. With failing breath he wondered if this was an effect of the Prioress’ love potion’ (p. 151).

Dinesen’s ecoGothic body is fluid rather than solid, permeable rather than closed, extensive with rather than separate from the nonhuman environment. Liquids in ‘The Monkey’ flow not only into but also *from* the human body into the external world. Most notably, when Boris confronts Athena in her bedchamber and insincerely declares his love—‘Athena [...] I have loved you all my life’—he is forcibly rebuffed, and a physical confrontation follows:

‘For a moment the light-eyed girl stared at him, bewildered. Then she drew herself up as a snake does when it is ready to strike. That she did not attempt to cry for help showed him that she had a clearer understanding of the situation, and of the fact that she had no friend in the house, than he had given her credit for; or perhaps her young broad breast harbored sheer love of combat. The next moment she struck out. Her powerful swift and direct fist hit him in the mouth and knocked out two of his teeth. The pain and the smell and taste of the blood which filled his mouth sent him beside himself. He let her go to try for a stronger hold, and immediately they were in each other’s arms, in an embrace of life and death.’ (p. 152)

Boris’ hemorrhage has been carefully prepared by the images of drinking, seepage, staining, and spilling that recur throughout the story and especially during the ‘great supper of seduction’, as when ‘in her excited state of mind [Athena] overturned her glass, breaking the stem of it, and the wine flowed over the tablecloth’ (p. 145). The flow of blood from Boris’ mouth, moreover, parallels the décor of the bedroom, whose ‘floor had a wine-colored carpet with roses in it, which, near the lamps, seemed to be drinking in the light, and farther from them looked like pools of dark crimson into which one would not like to walk’ (p. 151).

Previously ‘blood leapt up to his brain’, but now Boris feels blood leaving his body: ‘The blood kept coming into his mouth [...] Gasp[ing] for air, his mouth full of blood, he saw the whole room swaying from one side to another’ (p. 154). Mishler (1985: p. 443) and van Hees (1984: p. 20) analyse this climactic scene as a symbolic castration, while other critics (for

example Heede, 2001: pp. 200-201) comment on Dinesen's ironic reversal of the defloration plotted by the prioress. I interpret the blood flowing from Boris as a manifestation of bodily openness, materiality and environmentality, and thus as an important step in the story's Gothic unravelling of the sealed-off, armored, anti-ecological body. 'All orifices of the [classical] body are closed' (Bakhtin, 1984: p. 320), but Boris' corporeality is inscribed as 'a mode of seepage' (Grosz, 1994: p. 203). Boris' body is wounded, opened and unfinished, an abject body that ingests and emits, absorbs and leaks. His 'bleeding mouth', which is 'swelled badly' (Dinesen, 1994: p. 155) even at the end of the story, remains a tell-tale sign of the human body's incompleteness, fragility and inescapable participation in environmental processes.

More-than-Human Identity

Critical readers of 'The Monkey' must inevitably grapple with the story's conclusion, where a shocking supernatural transformation appears to take place:

[Boris] rose to open the window for it. "No! No!" shrieked the old woman in a paroxysm of horror. The knocking went on. The monkey obviously had something in its hand with which it was beating against the pane. The Prioress got up from her chair. She swayed in raising herself, but once on her legs she seemed alert and ready to run. But at the next moment the glass of the window fell crashing to the floor, and the monkey jumped into the room.

Still holding her frock with both hands, and bending double, as if ready to drop on all fours, madly, as if blinded by fright, she dashed along the wall. But still the monkey followed her, and it was quicker than she. It jumped upon her, got hold of her lace cap, and tore it from her head. The face which she turned toward the young people was already transformed, shriveled and wrinkled, and of dark-brown color. There was a few moments' wild whirling fight. Boris made a movement to throw himself into it, to save his aunt. But already at the next moment, in the middle of the red damask parlor, under the eyes of the old powdered general and his wife, in the broad daylight and before their eyes, a change, a metamorphosis, was taking place and was consummated.

The old woman with whom they had been talking was, writhing and disheveled, forced to the floor; she was scrunched and changed. Where she had been, a monkey was now crouching and whining, altogether beaten, trying to take refuge in a corner of the room. And where the monkey had been jumping about, rose, a little out of breath from the effort, her face still a deep rose, the true Prioress of Closter Seven.

The monkey crawled into the shade of the back of the room and for a little while continued its whimpering and twitching. Then, shaking off its misfortunes, it jumped in a light and graceful leap onto a pedestal, which supported the marble head of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, and from there it watched, with its glittering eyes, the behavior of the three people in the room.’ (pp. 161-162)

The subject of endless commentary, this scene seems to place the reader in ‘a narrative space of absolute undecidability’ (Aiken, 1990: p. 134). It is clear that Dinesen’s final ‘metamorphosis’ asks to be read with keen awareness of similar scenes of human-animal transformation in fantastic and Gothic texts including Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8 AD), Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (1912), and David Garnett’s *Lady into Fox* (1922).³ Yet even as this hair-raising tableau provides some semblance of closure, letting us see ‘the true Prioress of Closter Seven’ (p. 162), it compounds uncertainties and raises more problems than it resolves. Has the monkey, we wonder, occupied the prioress’ body consistently throughout the story, or only intermittently? Is the scheme to mate Boris and Athena the brainchild of the prioress or the monkey (or both), and will the ‘true prioress’ continue or discontinue the project to heterosexualise Boris and ‘put [Athena] in a cage’ (p. 142) now that she has taken (or resumed) her legitimate place? How can we trust that this denouement provides a ‘true’ revelation and not another twist in the prioress’ (and Dinesen’s) mystification of characters and readers? And what, if anything, does the prioress’ final quotation from Virgil’s *The Aeneid*—‘Discite justitiam, et non temnere divos’ (‘Learn justice, and do not feat the gods’) (p. 163)—prophesise for Boris’ and Athena’s future?

³ In an analysis strongly informed by critical animal studies, Ann-Sofie Lönngren places Dinsen’s story in this literary context (2015: p. 127-165).

Simians make frequent appearances in creative literature, where they often carry complex symbolic, satiric, and allegorical meanings (Romero, 2016). This crucial scene in Dinesen's story is, in the end, less a transformation or substitution, where one entity ('the true Prioress') replaces another ('the monkey'), than a revelation of irreducible interdependence. In the course of the story, Dinesen provides several clues suggesting that we understand the prioress-monkey relationship not in terms of stable, solid identities, but rather in terms of non-dualistic 'contamination' (Rorai, 2005: p. 126). The prioress, for example, has decorated her dining private dining room with exotic and oriental scenes, 'in a style that would appeal to a creature from Zanzibar' (Brantly, 2002: p. 35), and while still in human guise she confesses a strong, monkey-like preference for the forest environment:

'She sat for a little while in deep thought. Then she turned to the boy, her dark eyes clear as glass. "You have come through my new fir plantation", she said with the animation of a person talking about a hobby. "What do you think of it?" The planting and upkeep of forests were indeed among her greatest interests in life. They talked for some time pleasantly of trees. There was nothing for your health, she said, like forest air. She herself was never able to pass a good night in town or amongst fields, but to lie down at night knowing that you had the trees around you for miles, their roots so deep in the earth, their crowns moving in the dark, she considered to be one of the delights of life.' (Dinesen, 1994: p. 117)

At another point, the prioress goes 'up to the window, as if she meant to throw herself out' (p. 138), and when eating '[f]rom time to time she made use of a little gesture peculiar to her, of daintily scratching herself here and there with her delicately pointed little finger' (p. 144). As Brantly notes, '[l]ooking back over the tale, it is difficult to tell at any given time with whom one has been dealing' (2002: p. 35).

'What if what is "proper" to humankind were to be inhabited by the inhuman?' wonders Jean-Francois Lyotard (1991: p. 2). 'The Monkey' lets Aunt Cathinka's and the monkey's identities blur and bleed into each other from the beginning, making the prioress' status as a 'full' and 'pure' human being always-already problematic. Dinesen adds to the ambiguity surrounding the prioress' humanity, and humanity in general, by describing both the prioress and other human characters with a wide range of metaphors and similes drawn from the

nonhuman world.⁴ Thus, Boris notices how the prioress' 'eyes darted up and down the walls, like a rat that is shut up and cannot get out' (p. 160), while kissing her cheek makes him feel 'as if he had touched an electric eel' (p. 119). The prioress' mouth is 'like a very dainty little rosebud' (p. 139), and Boris and his soldier comrades are characterised as 'young flowers of the land' (p. 111), while the Count of Hopballehus cuts 'a striking figure [...] scrutinizing his visitor, like an old man gorilla outside his lair, ready for the attack' (p. 124). Athena, too, is imagined zoomorphically, as a 'young dove, a bird of the night' (136) 'standing [...] on one leg, like a big stork' (p. 130) or a 'young creature' having 'a pair of eyes for a young lioness or eagle' p. (129) and a voice like 'the lioness' roar' (p. 159). When Boris wrestles her in her bedroom, we are told that she draws herself up 'as a snake does when it is ready to strike' (p. 152).

Conclusion

Recent ecocritics' move towards 'the darker side of nature writing' (Hillard, 2009: p. 688) no doubt in part reflects the darkening mood among those who mourn the irretrievable losses to the world's ecosystems and understand that humanity's window to forestall catastrophic species extinctions and runaway climate change is rapidly closing. Gothic's blighted landscapes, treacherous environments and dysfunctional social relationships in many ways provide fitting objective correlatives to the ever-more apocalyptic prognostications for our environmentally precarious existence in the Anthropocene.

Yet interest in ecoGothic also flourishes because Gothic writing—the literature of collapsing boundaries, atavistic hauntings, contaminating invasions, and uncanny entanglements *par excellence*—offers instructive and potentially beneficial models for understanding human, more-than-human and perhaps especially posthuman being-in-the-world. Dinesen wrote to one of her correspondents in May 1954, expressing her misgivings about western culture's deeply entrenched separation of humanity and nature:

'Concerning my relation to nature: I cannot see that there is any boundary between nature and man. But I do not stupidly fail to understand that others

⁴ In another essay (Mortensen, 2018), I consider the problem of Dinesen's human-animal comparisons at greater length and with special emphasis on *Out of Africa* (1937).

perceive this boundary clearly, nor am I entirely ignorant what they mean by it [...] They say that nature is without memory – but I have often wished that I had a memory like a tree, which wears each annual ring carved into its being. In general I am not very capable of comprehending any “dualism”.’ (Dinesen, 1996, vol. 2: p. 213)

Dinesen’s Gothic tales, on the whole, are prominently concerned neither with celebrating the beauty of the natural world, nor with delineating the ramifications of humanity’s actions for the environment. Set in a highly artificial, meta-literary eighteenth- and nineteenth-century world of jaded aristocrats, disreputable clerics, impoverished opera singers, treacherous wet-nurses and clairvoyant gypsies, these stories neither problematise our capacity to either destroy or save the natural world, nor do they adumbrate a politically consistent environmental ethic for the troubled twenty-first century. But (and this is a key insight) this apparent lack of concern is not the expression of a philosophy that considers humanity to be raised above, or even clearly distinguishable from, the nonhuman world. On the contrary, the continual fascination and enduring power of these Gothic stories may stem precisely from their ability to remind us ‘that we are shaped not only by where we come from, but by [...] how we interact with the environment and all forms of life’ (Del Principe, 2014: p. 2).

Readers would write to Dinesen, begging her to decipher her cryptic tales, and on such occasions, she would invariably offer sphinxlike responses:

‘I am, as always when a reader asks me what a story means, quite uncomfortable, since I feel the only honest answer would be: “There is no meaning”. I think it would be a shame if an author could explain a story better with outside information than it explains itself! [...] If one is looking for a deeper meaning to ‘The Monkey’ it would probably be this: When human relations become unusually complicated or completely mixed up, let the monkey come [...] This is not a good explanation, but you are free to come up with a better one.’ (Dinesen, 1996: vol. 2, p. 433).

In this essay, rather than seeking to ‘explain’ the story, I have found meaning—what Dinesen calls ‘monkey-advice and monkey-help’ (ibid.)—in the story’s ‘proto-posthuman’ (Roden, 2015: p. 133) engagement with human domesticity, embodiment, and identity. In the final

scene of the story, the monkey in a defiant gesture mounts ‘the marble head of the philosopher Immanuel Kant’, and from there watches, ‘with its glittering eyes, the behavior of the three people in the room’ (Dinesen, 1994: p. 162). In Kant’s philosophy, rational thought, self-consciousness, and moral freedom are the unique and unifying characteristics that decisively separate ‘man’ from all other beings. ‘The fact that the human being can have the “I” in his representations’, Kant writes, ‘raises him infinitely above all other living beings on earth’ and makes him ‘an entirely different being from things, such as irrational animals, with which one can do as one likes’ (2006: p. 127).

A reply to Kantian anthropology is invoked at a previous moment in the story, during Boris’ visit to Hopballehus, when the conversation once again turns to monkeys:

‘The old Count started to speak of the Wendish idols, from whose country his own family originally came, and of which the goddess of love had the face and facade of a beautiful woman, while, if you turned her around, she presented at the back the image of a monkey. How, he asked, had these wild Nordic tribes come to know about monkeys? Might there have lived monkeys in the somber pine forests of Wenden a thousand years ago?’ (pp. 130-131)

On hearing this, Athena asks: ‘But how [...] did they know, in the case of that goddess of love, which was the front and which the back?’ (p. 131) – a question that ‘hangs suspended over the whole tale, implying [...] the impossibility of distinguishing front from back, proper from improper, human from animal’ (Rorai, 2005: p. 129).⁵ Dinesen’s writing in ‘The Monkey’, I have argued, removes her from the Kantian position and brings her closer to her Gothic predecessor Robert Louis Stevenson, who famously penned *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and whose writing suggests that ‘man is truly not one, but truly two’ (2006: p. 52), and to the posthumanist theorist Anna Tsing, who argues that ‘human nature is an interspecies relationship’ (qtd. Haraway, 2008: p. 19). In its ‘humanimal’ indeterminacy and multiplicity, Dinesen’s pre-Christian statue presents characters and readers with a possible alternative to the modern ‘idol’ of the unified Kantian subject. Both human and nonhuman,

⁵ As Hans Brix notes, Dinesen must have learned about this ancient pagan idol, called ‘Sieba’ or ‘Siwa’, from B. S. Ingemann’s *Grundtræk til en Nord-Slavisk og Vendisk Gudelære / Fundamentals of a North-Slavic and Wendish Mythology* (1949: pp. 64-65).

woman and monkey, the Wendish deity foreshadows the story's ending and symbolises ecoGothic's implied challenge to all hierarchical dualisms.

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REVIEWS

BOOK REVIEWS

Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils (eds.) *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*
(London: Routledge, 2018)

Elizabeth Parker

Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils' *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2018) is a timely and welcome addition to the nascent field of ecoGothic studies. The collection is comprised of a substantial introduction from the two co-editors, entitled 'Approaches to the Ecogothic', and thirteen essays from international contributors on a diverse range of areas. These areas include everything from themes of dark and twisted Nature in the writings of such established Gothicists as Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman to environmental readings of slave narratives, Gothic plants, and haunted animal skins. Each of the essays, importantly, provides some valuable insight into how we might best understand and utilise the new and exciting term 'ecoGothic'. Indeed, it is important to note that Keetley and Sivils' collection is one of the few major works published so far to specifically use and engage with this term and to tackle head on what exactly it 'is' and what exactly it 'does'.

Keetley and Sivils' introduction serves as a useful and informative source for anyone interested in the ecoGothic. In its very first sentence, they offer a clear and workable—if somewhat flexible—definition of the word: 'the ecogothic is a literary mode at the intersection of environmental writing and the gothic, and it typically presupposes some kind of ecocritical lens' (2018: p.1). They usefully provide an overview of the origins and developments of the ecoGothic, briefly summarising and engaging with the main existing scholarship in the field, from Simon C. Estok's introduction of the term 'ecophobia' (meaning our 'fear', 'distrust', or 'hatred' of nonhuman Nature) in 2009 and Andrew Smith and William Hughes' landmark 2013 collection *Ecogothic*, to the guest-edited special themed issue of *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature and the Environment* devoted to the ecoGothic in 2014. They draw attention to the

fact that the ecoGothic has been differently, if not paradoxically, interpreted in a number of ways (as a genre, repository, mode, terrain, approach, etc.) and subtly, yet persuasively maintain that it is best understood as a ‘literary mode’ (p.1) through which to interrogate the darker underside of our relationship to and representations of the natural world. They highlight some of the angles that might be most valuably assumed when reading culture with an ecoGothic lens, focusing in on three areas: ‘Ecogothic Time and Space’, ‘The Racial Ecogothic’, and ‘The Nonhuman Ecogothic’. In the first, they draw attention to the Gothic’s fixation on both time and space, with its emphasis on the past and on setting, and expand this into the *ecoGothic* by signalling the interesting relationship between our inherited sins of the past, such as slavery, and what we might call that ‘classic’ setting of the American Gothic: the howling wilderness. In the second, they emphasise the ‘predatory ecosystems’ (p.7) of humankind, which are often expressed through racial hierarchy and oppression and argue that the very soil of America has been ‘fed by the blood of violent oppression’ (p.8). In the third, they contextualise the ecoGothic within the nonhuman turn, as a part of a move to decentre humans, view them as merely one of many species, and acknowledge them as intricately enmeshed with the nonhuman world. The choice to concentrate on one period, location, and medium—nineteenth-century American literature—is a definite strength. It invites a greater sense of specificity, which is sometimes lost when discussions of ecohorror and the ecoGothic are overwhelmed by the sheer enormity of the subject of humankind’s propensity to demonise or ‘Gothicise’ Nature, and allows textured layers of an image to build with each essayist’s contribution. The focus on the nineteenth century is significant, too, not only because it is a fascinating time in terms of developing ideas about Nature, but because it dissuades contemporary readers from the common myth that environmentally destructive human avarice is a purely recent phenomenon. As the editors contend, ‘the dominant American relationship with Nature, whatever else it might have been, has *always* been unsettling’ (p.1, emphasis added).

The thirteen essays are quite diverse in focus. In nearly every single case, however, the contributors have devoted careful and considerable thought to how exactly they are interpreting and using the term ‘ecoGothic’ and it is this element—which has been missing from previous collections—that is the real forte of *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, allowing for a wonderful sense of dialogue and debate between the contributors. Each essay includes at least one close reading of a literary text, which further contributes to a sense of cohesion and provides useful examples of ways in which ‘approaches to the ecogothic’ might

be practically applied. The collection is fittingly opened by Tom J. Hillard, who first penned the term ‘Gothic nature’ (2009: p. 685), with an essay on Charles Brockden Brown. He argues that the ecoGothic is useful when deployed as a ‘praxis’ (p. 22)—as a ‘way of examining a text’ rather than as a strictly defined genre—and emphasises the need to examine what he terms ‘Gothic effects’ with ‘an eye toward understanding how they register concerns related to environment or ecology in the broadest senses’ (pp. 22-23). He argues eloquently for the ways in which such approaches, which often involve ‘break[ing] down the human/nature divide’ (p. 23), can expose texts to new and enlightening readings – and goes on to demonstrate this with his engaging analysis of *Edgar Huntley*. It is a strong collection of essays overall, but other particular standouts include Jimmy L. Bryan Jr.’s atmospheric piece on buffalo extinction and the clash of the modern and natural world, Kate Huber’s Derridean reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s animals and the sinister sides of ecophilia, and Jericho Williams’ case study of an American slave narrative as a key illustration of the ways in which societal hierarchies can have frightening and tangible impacts on our visions of the environment. Matthew Wynn Sivils provides an excellent overview of the nineteenth-century vegetal Gothic with his essay on the uncanny mundaneness of plants, Jennifer Schell makes a compelling case for the examination of what she terms ‘ecogothic extinction fiction’, and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock—in perhaps the most concretely ecocritical entry—makes intriguing connections between Timothy Morton’s so-called ‘hyperobjects’ and the growing penchant in contemporary popular culture for environmentally themed apocalypses.

Perhaps unavoidably in such a milestone collection, there is some slight repetition throughout and there are some inconsistencies between essays on how the ecoGothic is defined. Indeed, switching between the ecoGothic as an ‘approach’, ‘story’, ‘framework’, ‘genre’, ‘mode’, and all-round general descriptor is at times disorienting. However, as the ecoGothic is newly staking its claim in literary studies, such repetition is useful in challenging and nuancing understanding, while the lack of imposed uniformity when it comes to precise definitions is arguably a liberating and provocative acknowledgement of the fact there is still room for debate and discussion as this term evolves in the critical lexicon. The remit of the ecoGothic are perhaps occasionally stretched too far, particularly in the one or two instances where it is appropriated in deconstructions of non-‘natural’, clearly humanmade spaces. Additionally, it would have been interesting to see some discussion of the sometime twin and definite cousin of the ecoGothic, ecohorror, which is a term surprisingly absent throughout.

Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature is a highly valuable introduction and contribution to the increasing body of research at the cross-section of environmental and Gothic studies. It illustrates some of the ways in which the ecoGothic can be used, as Liz Hutter states in her essay in the collection, as a means through which we can ‘participate’ and ‘wrestle’ with the question of ‘how to understand our shifting relations to the human and nonhuman environments in which we dwell’ (p. 110). It provides a number of insightful close readings of various literature through an ecoGothic lens, whilst interlacing several arresting comparisons with contemporary narratives. This important intervention in the ecoGothic will no doubt enliven and inspire a wealth of new debates, discussions, and disseminations.

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Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*

(London: Penguin Books, 2018)

Marlee Fuhrmann

Graham Harman's *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (2018) makes a bold claim with its subtitle, but this small, well-organised book works hard to justify its declaration. For anyone interested in the controversial school of philosophy called OOO (pronounced 'triple-O'), Harman's book is an ideal place to begin. *Object-Oriented Ontology* is intended for a general audience, and Harman does not lose sight of this target, even as he gets into some of the more complex and sticky elements of his philosophy.

According to Harman, the most basic element of OOO is its rejection of truth and knowledge in favor of *reality*, which is only ever accessible indirectly. OOO is a realist philosophy, meaning it 'holds that the external world exists independent of human awareness' (p. 10). By taking this position, OOO departs significantly from the type of theory that has tended to dominate the humanities in recent decades (e.g. Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, or Judith Butler). OOO also deviates from the norm in advocating an initial flat ontology that rejects human exceptionalism and values all objects, a term Harman defines capaciously as 'anything that cannot be entirely reduced either to the components of which it is made or to the effects that it has on other things' (p. 43), including animate/inanimate or real/fictional things. However, Harman is quick to clarify that 'OOO does not see a flat ontology as an absolute good' (p. 54). Rather, it is only a starting point to ensure that artificial hierarchies, taxonomies, and prejudices do not obscure our ability to see and consider everything.

As stated in the subtitle of the book, Harman proposes OOO as a new theory of everything. He criticises previous theories that have made the same claim for four defects (physicalism, smallism, antifictionalism, and literalism) and asserts that OOO avoids these common pitfalls. Part of his argument hinges on the notion that also titles his second chapter: 'Aesthetics is the Root of All Philosophy.' In this chapter, Harman draws from Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset's essay (1914) on metaphor to declare that aesthetics is the way in which we begin to approach real objects outside of their relation to the person perceiving them. Harman distinguishes between *real objects* and *sensual objects* (as well as *real qualities*

and *sensual qualities* of those objects). A *real object* is the thing-in-itself, the inward essence of the object, which can only be accessed indirectly, whereas a *sensual object* is the object as we experience it. These terms, as well as the concept of indirect relations, are essential components of OOO that Harman explains at length. Harman stresses that what sets OOO apart is its assertion that ‘objects never make full contact with each other any more than they do with the human mind’, what Harman calls ‘the mutual darkness of objects’ (p. 12).

Throughout the book, Harman anticipates objections from his readers and acknowledges the various critiques that OOO has received from many quarters in the years since its inception. Framing the book with a brief discussion of Donald Trump, Harman appears to make a particular case for the political relevance of OOO in the face of assertions that OOO leaves us adrift in an unknowable world with nothing solid to which to cling. One of the special challenges Harman faces in writing this book is explaining and justifying OOO’s critique of knowledge and truth, especially at such a politically turbulent moment in United States history where everything it seems is declared ‘fake news’. Although the concept of truth is beyond rehabilitation for Harman, he usefully clarifies in chapter four that OOO does not entirely reject the concept of knowledge per se; it merely rejects the notion that knowledge equals unmediated access to reality. Instead, in OOO terms, knowledge is an untrue, justified belief about the real qualities of a sensual object. This definition may seem unsatisfying, but Harman states that appeals to knowledge are not the solution to today’s political crisis anyway. What we need, says Harman, is an appeal to *reality*. That said, it remains unclear to me what a politics compatible with OOO actually looks like in action.

From the outset, Harman declares his intention to write an accessible and engaging book modeled on Sigmund Freud’s *Introductory Lectures of Psychoanalysis* (1917), and he succeeds in those goals despite the challenging subject matter. His argument is carefully developed, beginning with a list of the seven central principles of OOO, and following with a gradual elucidation of those principles complemented with diagrams designed by Michael Flower. In addition to methodically explaining the central tenets of OOO, Harman also clarifies his stance by contrasting it with the philosophies of Derrida and Foucault. While Deleuze makes a couple of brief appearances, I would have liked to have seen a thorough discussion of OOO’s difference from his philosophy, especially given Deleuze’s recent prominence in the humanities.

After clarifying all the things OOO is *not*, Harman follows up by showing the various manifestations of OOO as practiced by its other major adherents: Levi Bryant, Ian Bogost, and Timothy Morton. He additionally discusses Jane Bennett and Tristan Garcia, who both do largely compatible and related work that is nevertheless distinct from OOO. A useful overview of OOO's main tenets concludes this small but dense work. Although Harman's book does not address ecoGothic or ecohorror themes, his philosophy does have something to contribute to ecocriticism more broadly, and it is the component that OOO is generally known for: its initial flat ontology. Ecocritics would do well to adopt an initial flat ontology (and to teach their students to do so as well) so that they may be sure to value even those aspects of our environment that tend not to capture our attention, elements such as soil or fungi. That being said, although OOO may be known for its advocacy of a flat ontology that values nonhuman, inanimate objects, Harman's book reveals that this new philosophy is much more complex than many give it credit for. It is, after all, a new theory of everything.

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Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological*

(Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018)

Eric Heyne

For Timothy Morton ‘being ecological’ is an immersive experience. Luckily, it’s one that you’re already entirely immersed in. You don’t even have to try. In fact, trying is exactly what you *don’t* want to do. This slim little book might be subtitled, ‘How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Bombardier Beetle’. Morton’s ecological consciousness is thoroughly Buddhist, a koan-ical attack on all pious assumptions and great expectations, fact-free and proud of it. This is the opposite of activist ecology; if your behaviour happens to change in any way after reading this book, it will be only a side effect of your consciousness having been altered subtly, of your ecological *style* having shifted.

For the first forty pages or so of *Being Ecological*, I was annoyed at Morton’s style and tired of being told things that I thought I already knew. Morton is always sure of himself, always in explanatory mode, and fond of his own lexicon: ‘possibility space’, ‘information dump’, ‘truthiness’, ‘object-oriented ontology (OOO)’, ‘blue marble photos’, ‘dark ecology’, ‘mouthfeel /thinkfeel’, and ‘Neolithic logistics’. He is ‘a proud (?) member of Generation X’ (p. 130), a friend of Bjork and frequent visitor to the Rothko Chapel, and a fan of *Dr. Who* and the Talking Heads who never passes up the opportunity to make a pop-culture reference. He uses jet lag as shorthand for a kind of universal human experience. It felt awkward to be preached to, even playfully, by someone whose text consisted primarily of ‘Don’t let them preach to you!’

But then something happened. My stiff resistance broke down. Somewhere around the discussion of converting the Uncanny Valley to a ‘Spectral Plain’, while exploring the linguistic roots of ‘environment’ in the verb ‘to veer’, among repeated assertions that art has its way with us and ‘free will is overrated’, I found myself thinking about how I was going to have to find a way to incorporate this book into my teaching. I’m not sure exactly what sort of ‘magic’ took place (and ‘magic’ is the term Morton would use for it), but maybe I started thinking like a Buddhist ecologist, sort of, in spurts. And it felt good.

Having an experience is exactly what Morton wants us to take away from this book, as opposed to learning some facts or drawing up a new agenda. I hope I'm not just making excuses when I say that conveying the experience of this book in a short review is difficult. I can give you some of his key terminology, as I've tried to, but not the way he weaves that vocabulary and a handful of key images together into a pattern that feels...promising. Whether that promise will be fulfilled remains to be seen, after I've spent time adjusting my ecological style.

Of course, style and behaviour are inextricably linked, and Morton not-so-secretly hopes that achieving 'awareness of the sensuous existence of other lifeforms' (p. 57) will result in incremental social change. But he steadfastly refuses to root for planned planetary-scale change. In fact, he strongly denounces ambitious techno-sociological solutions to climate change, which he considers the latest manifestation of 'agricultural religion', with scientists serving as priests and presidents as pharaohs. Such denunciations sometimes make him sound a bit like that wacky conspiracy theorist who delights in tracing secret societies from ancient Egypt through the Crusades and the founding fathers right up to the Kennedy assassination and the Trilateral Commission. Hierarchical structures and part/whole thinking are the principal villains in this revisionist history of the world, and the most pervasive and damaging hierarchical distinction is that between nonhuman and human (or, as Levi-Strauss synecdochised it, the raw and the cooked).

Exploring this distinction thoroughly is the project of Morton's previous book, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (2017). In fact, everything in *Being Ecological* has already been said by Morton elsewhere, in *Dark Ecology* (2016) or *Hyperobjects* (2013) or one of his other many books, but not always in such an engaging way. *Being Ecological* is a primer and a summation, a fun ride that takes us rapidly from zero (Kant) to futurity (OOO). Hence my sense of being lectured on the basics, and also my sense that this book might be very powerful in the classroom. Morton has been an almost absurdly prolific writer for the last two decades, beginning his career in English literary Romanticism and arriving at ecology through 'diet studies'. This is his seventh book of ecological theory, meant to bring those who haven't read his other books quickly and painlessly up to speed. I think Morton wants us to arrive at a position very similar to that held by thinkers such as Bruno Latour who come to ecology from a scientific background. But for a humanist like me, Morton's focus on art and 'the beauty experience' as a way into re-thinking the personhood of the nonhuman is more powerful than Latour's journey through biology towards the 'collective'. And of course Morton, with his

‘Neoplatonic retweets’ and suggestion that ‘maybe *everything is a TARDIS*’ (p. 109), is so much more Gen X than Latour, with his obsession with our never-achieved modernism. Morton wants us to be able to *enjoy* ecological thinking, make ecological jokes, pamper our pets, ‘navigate through a bad dream’ (p. 154), and relax into our already always ecological selves.

Relaxing is exactly what ecoGothic literature *doesn't* encourage, and although Morton talks about the current state of the world as ‘a bad dream’, as well as the huge amount of ‘trauma work’ it will require for us to recover, *Being Ecological* is about achieving a zen calm, not indulging in our fears. You’d think the author of a book titled *Dark Ecology* might be interested in the morbid or frightening ways that we conjure up nature’s revenge. But it’s good magic Morton is extolling, a kind of Transcendentalist optimism as opposed to the darker European Romantic pessimism. Because ‘it’s already the end of the “world” [...] [i]t’s like those horror movies in which the hero finds out that she or he is already dead. If you’re already dead, there’s nothing to be afraid of, is there?’ (p. 155). Cue the maniacal laugh.

Adam Scovell, *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange*

(New York: Auteur, 2017)

Ken Duffy

Pity us poor folk horror fans. Of all of subgenres of horror, folk horror seems to contain the fewest on-screen hours to enjoy. Once we have binged upon the triumvirate of Michael Reeves's *Witchfinder General* (1968), Piers Haggard's *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971), and Robin Hardy's *The Wickerman* (1973), we find ourselves scrambling for further examples. Adam Scovell's book *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* (2017) presents an excellent resource for those wishing to explore this sub-genre in more academic detail and along the way, pick up a viewing list of folk horror film and television.

Part of the problem is the issue of definition. What makes a horror film, book, or television series 'folk horror'? If it requires a setting in the past like *Witchfinder* and *Claw*, then *Wickerman* is out. If it requires a folkloric theme, then it might accidentally draw in *Halloween III* due to the pivotal role of witchcraft at Samhain. Thankfully, Scovell knows that to define is also to constrict. He therefore explores folk horror through a device which he introduces as the 'folk horror chain', which he defines as 'a linking set of narrative traits that have causational and interlinking consequences' (p. 14). These narrative traits centre on themes of landscape and isolation, on comparisons between skewed systems and contemporary morality, and on 'summonings', which may or may not be supernatural.

With this framework, Scovell opens up the genre to include several diverse examples not usually considered folk horror by the casual viewer. For instance, he discusses Neil Marshall's *Dog Soldiers* (2002), as its setting in an isolated farmhouse suddenly attacked by werewolves succinctly illustrates themes of isolation, rurality, and a summoning. He also includes Roy Ward Baker's *Quatermass and the Pitt* (1967), a film traditionally classified as science fiction. Scovell argues that Baker's film follows the folk horror chain by tying its urban setting to folkloric connections with the devil and resurrecting ancient and skewed beliefs about Martians which created *homo sapiens*. Finally, the film culminates in the destruction caused by the unearthing of a Martian artefact, illustrating the summoning of a long-buried evil, which is intrinsic to the folk horror train.

Scovell draws substantially on what he calls the ‘heroic’ BBC plays of the 1970s, such as Trevor Ray and Jeremy Burnham’s *Children of the Stones* (1977) and Alan Garner’s *Red Shift* (1979). Influenced by the summer of love’s equinox into the winter of discontent, these writers and directors delighted in showing the perversions of Britain’s ancient past brought to horrifying ends. In his chapter exploring hauntology, Scovell talks about how occultism was drawn into the culture of late 1960s and early 1970s Britain. From musicians Donovan, Led Zeppelin, and Black Sabbath to what the author calls ‘The Unholy Trinity’ of the films *Witchfinder*, *Claw*, and *Wickerman*, British folklore and occultism provided ample material for inspiration, dragging the Victorian view of the idyllic English countryside into the dark underbelly of post-war British dissatisfaction. Perhaps because of this, one of the most appealing aspects of folk horror is that while always relishing in the delightfully eerie, it always seems so much more rock-and-roll than some of its fellow horror sub-genres.

By organising his chapters by theme rather than chronology, Scovell is able to analyse the same works under several different headings such as ‘Rurality’ and ‘Topography’. He is also able to address how occultism, or perceived occultism, is examined how these works contribute to the expansion of the genre. In particular, Scovell draws heavily on the adapted plays of M.R. James produced during this period by the BBC. From *Whistle and I’ll Come to You* (1968) to *A Warning to the Curious* (1972), he analyses this material in great detail, returning to the same works throughout the book when the theme under examination requires it.

Though this method risks becoming repetitive, it never does. Instead, it shows how the works under examination, be they works by M.R. James or *Blood on Satan’s Claw*, can be analysed through different thematic prisms to reveal the ideas contained within. This methodology shows how an obscure twenty minute BBC television play like *Whistle and I’ll Come to You* can say as much about folk horror as cult classics like *The Wickerman*. The book’s great advantage is that it does not presuppose familiarity with the major or minor works of the genre, and though it would be easy for Scovell’s synopses of each work under consideration to become tedious, especially to the reader who is already familiar with them, they never do. His enthusiasm for the genre drips from the page like the Technicolor blood of a Hammer classic. Any study on film can either fall into a series of backstage technical details, or an overly-philosophical investigation where the author frantically tries to find Jungian value in *Cannibal*

Holocaust. Fortunately, Scovell does not sacrifice the academic to the accessible or vice versa. His analysis is not only valuable, but entertaining.

The book deals almost exclusively with British folk horror. While this facilitates a stricter focus, it would have been interesting to see more discussion, here, of how the folk horror chain can be applied to film and television from other countries. A complete exploration of the genre should look, for example, at the silent masterpiece Benjamin Christensen's *Haxan* (1922), which represents one of the first complete views of the themes and aesthetics of folk horror and delivers the genuine sense of eeriness and discomfort that must seemingly be present in any good example of the genre. Scovell might also consider how folk horror has manifested itself in North American Cinema, given that settler colonial folklore in North America developed relatively recently. It would be interesting to see how the folk horror chain is manifested in the rural isolation of *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) or the hostile natural world explored in *Jug Face* (2013). Though American cinema is mentioned, it is never examined in detail.

Scovell does, however, take his final chapter into the new millennium. Films such as Ben Wheatley's *Kill List* (2013) and *A Field in England* (2013) and Robert Eggers's *The Witch* (2015) have arguably rejuvenated folk horror after so many years of being in danger of becoming a historical footnote in the annals of horror cinema. It may seem at first glance that *Kill List*—a story of two hitmen set in the modern day—does not fit a predetermined definition of folk horror. But Scovell's enlightening examination of folk horror expands the genre beyond the unholy trinity of *Witchfinder*, *Claw*, and *Wickerman*. *Folk Horror* broadens the boundaries of our attention and deepens our understanding of this complex and much-loved subgenre in a way that is as engaging as it is enlightening. It encourages us to broaden our understanding and questions of this genre; it teaches us to seek and locate evidence that the relics of folk horror indeed surround us.

Lee Gambin, *Nope, Nothing Wrong Here: The Making of Cujo*

(Albany, GA: BearManor Media, 2017)

Daniel Otto Jack Petersen

Cujo (1983) is an iconic instance of the time-honoured animal subgenre of eco-horror, one that brings a rabid, two-hundred-pound St. Bernard into visceral proximity with terrified humans. One of the best things about Lee Gambin's labour of love on the making of *Cujo* is that his book's very existence provokes readers to revisit director Lewis Teague's adaptation of Stephen King's novel of the same name. I hadn't seen *Cujo* since I watched it on VHS as a young teenager in the 1980s. Watching it before reading Gambin's book, I was pleased to rediscover a well-crafted film. Artful cinematography by Jan de Bont, good animal special effects, and solid, sometimes remarkable, acting (especially by the mother and son duo played by Dee Wallace—of *E.T.* fame—and Danny Pintauro) make this one of the better adaptations of King's work. And it's still pretty scary! The title of Lee Gambin's book is taken from a television commercial in the film made by the advertising agency of one of the central characters. The ad features a professorial figure who, after taking a bite of the children's cereal being advertised, assures his viewers: 'Nope, nothing wrong here'. The facile slogan, of course, drips with irony.

Gambin's book launches straight into, without preface or introduction, a scene-by-scene analysis of the entire film. Each chapter's scene analysis is followed by an array of related interview excerpts from cast and crew (accompanied by hundreds of photographs of the film sets). Some excerpts tie into the chapter's focus quite well and others seem only of tangential interest at best. The book is situated somewhere between an academic work and what might be called 'fan scholarship'. Secondary literature is scarcely mentioned and no citations are provided for the book's critical, cultural, or historical claims. Earlier versions of the screenplay are frequently mentioned, but again without cited sources. Gambin's scene-by-scene analyses also engage in no overt conversation with critical theorists or scholars of any kind (except for a few passing references in the most general terms). Readers of *Gothic Nature* may find this disappointing as *Cujo* begs to be put into conversation with an interdisciplinary field like Animal Studies. One can imagine, for example, a strange and lively engagement between *Cujo*

and Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (2003).

Nevertheless, Gambin's book provides many prompts for the interested scholar to trace out such conversations themselves. For example, Gambin observes that, while earlier 'dogsploitation horror' movies like *Dogs* (1976) and *The Pack* (1977) were centred on ecological and social concerns, '*Cujo* brings the horror home to the domestic interpersonal, rather than being about societal flaws and a response to animal neglect' and that 'this is something that will happen within the eighties coming out of the ecologically aware seventies, where family-centric dramas will merge with horror' (p. 303-304). Gambin's observation will provoke ecocritics to wonder if Teague's film wrests animal horror from its ecological and social consciousness in the service of advancing a mere metaphor for human domestic concerns or if it literally brings ecohorror home, regardless of middle-class and working-class families' attitudes toward ecological coexistence. At the point in the film where mother and son are besieged by the rabid dog in a broken-down Pinto, four-year-old Tad asks his mother with pitiful vulnerability whether the monster dog can 'eat his way in' to the little car. She responds 'No'. But the movie shows that monstrous coexistence can indeed eat its way into the allegedly safe space of modern industrial domesticity (cf. Gambin, 2017: p. 293).

What, after all, induces *Cujo*'s monstrous transformation from gentle, loyal pet to ferocious killer? Nothing more or less than the St. Bernard's ecosystemic encounter with rabid bats in a cave whilst chasing a rabbit in rural environs. As Gambin notes, the monster behind the monster here is rabies: 'in *Cujo*, the disease would act as the monstrous entity inhabiting a normally benevolent dog' (p. 168). The domestic struggles of the humans in the film (which include abuse and adultery) do not exempt them from learning, bodily and gorily, that they are interconnected members of the same local ecology that can make a pet undergo a 'tragic transformation' (p. 169). (As Gambin aptly observes in several places, the film is a striking portrait of animal suffering.) There is no anthropogenic cause for the monster here. There is simply participation in the viral vagaries of a regional biome. The film does not allow the significant otherness—that is, 'specific difference' that is taken seriously (Haraway, 2003: pp. 3, 7)—of bats, dogs, and even viruses, to be reduced to strictly human concerns, even environmentalist ones. This monstrous intersection of human and animal drama is what Gambin aptly labels 'horror of circumstance' (p. 42). Perhaps *Cujo* shows us that sometimes it

takes even a *monster* dog to remind us that ‘dogs are not about oneself. Indeed, that is the beauty of dogs’ (Haraway 2003: p. 11).

Finally, it’s worth noting that one of the most interesting fruits of the hundreds of interview excerpts is the wealth of detail from the animal trainers on the film set. Anyone wishing to trace out the relationship between the cinematic genre of animal horror and what filmmakers must do to get real-life animal ‘actors’ to ‘play’ those roles (practices that range from the playful to the cruel, as the interviews reveal) will find a wealth of material for such a line of inquiry in Gambin’s book. What would Donna Haraway, who participates with her dog as a trainer and competitor in ‘dog agility’ sports, make of these practices? For example, while sometimes the trainers used toys off camera to get the dogs to leap (p. 285), other times chief trainer Karl Lewis Miller (who also worked with St. Bernards on the *Beethoven* series of films) donned a fright mask to genuinely scare the dogs into growling aggressively (p. 254) and would later feel depressed about it (p. 288). What counts as monstrous here and what remains within the bounds of the humane?

While Gambin’s book would benefit from a lengthy introduction that thoroughly contextualises the material, it is a labour of love that will reward those interested in delving into the myriad production details of this canine horror classic of the 1980s. *Cujo*’s cultural heritage will no doubt live on, and Gambin’s guide may aid the interested critic and entertain the general reader.

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Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt (eds.)
Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Monsters/Ghosts of the Anthropocene
(University of Minnesota Press, 2017)

Alyssa Quintanilla

Monstrosity, in its various forms, suggests both destructive consequences and generative potential. *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Monsters of the Anthropocene* (2017) begins by pointing to the monstrosities that humans have created and destroyed via entanglement. While entanglement has a variety of meanings, the editors understand it as, ‘the enfolding of bodies within bodies in evolution and in every ecological niche’ (p. M3). Editors Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt write that, ‘Our continued survival demands that we learn something about how best to live and die within the entanglements we have. We need both senses of monstrosity: entanglement as life and as danger’ (p. M4). As they suggest, humans are deeply entrenched in the life and continued destruction that constitutes the Anthropocene. Despite consistent efforts to assert ourselves as ontologically superior to, or separate from the world around us, we are ultimately constructed through (and by) natural elements. By focusing on entanglement and haunting in this double-sided book, the contributors in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* demand a reconceptualisation of what it means to be active participants in the Anthropocene. They also want us to recognise that our standing is not at all separate from nature, time, or matter.

Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet shows a commitment to interdisciplinarity through the inclusion of diverse fields and methodologies. Each essay challenges the reader to think beyond set fields or ways of viewing the environment and mimics the very entanglement about which the authors are writing. Using creative writings from Ursula K. Le Guin and Lesley Stern, the book articulates the importance of storytelling while simultaneously pushing against fixed notions of narrative. The editors emphasise the potential of storytelling in interdisciplinary work, writing that, ‘Unless we learn to listen broadly, we may miss the biggest story of life on earth: symbiogenesis, the comaking of living things’ (p. M8). Rather than relying on academic fields and set forms, *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* embraces the co-making of all things to breakdown boundaries of field and form.

Spilt into two halves and comprised of multiple sections of two to three essays, the book's topics span place, time, field, and species. 'Inhabiting Multispecies Bodies', the first section in *Monsters*, is comprised of two essays, one by Donna Haraway and the other by Margaret McFall-Ngai. Haraway's essay, 'Sybiogenesis, Sympoiesis, and Art Science Activisms for Staying with the Trouble', is foundational for the entire collection, as she poses the importance of symbiogenesis, or evolutionary change and adaptation through the 'long-lasting intimacy of strangers' (p. M26). Haraway traces the importance of symbiogenesis as a natural phenomenon that extends to academia through cross-disciplinary work and activism. Her contention is that symbiogenesis is not only essential in making sense of continued life on a dying planet, but an integral part of our existence in general. Understanding human life as part of continued sybiogenesis allows for serious consideration of diverse perspectives which may challenge seemingly fixed paradigms. Nothing exists without the world that surrounds it, which extends to the works academics create despite assertions that fields do not intersect.

From bacteria and ants to wolves and werewolves, the essays in *Monsters* incorporate methodologies from biology, literary criticism, and anthropology to grapple with the importance of entanglement. The final section, 'At the Edge of Extinction', asserts the importance of recognising that we are, in fact, facing the sixth extinction to occur on planet Earth. Peter Funch examines the interlaced relationship of red knot birds and the slowly dwindling horseshoe crab population to question what happens to the rest of the planet once these two species finally cease to exist. While it seems easy to dismiss these arctic birds as distant from most of the human population, symbiogenesis assures us that there will be effects upon the human whenever any other aspect of our entangled ontology dies. Though these shifts in the environment represent the true devastation of the Anthropocene and human monstrosity, Dorion Sagan ends *Monsters* with a glimmer of hope. He writes that we should 'worry but not despair' about our situation, and that 'Maybe this time, instead of hurting [the earth], we can help it continue its multispecies energy-transducing recycling ways for billions of years more' (p. M174). Humans may not live through this coming extinction, but that does not mean we are not already entangled with what remains.

While *Monsters* focuses heavily on entanglement, *Ghosts* stresses the importance of remembering the landscape and our part in ecological degradation. The editors and authors understand ghosts as 'the traces of more-than-human histories through which ecologies are made and unmade' (p. G1). Prior constructions of economic and cultural progress have been

predicated upon forgetting previous environmental damage. Yet the failure to acknowledge our past bars us from making sense of our place on and responsibility to a dying planet. The authors' focus on the eeriness of ghosts and hauntings pushes the reader's 'senses beyond their comfort zones', encouraging humans to look at traces of radiation, decay, and other ghostly destructive forces (p. G2). Like *Monsters, Ghosts* approaches this haunting through a variety of fields. Lesley Stern's non-fiction piece, 'A Garden or a Grave? The Canyonic Landscape of the Tijuana-San Diego Region', considers the shifting and polluted canyons on the U.S.-Mexico border between San Diego and Tijuana. Stern's piece sets the tone for *Ghosts* by exploring the destroyed spaces humans continually, and willfully, overlook in the name of cultural, economic, and political issues.

Each section of *Ghosts* covers the legacy of anthropogenic environmental damage that is either forgotten or misunderstood in public perception. Karan Barad's essay, 'No Small Matter: Mushroom Clouds, Ecologies of Nothingness, and Strange Topologies of Spacetime-mattering', addresses the complexity of how we alter our world through ecological encounters both big and small. Examining the after effects of Hiroshima, she provides a compelling example of how our ghosts manifest themselves in every aspect of our lives. By exploring 'spacetime-mattering', or the material effects of time, Barad contends that 'Hauntings are not immaterial', but rather important and continued parts of our entanglement (p. G107). While we remember the devastation of Hiroshima, we fail to acknowledge how time and matter are forever altered by the event. *Ghosts* ends with a reflective essay by Mary Louise Pratt wherein she acknowledges how our cultural perception of the world around us has failed to account for the past.

Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghost/Monsters of the Anthropocene is an important experiment in interdisciplinary research that approaches ideas of entanglement and materiality in new and nuanced ways. While its overall project is incredibly important, the book can be a little opaque at times, as the shifts between fields sometimes fail to prepare the reader for drastic changes in language or expected familiarity with complex concepts. Despite this difficulty, it is well worth the effort for researchers interested in our current ecological moment. As climate change continues and the world changes due to our actions, albeit in unanticipated or unintended ways, scholarship like this can help reveal where we have been and offer possibilities for how we can move forward. The conversation about our world is not

exclusive to any one field or mode of storytelling, but rather an entanglement in itself, one that helps us make sense of our impending extinction and the world thereafter.

Simon C. Estok, *The Ecophobia Hypothesis*

(London: Routledge, 2018)

Rick Hudson

In this study, Simon C. Estok builds upon his established scholarship on ecocriticism—such as his *Eco-criticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* (2011)—by presenting us with the concept of ecophobia in opposition to, but also as an augmentation of, biophilia. In Estok's view, we must acknowledge the value and contribution made to ecocriticism by work which highlights humankind's affinity with nature (biophilia or ecophilia); nevertheless, the current ecological crisis cannot be truly understood, nor combatted from this perspective alone. For Estok, we must also recognise and interrogate the notion of ecophobia, which sits on the same theoretical spectrum as ecophilia. *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* proposes—forgive my somewhat ungainly over-simplification—that we as humans suffer from a morbid fear of nature that is grounded in a perfectly reasonable and necessary fear of nature that has been vital for our survival as a species (fear of snakes, lightning, earthquakes, for example). However, that rational fear has been maladapted into an unconscious and irrational phobia which is contributing to our extinction. Estok maintains that we have to accept that our harmful behaviours towards the environment are far from 'unnatural'; that they are in fact the behaviours that have enabled humans to succeed and thrive. The problem we have to confront if we are going to combat ecological damage in any meaningful way is that we are going to have to somehow act *contra* to behaviours that are encoded in our genes. Simply put, in order to survive, we will have to act against our survival mechanisms. While Estok unapologetically embraces scientific thinking and its findings, his position is far from deterministic and not exclusively rooted in an unproblematic acceptance of empiricism. He acknowledges and discusses how cultural and media forces come to play on ecophobia, and, indeed, how they contribute to, institutionalise and perpetuate ecophobia.

To say this book was chilling would be an understatement of massive proportions; indeed, it makes us wonder if any action we are currently taking regarding the environment is any more effective than hanging up a wind chime. What is most frightening is Estok's claim that the behavioural changes required to significantly avert ecological disaster are in conflict with our human behaviour patterns to such a degree that we consciously and unconsciously

refuse to entertain them as ideas. However, I'm going to turn away from the substance of the book itself (probably due to ecophobia) and discuss a broader role it plays in the advancement of academic study.

The Ecophobia Hypothesis is a truly interdisciplinary work: it draws upon the humanities, social sciences, and—importantly—the hard sciences, particularly biology and neuroscience. The book also assumes that its readership will be interdisciplinary and, as such, introduces concepts and explains them in a manner which is accessible to a reader who is not familiar with them. Nevertheless, Estok never over-simplifies or 'dumbs down' these principles. As a humanities academic—who is very much on the literary/philosophical rather than social science wing of the discipline—whose understanding of science is limited, *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* had me understanding quite advanced aspects of biology and neuroscience rather effortlessly.

The Ecophobia Hypothesis also demonstrates a great deal of intellectual courage; not only does it confront the reader with some very disturbing and positively frightening information regarding the ongoing ecological crisis, but it challenges dogmas and orthodoxies that are prevalent in many disciplines. As Estok explains in his introduction:

'Ecophobia, like any other human behaviour (including biophilia), is written into our genes. It cannot be otherwise since there is no magical ventriloquism here, no enchanted space outside of our genes from which human behaviour can reasonably be thought to originate. Yet, as Michael Beard—the voice of evolutionary compulsions in Ian McEwan's *Solar*—notes, one must be wary when theorizing about genetics and culture. *Solar* nevertheless seriously questions the human capacity to make the behavioural changes needed to stop climate change, reflecting a larger debate that has been going on for a long time.' (p. 20)

By making such claims, Estok takes certain risks. In some academic circles (and yes, I do realise I am going to sound like a 'snowflake'-bashing Youtuber), theoretical approaches that were once revolutionary and challenging in the 1960s and 1970s have become ossified into a new orthodoxy: a church with its own saints. Philosophical approaches that are mutually

grounded in Marxism and postmodern relativism *do* have a proclivity to police academic discussion with Stalinist rigour. As the first chapter of this study observes, any recourse to scientific method or empiricist thinking within some universities is tantamount to fascism, and any humanities or social science academic who merely suggests that biology, specifically genetics, has an influence on behaviour is nailed to a cross and burned for heresy. If we are going to combat climate change, or even just discuss it with any meaning, those of us on the ‘artsier’ end of the academic spectrum are going to have to review our attitude to science. If we acknowledge that the ecological crisis is happening, then we are responding to information scientific method has revealed; it is nonsense, therefore, to dismiss scientific method in the next breath on the grounds that it is not congenial with our world view, or contradicts our favourite critical theory. Estok makes a much better job than I have of addressing this issue, and Chapter 1 of *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* unapologetically and rationally makes the case for scientific method and its findings. This will no doubt upset many people in academia, but in my view this book should be saluted as much for this achievement as it is for the contribution it makes to ecocriticism.

Cherie Dimaline, *The Marrow Thieves*

(Toronto: Cormorant Books, 2017)

Jennifer Schell

After the publication of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008), authors and publishers flooded the literary marketplace with young adult dystopian novels. The list includes, among others, James Dashner's *The Maze Runner* (2009), Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011), Marie Lu's *Legend* (2011), and Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* (2011). Few of these books—or their numerous sequels—are as powerful or original as Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), however. Set in an indeterminate but near future, the opening portions of the novel describe a North American landscape devastated by climate change, pollution, epidemic disease, and global warfare. Ecohorror, indeed! Amidst all this destruction, Canada's human and nonhuman survivors struggle to eke out a living, competing with one another for slim advantages and scarce resources. In this new world, North America's Indigenous people are particularly vulnerable because they possess an ability that other humans do not, namely the capacity to dream. They are hunted by Recruiters, uniformed officers who work for the Canadian government's Department of Oneirology. Equipped with special vehicles and silver whistles, these men and women relentlessly pursue their human quarry, capturing and keeping First Nations people in facilities modeled after the residential schools of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At these institutions, scientists conduct a series of horrific medical experiments on their subjects, all in an attempt to extract their ability to dream from their bone marrow.

Narrated by Frenchie, a sixteen-year-old Métis boy from Southern Metropolis City (Toronto), the novel follows the adventures of a small band of Indigenous survivors, most of whom range in age from nine to seventeen and all of whom hail from different tribal backgrounds. As the only adults in the group, Miigwans, a middle-aged Anishnaabe man, and Minerva, an elderly Anishnaabe woman, serve as leaders, shepherding their charges through the wilderness, preserving their history by telling stories, and providing instruction in various First Nations languages. The younger children—Tree, Zeegwon, Slopper, and RiRi—sing songs, play games, and learn survival skills. Meanwhile, the teenagers—Chi-Boy, Wab, Frenchie, and Rose—tend camp, practice woodcraft, and flirt with one another.

Over the course of the novel, the group travels north through Canada's deciduous and boreal forest towards James Bay in search of food and freedom from persecution. They find a few moments of joy and happiness, as they enjoy each other's company in the relative luxury offered by an abandoned hotel. They also endure a period of tremendous loss and hardship, as they experience betrayal at the hands of two Indigenous men—one Anishnaabe and one Cree—working for the Recruiters. The violence which erupts during this encounter costs Frenchie and his companions dearly, but it does not leave them defeated. In the ultimate act of defiance, they decide to join the 'resistance', a group of First Nations freedom fighters, living near the town of Espanola. As they come to realise, they possess special powers related to their traditional songs and dreaming ability, which just might enable them to defeat the Recruiters and the government scientists for whom they work.

Although written for young adults, older readers will also appreciate *The Marrow Thieves*, especially insofar as its thematic density is concerned. Throughout the book, Dimaline deftly juggles a number of different but important ideas and concepts. She emphasises that kinship ties do not necessarily depend upon biology, explaining that the members of Frenchie's group constitute a tight-knit family even though most of them are not related. She stresses the power of romantic love in all of its various forms, describing the tremendous grief Miigwans experiences when he loses his husband to Recruiters and fails to rescue him from the 'school' in which he is imprisoned. And she depicts strategies of what Anishnaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor would call 'survivance', showing possibilities for resisting the forces of oppression and creating new cultural traditions (some of which involve Pearl Jam!).

Perhaps most importantly, Dimaline tackles issues of social and environmental justice, demonstrating that they are hopelessly convoluted and inextricably intertwined. As she makes very clear, environmental catastrophes—like the Water Wars and pollution problems which occur in the book—can worsen the oppression experienced by historically marginalized human populations. As she also makes clear, these peoples sometimes possess powerful survival strategies that their non-marginalized counterparts do not. Therein lies the importance of dreams, language, culture, and tradition to the novel.

Although *The Marrow Thieves* addresses important themes, Dimaline's real strength is characterisation. Miigwans is a complex individual—and perhaps the true hero of the novel—

but Frenchie deserves special consideration, because he is a maze of contradictions, just like an actual teenager. At times, he is jealous and angry, immature and impulsive, awkward and anxious. At others, he is generous and kind, considerate and contemplative, confident and courageous. Nowhere is this strange, contradictory mixture more apparent than in the following passages, which describe what happens when Frenchie embarks on a solo hunting expedition and encounters a bull moose deep in the Canadian wilderness:

‘Just then he raised his head, so massive that I wondered at the blood it must take to animate, and he saw me. He blinked a long, slow blink and faltered for only a second or two before he began chewing again. He turned a bit so that I knew he knew I was there. I swallowed hard, aiming, fingers exact and stiff. He was so frigging big. It was like he was a hundred years old, like he had watched all of this happen. Imagine being here through it all—the wars, the sickness, the earthquakes, the schools—only to come to this?’

He exhaled, long and loud like the wind. This was food for a week. Hide and sinew to stitch together for tarps, blankets, ponchos. This was bone for pegs and chisels. This was me, the conquering hero, marching into camp with more meat than all of us could carry, taking the others back to field dress this gift. This was Rose looking at me with those big eyes so dark they shone burgundy in the firelight. This was my chance.’ (p. 49)

Here, Frenchie realises that he must choose between his respect for this animal, a fellow witness and survivor, and his desire to provide for his family (and impress Rose). Ultimately, in a particularly poignant moment, Frenchie adopts a less anthropocentric attitude toward the moose and decides not to shoot him. As he explains, ‘I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t let it come to this, not for him and not for me’ (p. 50).

Not insignificantly, *The Marrow Thieves* has received several prestigious awards in Canada and the United States, including a Governor General’s Literary Award and a Kirkus Prize. It has also proved to be quite popular, finishing third in the 2018 Canada Reads competition, a ‘battle-of-the-books’ contest sponsored by Canadian Public Television. The book is certainly worthy of all of these accolades. More than just another young adult dystopian novel, it is a compelling, thoughtful, and well-written novel about the current state of the natural world and the future of the human race. For all of its pessimism and darkness, it is also a hopeful

book about the power of perseverance, generosity, and love. If humans are to survive the ecological and social crises currently unfolding across the globe, they are going to need a hefty dose of all three.

Mike Ashley, ed., *From the Depths and Other Strange Tales of the Sea*

(London: British Library Publishing, 2019)

Michael Wheatley

From the chthonic monsters of H.P. Lovecraft's 'Dagon' (1919) to the monstrous mermaids of Mira Grant's *Into the Drowning Deep* (2017), the sea may be ecohorror's most enduring symbol. The oceans surround us with our own anxieties, resurfacing the consequences of plastic pollution, Holocene extinction and global heating for us to confront. 'There is so much that is both frightening and awesome about the oceans of the world', explains editor Mike Ashley, 'Little wonder that over the years there have been stories of monsters, ghost ships, and the plain inexplicable at sea' (p. 7).

Published as a part of the British Library's *Tales of the Weird* series, *From the Depths and Other Strange Tales of the Sea* (2019) collects fifteen ocean-centric stories. Ranging chronologically from 1891 to 1932, these tales resonate with contemporary ecological concerns, such as Darwinian evolutionary theory and the consequences of global warfare. While most of the stories share numerous formal similarities, including the liberal use of nautical jargon and (often multiple) framing narratives, *From the Depths* demonstrates a range of approaches towards ecohorror. From the hostile environment of the Sargasso Sea to the undiscovered creatures dwelling beneath the waves, Ashley's collection shows the malleability and legacy of the sea as a narrative tool that challenges human exceptionalism.

The opening tales, Albert R. Wetjen's 'The Ship of Silence' (1932) and Morgan Robertson's 'From the Darkness and the Depths' (1913), imagine what lurks upon the unexplored ocean bed. Providing only slight suggestions of 'something which could not be shot!' (p. 31), Wetjen adopts a restrained approach to the trope of the sea monster. In contrast, Robertson revels in his invisible, vampiric, giant squid, as it slowly lays claim to a ship's crew. Although the latter story is bogged down by excessive scientific spiel, these works challenge humanity's conception of itself as alpha predator.

Published in 1908, both 'Sargasso' by Ward Muir and 'Held by the Sargasso Sea' by Frank H. Shaw engage with the contemporary mythology of the Sargasso Sea, a supposedly

haunted seascape where a vast collection of weed trapped any sailors unfortunate enough to cross its path. Echoing Wetjen, Shaw opts for suggestion over showing, teasing the descent of a motley crew of mutineers entrapped within the weeds. Much more effective, however, is Muir's haunting epistolary tale, as the weeds lay home to something far greater. Playing to Darwinian notions of evolution, in these stories the human protagonists become trapped in an environment within which they are ill adapted to survive.

Offering contrasting images of Nature's power, 'The High Seas' (1918) by Elinor Mordaunt and 'No Ships Pass' (1932) by Lady Eleanor Smith, imagine the divinely violent alongside the insidiously serene. Coming late in the collection, these tales refreshingly digress from what begins to stagnate as a well-trod narrative formula. Indeed, together they show the tonal variance possible in manifestations of ecohorror.

Echoing the story of Cain and Abel, Mordaunt's tale is a family drama about two feuding, sea-faring brothers. One brother possesses murderous intent, and the sea eventually smites him for his sin, 'the immense bulk of the incoming wave [...] like the hand of God outstretching above him, dropping to snatch' (p. 264). 'No Ships Pass', meanwhile, resonates with the television series *Lost* (2004-2010), as a moving mirage island rescues the shipwrecked and entraps them within purgatory. Despite the sinister undertones of their prison, the landscape remains Edenic, as 'the island's beauty seemed more exotic than the radiant plumage of the parakeets darting to and fro' (p. 295).

Hybridising the natural with the material, 'The Floating Forest' (1909) by Herman Scheffauer and 'The Ship that Died' (1919) by John Gilbert unfix the security of man-made constructs. In Scheffauer's tale, a lost ship named the *Serapis* plays host to a vast woodland, 'like some ancient barge of state, a fragment torn from the rich, primeval forest' (p. 117). Meanwhile, in 'The Ship that Died', the man-made *Carnivordshire* succumbs to rapid natural decay: 'the sagging deck slowly forced the boat apart and she flattened out upon the water in a great mass of scum' (p. 211).

A remarkable number of these stories present the sea as a haunted place, laying host to human secrets. Examples include: Rupert Chesterton's 'The Black Bell Buoy' (1907), William Hope Hodgson's 'The Mystery of the Waterlogged Ships' (1911), James Francis Dwyer's 'The Murdered Ships' (1918), and the titular 'From the Depths' (1920) by F. Britten Austin. In these

various tales, scuppered ships and betrayed crews linger in the waters, seeking revenge from beneath the waves. Far from swallowing humanity's sins, however, the sea makes them visible for all to see.

Izola Forrester's 'Devereux's Last Smoke' (1907), meanwhile, offers a more traditional ghost story. A widow's husband allows her to pursue her true love on the condition that she wear violet for a year following his death. Breaking this vow, Devereux comes back to collect his wife. However, despite this simplicity, the sea remains omnipresent, housing a haunting fog 'so thick on deck you couldn't see your own hand' (p. 220). Lastly, Morgan Burke's 'The Soul-Saver' (1926) echoes Lovecraft's 'The Rats in the Walls' (1924), showing that escaping the sea does not mean that you escape the nonhuman's wrath. A murderous captain finds the souls of his victims become enclosed within little white mice.

From the Depths may favour tales of the ship to tales of the sea, but it offers an interesting insight into how this symbol was interpreted in ecohorror fiction of the 1890s to 1930s. Favouring 'lesser known stories, covering the whole range of the mysteries of the sea', Ashley's collection introduces a variety of lesser-known and underappreciated authors (p. 7). Indeed, despite the century-long gap, these stories often prove anticipatory of the ecological concerns of today, echoing ongoing ecocritical discussions surrounding nonhuman agency and anthropocentrism. For a scholar of ecohorror, this collection provides a valuable touchstone and comparison point to the fiction of today.

FILM AND TV REVIEWS

Annihilation: A Roundtable Review

(USA: Skydance Media, 2018)

A special collaborative collection from Sara L. Crosby, Andrew Hageman, Shannon Davies Mancus, Daniel Platt, and Alison Sperling

INTRODUCTION

Sara L. Crosby

Drawn primarily from the first novel in Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy, director Alex Garland's 2018 film *Annihilation* begins with an interrogation and a cosmic event: Our protagonist Lena (played by Natalie Portman) sits in an empty cell facing a man in a hazmat suit, who asks her 'What do you know?' As she ponders the question, the film flashes back to a meteor silently slamming into a marshy coast, but, instead of disintegrating, it expands outward in a haze of oily color to create 'Area X' – a gorgeous but menacing zone of wild genetic and temporal mutation bounded by a still-expanding wall of leftover 'shimmer'. After Lena's husband Kane (played by Oscar Isaac) returns from Area X, riddled with cancer and dying, she tries to find a cure by joining four other women for another doomed expedition. Once they march in, bloody mayhem ensues, including a terrifying bear-monster attack and a tangle with Lena's doppelgänger, which seems to leave her the sole survivor but ultimately raises the question: Who really returns from Area X? In the final scene, back in the present, Lena and Kane embrace, together and healthy again, but a slick of oily shimmer in their eyes suggests other possibilities.

The story behind the story of *Annihilation* is possibly even more fraught. As Isaac joked, the film was not 'Predator with girls!' (Garland and Isaac, 2018). Paramount suffered a case of nerves worrying that it might be too 'weird' and 'brainy' for audiences, and so after an unsuccessful struggle over the ending the studio dumped foreign distribution onto Netflix and

slashed its American advertising campaign to the bare bone, guaranteeing underperformance at the box office (Lodge, 2018). Nonetheless, critics hailed it as ‘a new sci-fi classic’ and ‘a genre gem, an ambitious, challenging piece of work that people will be dissecting for years’ even if it refuses to fall into ‘the same neat categories’ as other genre films (Taylor, 2018; Tallerico, 2018).

The critics are correct. It is a unique and beautiful film, but it is also an important film with a resonance beyond most other ‘sci-fi classic[s]’—at least from an ecocritical perspective—which is the reason we have decided to devote a ‘roundtable’ discussion to its analysis. In an age of devastating climate change and environmental disintegration, the film brings to a popular audience a cinematic version of the mind-altering ‘ecological awareness’ that theorists such as the author of the novel *Annihilation* consider essential to human survival. VanderMeer, of course, is a leading figure in the recent upsurge in cosmic horror literature termed ‘The New Weird’, and the ‘weird’, he points out, draws attention to how the human is inexorably ‘entwined’ with the material, nonhuman world. It thus confronts our self-destructive amnesia, our doomed ecophobic ‘attempt to transcend our material conditions’ which has only seduced us into suicide (Morton and VanderMeer, 2016: p. 58). The film, *Annihilation*, in its weirdness, may evoke such entanglement and, as the following reviews demonstrate, certainly causes us to reflect upon it.

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THE REVIEWS

‘Why You Should Lichen Alex Garland’s *Annihilation*’

Andrew Hageman

I’ll say it up front: I deeply admire both Jeff VanderMeer’s novel, *Annihilation* (indeed, the full *Southern Reach* trilogy), and Alex Garland’s film of the same name. The film strikes me as an outstanding work of fan-fiction reverence that offers up its own aesthetic contributions to the exploration of weird ecological consciousness. This novel-film duo seems to fit Fredric Jameson’s (2011) general claim about literature into film in Colin MacCabe’s *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*: that if both texts are equal in value and impact they will diverge in spirit. This review focuses solely on the film and the Gothic Nature elements of its weird ecomedia spirit. And I use the term ‘weird’ in this review with two points of reference in mind: one is to invoke the idea of surrendering to surreal weirdness that sprawls beyond borders that Ann and Jeff VanderMeer articulate as at the heart of the genre in their anthology, *The New Weird* (p. xvi), and the other is to keep in mind China Miéville’s assertion that the New Weird had an important yet short run that’s already done (Bould, p. 25). I am specifically entranced by the film’s complex invocations and interrogations of ‘home’, ‘family’, and ‘doppelgängers’. By rendering the home as unsettlingly permeable and permeated by nonhuman lives, framing the family as newly symbiotic with elements of a radically

changed ecosystem, and leveraging doppelgängers to point out the limits of anthropomorphism, *Annihilation* seems to exemplify Gothic Nature.

One of the most recognisable, yet deceptively subtle threads in the film is the heteronormative household. Very early on the film transitions from introducing Lena (Natalie Portman) via her classroom at Johns Hopkins University to a montage of rooms in the house where she and her husband Kane (Oscar Isaac) have lived. The shots are tightly framed and from perspectives that are in threshold spaces inside the house such as corridors and openings between two distinct rooms. As a result, *Annihilation* conjures the feeling of home in a thoroughly eerie way. It does not, however, do this conventionally. Rather than emphasising spookiness contained within the house as seen from outside (as in Hitchcock's *Psycho* [1960]) or the interior as a bulwark against spookiness without the house (as in Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* [1968]), this montage establishes the house/home as *in itself* permeable and permeated. Put another way, the architectural artifact typically associated with dividing inside from outside, private from public, and so on, is implied to be much more porous than all that. And by leaving this focalising agency unidentified, the film enables readers to fill in the blanks of what crosses thresholds and coexists with human beings, from microbes and viruses to ghosts and water vapor. One signal this sends is that the Gothic concept of the home as haunted dilates to a Gothic Nature concept of the planet as haunted by climate change and mass extinction. One other signal, however, is that in order to confront such planetary devastation people will have to shift away from stable notions of inside/outside to an aesthetic and scientific vision of homes and organisms as porous and permeable, differently vulnerable and differently robust through such inherent connection.

This subtly-implied permeability is reinforced in the subsequent scene when Kane, just returned from The Shimmer of Area X, explains to Lena how he got home:

Kane: I was outside.

Lena: Outside the house?

Kane: No, no, I was outside the room. The room with the bed. The door was open and I saw you.

The volume of this initial eeriness gets turned way up later in the film when the expedition team enters the house inside The Shimmer where the bear attack occurs. Though one might

overlook it on a first screening, the bear attack house in fact seems to be the same structure as Lena and Kane's house and so provides a provocative reflection of their home. As such, when the home gets weird and threatens to overturn human stability and control—allegorically, when impacts of climate change on Earth upset the fantasies of home planet stability and control—the causes of this are not precisely evil within or without. Rather, *Annihilation* invites spectators to re-envision the home, whether house, ecosystem, or planet, as an intersection of insides and outsides that flow and mix. Here the film and novel converge in a spirit of eschewing focus on evil, as such concerns can function as destructive fantasies and/or escape-hatches of blame. *Annihilation* invites us to wonder if cosy notions of home actually erect barriers to life as wild and radically strange coexistence.

This unsettling depiction of home is intricately entangled with the film's exploration of family through Lena and Kane's marriage. Through Lena's flashbacks, we witness an arc of estrangement. Their love, their very capacity for conversation, had eroded before Kane ever left for Area X. Their marriage was lost. It's the things we lose that we have forever, though. In this case, Lena possesses not only the trauma of the failed relationship, but the alien-infused second chance at making a family with Kane at the close of the film. For, through the refracted (and, to some, horrifying) reproductions of themselves inside The Shimmer, Lena and Kane reenter their relationship, which is changed and made new. The film ends on the embrace of the permeated, mutated Lena and Kane, his words and her eyes indicating that this second chance at love, marriage, family exists for radically altered versions of who they were before Area X. It's a weird rendition of a love's second chance. At this level of intimacy and coexistence, the film is deeply unsettling and provocative as it figures family members as deeply alien. But if an ecological cultural revolution is needed on Earth, wouldn't that include re-imagining the structures of human love and reproduction? At least that's what the heteronormative family in *Annihilation* seems to ask.

In addition to the perturbed depictions of home and family, both of which feature aspects of doubling, another significant Gothic Nature element of *Annihilation* is its use of doppelgängers. These are not Sigmund Freud's doppelgängers; the doubles in this film are not projections of self that generate uncanny reactions still centered on individual egos. Instead, the doubling synthesises the uncanny and the weird as it combines the uncanny disturbance and disintegration of what's inside the self with the startling perspective of a wholly alien other. Take for example Lena's account of her encounter with her doppelgänger inside the

Lighthouse. When the Southern Reach interrogator presumes that the double attacked her, she replies that it was merely mirroring her and she was the one who attacked. She emphasises her point by saying she doesn't know what it wanted or even if it is a thing that wants. By responding to the double this way, Lena perceives what's happening inside The Shimmer as creation rather than destruction or dissolution. She opens herself both to the weird permeability that was always the self and to the new and alien other thing that she is becoming.

I'll close with a pair of *mise-en-scène* features that connect the Gothic experimentations on home, family, and doppelgängers with the lichens of this review's title. The viscous rainbows of The Shimmer haunt *Annihilation* like the monitor-green tint that haunts *The Matrix*. Prismatic splashes of The Shimmer pulse in the peripheries of shots with their viscous double coding of beautiful light and oily pollution. Of note is how The Shimmer's prisms swerve away from the Gothic aesthetics of ruins; instead, the beauty-pollution dynamic is focalised strictly because of an alien intervention, a thorn in the Earth from outer space, to borrow a notion from VanderMeer's trilogy. Echoing The Shimmer's colors are the riotous lichens that abound where Earth is being changed, attached to myriad surfaces from which they broadcast their technicolor colonial presence. As they spread over built and unbuilt surfaces inside of Area X, these lichens signal a radically nonhuman social infrastructure rising. A lot of Anthropocene visual media texts deploy infrastructural objects like elevated highways with plants sprouting from the crumbles and cracks that signal the collapse of the human public, the human social. In *Annihilation*, the lichen and other life forms point more to themselves than to what we human beings could lose. And as they move into the foreground inside Area X, these lichens do not pull people into the environment so much as point to the fact that we've always been inextricable from this complicated planet. Because the lichen, like the surface of The Shimmer, are earthy and alien, lovely and repulsive, they represent the fruiting bodies of ecological awareness as it arises in the Anthropocene.

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'We're all damaged goods here': Gender and Shared Trauma in *Annihilation*

Alison Sperling

I keep coming back to writing about Jeff VanderMeer's 2014 novel *Annihilation*. Its weirdness, by which I mean here its inexplicabilities and ambiguities, continue to suggest new readings and critical engagement the more I reflect on it. But I admit that one of the things that I've never really known what to do with is the all-women makeup of the twelfth expedition into what is called in the novel 'Area X': a biologist, a linguist, a psychologist, and a surveyor. How might we reflect on the shared gender dynamic of these particular four women who *choose* to enter into this most toxic and dangerous space?

Though Alex Garland's film adaptation of the novel takes a lot of liberties in transitioning to the big screen, one of the elements that stays the same is that it is a team of all-women that embarks on the mission into what is called in the film 'The Shimmer'. But in the film, a new dimension is added, or at least made more explicit: Each of the women has and continues to deal with an explicit trauma. In a scene near the start of their expedition, Cass and

Lena share a short canoe trip that in turn reveals a whole lot to Lena about the rest of the team members. Lena tells Cass that she recently lost her husband, to which Cass replies:

Cass: I'm sorry to hear that. I guess there had to be something.

Lena: What do you mean?

Cass: Volunteering for this. It's not exactly something you do if your life is in perfect harmony. We're all damaged goods here. Anya's sober...an addict. Josie wears long sleeves because she doesn't want you to see the scars on her forearms.

Lena: She's tried to kill herself?

Cass: Oh I think the opposite, trying to feel alive.

Lena: Ventress?

Cass: Yeah. As far as anyone knows, no friends, no family, no partner, no children, no concession in her at all.

Lena: You?

Cass: I also lost someone. Not a husband, though, a daughter. Leukemia.

Lena: God, I'm sorry.

Cass: In a way its two bereavements. My beautiful girl, and the person I once was.

Distinct to the film adaptation, each woman enters The Shimmer having already experienced some form of trauma or loss. Each carries with her a personal history that, according to Cass in this scene, informs their decision to embark on what they know is likely a one-way trip into uncharted and inexplicable territory.

Why does the film take such care here to establish these character histories that we might understand as a shared sense of trauma (being careful of course not to level all trauma as equivalent)? Indeed it seems crucial in the film, at least to Cass, that their pasts somehow unite the women. It is as if only with nothing to lose would one consider entering The Shimmer, only having already lost (all or part of) oneself would one be willing to do it all over again. As Cass says, the loss of her daughter required two bereavements – one for her 'beautiful girl', and one for 'the person I once was'. As someone admittedly unfamiliar with the field of trauma studies, I wonder how this notion of trauma as loss of self trucks with scholarship in the field. If one thinks about the self as already 'annihilated' before entering Area X in the way that Cass describes, what is left to annihilate once inside The Shimmer? As the notion of bounded (human) subjectivity literally merges more and more with the animals, the plant life, the

landscape of Area X, how might the women's pasts inform the kinds of subjectivity with which they entered in the first place? The film suggests that trauma informs the subject in crucial ways that serve to blur its bounds, even open one up in weird ways to the unknown on the other side of *The Shimmer*.

To further de-center the human, a gesture that both the novel and film arguably make, we might also ask how the women's varied histories of loss operate in relation to the trauma or ecological changes that nonhuman nature is also undergoing. In short, though I don't have the space to fully explore the question here, I wonder about the relationship between gender, trauma, and the kinds of weird ecological changes that occur in the film. And I'm interested in how the novel and the film draw connections between (the) women and a dramatically changing ecology, and what role their shared sense of being 'damaged goods' links them or distinguishes them from the damage that the landscape and nonhuman beings that populate it are likewise undergoing.

Imperial EcoGothic and the Soldier/Scientists of Alex Garland's *Annihilation*

Daniel Platt

In a recent interview (Barber, 2018), a reporter from *Military.com* asked *Annihilation* director Alex Garland about his interest in the intersections 'between science, research, and military application'. In his response, Garland strikes a measured but cautionary tone, warning about the 'power embedded within tech and science' and pointing to the ethical questions that researchers must ask themselves when considering military applications of their work. *Annihilation* is a much more fully realised answer to this question: it speaks to the tension between science and militarism both through its Gothic and ecoGothic elements and through the troubled relationship between Lena (Natalie Portman) and her husband Kane (Oscar Isaac), which, I argue, can be read as an allegorical representation of national anxieties. I would place the film in a category that scholar Johan Höglund (2016) terms 'the American Imperial Gothic', texts that seem haunted by threats to U.S. global hegemony and by the legacies of U.S. imperialism, particularly in the post-9/11 era. Lurking beneath the threatening landscapes and horrific creatures of *Annihilation* is a fear that the marriage of military might and scientific

innovation that made the U.S. a dominant global power in the second half of the twentieth century is crumbling in the face of environmental threats that the nation is not prepared to understand *or* fight.

Garland's *Annihilation* presents both Lena and Kane as veterans of the U.S. Army whose romantic relationship begins in the service. However, it soon becomes clear that Kane's ongoing commitment to the Army—and Lena's new career as a university researcher—have become a fault line in their marriage. As Lena's colleague Daniel (David Gyasi), with whom she is having an affair, asserts: 'You can't talk to him about work, and he won't talk about his'. This breakdown of communication is dramatised early in the film, when a version of Kane returns from 'The Shimmer': a slowly-expanding territory where strange phenomena occur. Lena seems to believe that he has been away on covert operations in Pakistan. When she presses him for details about his absence, Kane exhibits behavior that could be mistaken for symptoms of PTSD: He appears emotionally distant and seems unwilling or unable to recall basic details from his deployment. This troubling scene can be read as an example of the Gothic return of the repressed, as the distant violence of U.S. military interventions overseas resurfaces in the homeland in the form of haunted veterans like Kane carrying secrets they can't disclose. But this scene also fits within a larger pattern of unsettling failures of communication in the film, which seem to speak to broad national anxieties about the ability of military and scientific institutions to respond effectively in the face of crisis.

Unlike other works of post-9/11 U.S. cinema, such as Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* (2005), which evoke U.S. imperialism and the global 'war on terror' through the invasion of monstrous bodies like zombies or 'alien' others, *Annihilation's* invasion seems more like a local 'environmental' phenomenon. With *The Shimmer*, *Annihilation* points to a military/industrial/academic complex that both contributes to and often *benefits* from global environmental catastrophes (by way of 'disaster militarism' and its companion 'disaster capitalism') in ways that are often hidden, repressed, or denied. In Jeff VanderMeer's novel, which inspired the film, the initial public explanation for the evacuation of territory near 'Area X' is an environmental catastrophe caused by experimental military research; in the film, the evacuations are conducted under the pretext of a chemical spill. By juxtaposing these 'ordinary' and 'acceptable' catastrophes with the 'extraordinary' and unsanctioned phenomenon of *The Shimmer*, *Annihilation* defamiliarises the everyday environmental violence of U.S. militarism

and raises questions about the complicity of scientists and researchers in that violence. As a phenomenon that defies scientific explanation and renders conventional military interventions useless, *The Shimmer* also seems, like the rift in Kane and Lena's marriage, a symbol of the failing union between science and military.

The film's second act launches Lena—along with four other scientists—on a heroic quest into *The Shimmer* to heal these two traumas: to restore Kane and to understand and undo the strange phenomenon that seems to be destroying the land. As the team makes their way through *The Shimmer*, they encounter military bases crumbling and overgrown like Gothic ruins. Three years of expeditions into *The Shimmer* have resulted in failure: With the exception of Kane, no one has returned. Dr. Ventress (Jennifer Jason Leigh) suggests that Lena's ability to bridge the worlds of military power and scientific research gives her a unique advantage: 'Soldier/scientist: You can fight. You can learn. You can save him'. Initially, she seems to be right: Monstrous creatures are defeated with automatic weapons, and Lena and her colleagues seem to uncover a scientific explanation for the strange transformations that occur within *The Shimmer*. With a hand grenade and a deft dance move, Lena brings down *The Shimmer* and revives Kane. But *Annihilation* refuses a neat resolution in which the union between science and militarism is restored and the repressed national anxieties are re-buried. Instead, Lena's reunion with Kane is veiled in uncertainty: Neither seems to know who they are or how to resume a relationship that has been fundamentally changed by their experiences in *The Shimmer*. Ultimately, *Annihilation* asks its viewers to think critically about the permeability of borders—between self and other, human and nonhuman, place and planet—but also to reconsider what is possible to learn and what is possible to fight.

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Prison/Prism: Refraction as Radical Praxis in *Annihilation*¹

Shannon Davies Mancus

For most of the modern Western environmental movement, there has been a strong strain of thought that operated in accordance with what social scientists who study climate change messaging call the ‘information deficit model’(IDM). This lens treats the problem of environmental communication as one of a deficit of exposure to good facts and assumes that the reason that the general public is so reticent to acknowledge and act on climate change is due to a lack of understanding of empirical data. This is also the operative assumption of most climate change documentaries and a vast swath of ecomedia: that more, better, and clearer information will result in a change in hearts and minds and an uptick in political will.

The information deficit model, however, has proven dangerously ineffective, and even, at times, counterproductive (Kahan, 2012: pp. 732-735). Social scientists have conducted research that proves that narratives are more effective than a simple communication of facts (Greenberg, 2010: pp. 16-34; McComas & Shanahan, 1999: pp. 30-57; Dahlstrom, 2014: pp. 13614–20; Boykoff, 2011). Environmental psychologists have noted that cognitive dissonance causes individuals to sift facts through a filter of personal identity; in this way, people bend facts to match their interpretive models of the world rather than the other way around (Stoknes, 2015).

Storytelling, then, has a key role to play in coaxing individuals to understand themselves as part of larger environmentalist narratives, and *Annihilation* is an entry into a canon of ecomedia texts that seek to alter people’s ideas about their relationship to the

¹ I am grateful to the students in my honors Environmental Film class, with whom I engaged in robust discussion about this film. Their insights in our conversation about this topic helped shape this essay.

biosphere. Though far from a perfect film, *Annihilation*'s structure proves an interesting case study for how we might tell new kinds of stories about ecological collapse. Instead of taking a straightforward approach to communicating to the audience what an environmental apocalypse might look like, *Annihilation* centers around the concept of refraction – a phenomenon in which a wave travels between two or more mediums which deflect or bend the wave resulting in the wave progressing at two simultaneous different speeds. Like the alien shimmer that serves as the primary antagonist, the film bends its spatial and temporal constructions in ways that subvert some of the primary problems with climate communication.

One of the major barriers that environmental storytellers face is representing what Rob Nixon (2006) calls 'slow violence'. Environmental issues, he notes, often '[require] creative ways of drawing public attention to catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects'. This poses narrative issues for climate communicators, because '[t]o intervene representationally requires that we find both the iconic symbols to embody amorphous calamities and the narrative forms to infuse them with dramatic urgency...to render slow violence visible entails, among other things, redefining speed' (p. 15).

One common way storytellers have faced this dilemma is by projecting narratives into the future to demonstrate the dramatic outcomes of the slow violence of environmental crises. Another method has been to hyperbolise slow violence into sudden violence, a la *The Day After Tomorrow*, wherein environmental catastrophes that are projected to occur over a long period of time occur suddenly and all at once. In both cases, these dystopian narratives serve as a warning to the present by showing us a planet irrevocably and globally altered.

Annihilation, however, is able to isolate its radical change behind the oily, petro-fantastical curtain of *The Shimmer*, while simultaneously giving us the sense that it might not be too late to save the rest of the planet. In *Annihilation*, time is refracted, and not just in terms of the non-linear storytelling. The narrative itself flashes back and forth between the past and the present for the protagonist, but the film also speeds up, slows down, and collapses time in other ways. The event that causes *The Shimmer*—and ultimately threatens the human species with the titular crisis—is brought about by a meteor impacting the earth in a clear echo of the extinction of the dinosaurs. Rapid cell division and bodily alteration within *The Shimmer* echo but exaggerate the aesthetics and speed of the cancerous growth shown early in the film. Time operates differently within *The Shimmer*, both literally and metaphorically: While the world

outside *The Shimmer* reflects our current moment, the world inside *The Shimmer* luridly evinces an ever accelerating and slowly expanding environmental calamity; it lets us see what an apocalyptic future might look like without sentencing its protagonists to a totalising dystopia. This is because *The Shimmer* also serves as a spatial laboratory that subverts another issue that much cli-fi narratives face: Because the effects of climate change, though uneven, cannot be contained, most dystopian cli-fi can only offer visions of an environmental future that are devastating on a global level. By constructing *The Shimmer* as a kind of cataclysmic snow globe, the film is able to both show us a catastrophic environmental future while still presenting hope that the world as we know it can be saved.

To combat annihilation, the film prescribes radical, uncomfortable, fundamental transformation for the human species in the face of malignant growth. The Lena and Kane hybrids that we see at the end of the film are able to take a blueprint for survival out of *The Shimmer*. The key to avoiding a violent death inside the dome of environmental chaos is articulated first by Josie: As she notes that death has come to those who want to face the forces of *The Shimmer* or fight them, she declares that she doesn't want 'either of those things'. Instead, she tentacularly merges with the forces of *The Shimmer* by growing vines and disappearing into the landscape. In *The Shimmer*, the plants and the animals, and the animal/plant refractions that radically disrupt human notions of species hierarchy, are thriving; it is the people who refuse to evolve that are dying in gruesome ways. The outcome of these mutations are sometimes nightmarish, sometimes beautiful, but it is these alterations that allow for survival. Lena and Kane become messengers for this uncomfortable but necessary adaptation when they are forced to face themselves—quite literally—and radically adjust by abandoning prior notions of individualism and what it means to be human.

In the end, the ubiquitous refraction in the film seems to be asking us to think about radical flexibility. At the climax of the story, Lena's interviewer asserts that *The Shimmer* 'was mutating our environment, it was destroying everything'. To this, Lena responds by applying a different lens to the phenomenon, saying 'It was changing our environment. It was making something new'. In the face of annihilation, then, the metaphor of refraction works with those who bend and breaks those who remain rigid. It also rewards those who can see in new ways. A tertiary definition of the word 'refraction' relates to the mechanisms that focus an eye; it is interesting, then, that confirmation of *The Shimmer*'s presence inside Lena and Kane at the

very end of the film comes in the form of a psychedelic swirling in their irises. Survival is predicated on literally seeing through new eyes.

One of refraction's primary aesthetic qualities is that it can make things appear closer than they are. In using refraction to remodel space and time, *Annihilation* closes the distance between our present and an environmentally calamitous future and offers up an alternative mode of storytelling that is uniquely suited to bypass some of the most stubborn problems with our current narrative canons.

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The ‘Neuro-washing’ of *Annihilation*

Sara L. Crosby

Annihilation by Jeff VanderMeer is my favorite book. And it’s my favorite book because of one striking innovation: the protagonist’s adaptive, posthuman neuroatypicality, which impels her to identify more strongly with ecosystems than with human individuals. It’s also the element that Alex Garland’s film gets profoundly wrong.

In the novel, ‘the biologist’ never gives a name. It’s not important to her. She barely talks of her parents or even her cancer-stricken husband, who had ventured into and then out of Area X to die. She relates his death as a puzzling fact, but not one that explains her own compulsive pilgrimage into that uncanny new wilderness. The novel (unlike the film) refuses to portray her as emotionally damaged or disabled. Humans—and even her own identity—simply fail to interest her. They are just not that bloody important.

What is important to her is a neglected swimming pool. She remembers it abandoned in the backyard of her parents’ rental, slowly filling with rainwater, algae, frogs, turtles, and dragonfly larvae, until it became a ‘functioning ecosystem’, a ‘miniature paradise’ that she observed with obsessive fascination and with more than fascination: with love. ‘One of the great traumas of my life’, she admits, ‘was worrying about that pool’, after her parents like so many other working people in our age of advancing inequality could no longer afford the rent and she was expelled from her paradise (pp. 45-6). She nonetheless avoids Adam and Eve’s self-pity and instead agonises about the ecosystem’s suffering: ‘Would the new owners see the beauty and importance of leaving it as is, or would they destroy it, create unthinking slaughter in honor of the pool’s real function?’ (p. 46).

Ecological ‘trauma’ caused by this hubristic ecosystem ‘slaughter’ is the heartbreak that marks and motivates her: ‘There are certain kinds of deaths that one should not be expected

to relive, certain kinds of connections so deep that when they are broken you feel the snap of the link inside of you' (p. 46). The death of the pool and her mourning for it mime in miniature the melancholia provoked by the human-driven Anthropocene and its 'end of nature', as Bill McKibben (1989) famously put it. Sorrow for that loss drives her forward past the shimmering wall, into an alien ecosystem too strong for us humans, too resilient to be reduced to its human-determined 'real function'. She goes into Area X to find her lost, *nonhuman* love.

This is not how humans, particularly modern humans, with psyches shaped to suit an environmentally-exploitive settler-colonial or capitalist mentality, are 'supposed' to structure our attachments. In 1630, that great coloniser, John Winthrop, prepared his Puritan followers for their brutal conquest of American nature by affirming that 'dissimilitude' leads to 'disaffection', but 'the ground of love is [...] resemblance' (p. 42). Such love builds out from ourselves, seeking similarities, loving mirrors or projections of self, and rejecting or destroying and exploiting the different. But the biologist lacks this supposedly healthy psychology. She loves the nonhuman: the unfettered pool 'as is' and its even more unruly and nonhuman macrocosm, Area X. This difference in her emotional structures leads her to engage with Area X from a standpoint beyond the solipsistic mentality that enabled our current ecological crisis. And—trilogy spoiler alert—it allows her to adapt and become the 'final girl' (or gelatinous blob) of a post-human world.

The film, unfortunately, fails to understand the protagonist's adaptive neurodiversity and actually reintroduces a conventional love plot that washes out her neuroatypicality altogether, reducing 'Lena' (Natalie Portman) to just another of Hollywood's romantic heroines, whose self depends on and derives from a man. The film skips her true love interest—the pool—and entangles her with men: an adulterous colleague, a mysteriously distant husband. Although Portman is ostensibly the star, the movie makes everything she does about and for her character's husband. The film flips the book's characterisation, making him the unattainable, outer-directed one, and her the clinging, needy supplement who spends the first half of the movie crying over his portrait and the second half desperately searching for a cure for him. In fact, that is why she ventures into Area X. As she tells the psychologist, now named Dr. Ventress, 'I owe him. So I went in'. Lena's subsequent flashback—nakedly riding her illicit, African-American lover—suggests that she owes her husband because of this sexual (and racial?) betrayal. But after sacrificing herself to Area X for him, she returns cleansed and changed like he was and so able to embrace him in their renewed 'resemblance'. That's how

the film ends – with the Edenic pair changed a bit, maybe enhanced by a drabble of alien or mutant DNA like the X-Men, but essentially restored to healthy human form and ready for a new kind of human dominion. New boss, same as the old boss. This plot tells us once again that the world revolves around the human, the male human in particular, the very inverse of the book’s critique of the exploitive and egotistical psychology that murdered the pool and our planet.

The film has been criticised for whitewashing the protagonist, but I think its erasure of her neurodiversity, its ‘neuro-washing’, is also deeply problematic. It fails to represent her neuroatypicality, the ecological consciousness, the posthuman identity, that was the book’s most insightful look at and beyond our current ecocidal Anthropocene. Without that, the film is only another shiny Hollywood melodrama reinstating old, broken Edenic dominion narratives and maladaptive psychologies. No promise of a different relationship to ourselves and our world, it’s just one more stop on the way to annihilation.

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THE RESPONSES

Andrew Hageman

It's an intellectual pleasure to be part of this *Annihilation* response roundtable. Each response seems to explore contradictions that arise or become more visible through fiction (such as *Annihilation*) as the act of actively and critically engaging such films parallels and assists the work of learning how to live and plan for the future in the current phase of extreme transition precipitated by climate change and mass extinction. Crosby's response highlights several of the deepest contradictions between the novel and Garland's film adaptation. Without the defunct swimming pool or life-changing tide pools of the novel, the film creates a protagonist who is very differently ecologically attuned than her literary counterpart. Crosby's piece prompts sustained contemplation of the particular prospects and pitfalls that inhabit different media forms and marketplaces: Adaptations are not required to replicate their literary progenitors, but when they do swerve, it's productive to ask questions driven by the doubled text dynamics. Davies Mancus' piece makes critical note of how *The Shimmer* offers a 'cataclysmic snow globe' within which radical ecological changes are happening rather than a global-level vision of climate catastrophe. Davies Mancus' connects this isolated zone with her argument that by swerving wide of a globe-totalising perspective, *Annihilation* retains sufficient space to maintain hope so long as new strategies for coexistence can be adopted. While reading this piece, I was reminded of how Dr. Yamane in the original Japanese film *Gojira* (1954) is immediately frustrated by everyone around him desiring to kill the kaiju while he alone sees its disruptive arrival as an unprecedented opportunity to learn how to survive extreme radiation. Davies Mancus identifies a similar contradiction in how Lena, like Dr. Yamane, confronts the horror as an awful yet powerful opportunity to re-think resilience in a radically altered world. Platt's piece identifies the contradiction of recognising that, just as a conventional confidence in militarism blended with scientism is no longer viable, one response to this realisation can be to retreat to a desire for precisely the protection that that same blend previously promised. One of the great insights from Platt's piece is its identification of the single, simplified representation the film assigns to militarism-scientism. Finally, Sperling poses some very insightful and provocative questions that get at crucial intersections and potential contradictions of gender and trauma in the film (as well as the novel). On the one hand, as Sperling points out, Garland's emphasis of traumatic pasts potentially undermines and/or disempowers the women entering *The Shimmer* as they may appear capable of this risk only because they are 'damaged goods'. Yet, Sperling adroitly suggests there may be useful parallels to draw between their individual traumas and the ecological trauma at the center of *Annihilation*'s narrative. Sperling's piece prompts me to think together *Annihilation* and Jeff Nichols' 2011 film *Take Shelter*. The latter is among the films that E. Ann Kaplan analyses in

Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction. Together, this pair of films provide a contrast between paternal/patriarchal masculinity confronting the psychic pre-traumatic stress of global warming in *Take Shelter* and the range of women working through post-traumatic stress in *Annihilation*. As trauma and its gendering is so integral to the Gothic, close attention to gender dynamics in Garland's and other ecocinema texts has a key role to play in theorising Gothic Nature.

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Alison Sperling

Together, these responses to *Annihilation* bring out related questions about narrative, climate change, ecological trauma and its temporalities, and the ways in which institutions in place can or cannot address questions of planetary destruction and catastrophe. Daniel Platt's reading convincingly argues that the film resists the celebration of either science, militarism, or their union in its approach to The Shimmer. As Platt explains, Lena is framed as one who can both 'learn' and 'fight', which is, according to Ventress, the ideal qualifications needed to save her husband, (though whether that's really what Ventress is concerned about is debatable). But it's not always clear that the best response to The Shimmer and the drastic changes it forces is either to understand it or to fight it – both seem futile. Platt's review thus asks the implicit question: what structures are in place, if any, to respond to crisis (in the Anthropocene), and, if neither understanding nor fighting the emergent forms of crisis are sufficient, what other responses and forms of engagements are possible?

Shannon Davies Marcus reads the refraction of *The Shimmer* in the film to suggest that knowledge about the climate is itself refracted, and reflects on how climate-storytelling might play with temporal and spatial dimensions in order alter the viewer's understanding of herself in relation to the biosphere. I really like thinking about the kind of 'radical flexibility' (particular with eco-temporalities, or the slowness of climate change) that can be imagined inside what Davies Marcus calls the 'cataclysmic snow globe' of *The Shimmer*. The response really gets at not only the problem of time in storytelling about the climate but also the problem of scale, the relationship between local the global. Andy Hageman's response, especially his really smart focus on the home in the film and its disruption of the inside/outside dynamic that is central to the *Weird*, also points to problems of scale, but shows how the film both stages intimate encounters with perhaps the most local locale, the home, as itself already infiltrated by the outside, as porous and permeable, eerie and unsafe.

I was especially struck by Sara Crosby's response, particularly because of its resonances with my own – the focus on ecological trauma that serves as a driving force for the biologist's 'love for the nonhuman' in the novel, which, according to Crosby, the film simply gets wrong. I too absolutely loved the descriptions of the pool in the novel, of the biologist's obsession with it, of the way it stood in for other kinds of perhaps more familiar human attachments. So, although the film does retain some focus on trauma of at least some of the women on the twelfth expedition, the trauma is different from that of the novel, and may, as Crosby suggests, have different implications.

Daniel Platt

I walked into Alex Garland's *Annihilation* with a giant bucket of popcorn and a thin shield of skepticism. Like the other reviewers, I had first read and enjoyed Jeff VanderMeer's novel, and I felt protective of the experience I had as a reader. By the end of Crosby, Stills, and Nash's 'Helplessly Hoping'—which plays over a montage of Natalie Portman's Lena tearfully remembering her missing husband—I had come to accept that this film would diverge meaningfully, and at times maddeningly, from the spirit of the book. The ideas and images that this surprising and tone-setting early scene introduces—the permeable borders of house and

home that Hageman explores, the theme of trauma as ‘loss of self’ that Sperling discusses, the familiar patterns of Hollywood melodrama that Crosby critiques—have haunted me like few other scenes in recent cinema. Like Crosby, I was disappointed by the centrality of the love story and by the absence of strange wonder and love that the novel’s ‘ghost bird’ possesses for the nonhuman world. But I also found my own wonder at the oddly beautiful and eerily familiar creatures on screen, like the ‘pale riotous lichens’ that Hageman observes. And I was inspired by the film’s vision of radical flexibility and adaptive alternatives to individualism, which Mancus’ review points to. While the world of Garland’s *Annihilation* might only differ cosmetically and not structurally from our own—a set of blossoming designer antlers on top of a suburbanised deer—I’m grateful that it helped me to imagine for a moment that another world *is* possible, and that it might be contained within the one we inhabit.

Shannon Davies Mancus

Reading the stimulating pieces of the other contributors led me to realise how deeply anti-melodramatic *Annihilation* is. The narrative mode of melodrama has been articulated by Linda Williams in *Playing the Race Card* as the most popular mode of storytelling in American life. Melodrama is defined by several specific narrative characteristics, including the need for an in-the-nick-the-time rescue and a clear separation between heroes and victims and the villains who menace them. In such stories, villains are evil forces with no redeeming qualities and heroes earn the virtue necessary to defeat villainy by performing suffering. Melodramatic rhetoric is often deployed to address moments of communal crisis. Elisabeth Anker, for example, in *Orgies of Feeling*, has explored how the rhetoric that justified the Iraq War was intensely melodramatic. I have written elsewhere about how this rhetoric also predominately structures narratives about climate change. These two international crises are linked; as Platt observes, anxieties about the environment and national security are intertwined.

Nearly every author in this roundtable points to ways in which *Annihilation* is anti-melodramatic. Hageman identifies that *Annihilation* does not allow for a simple displacement of responsibility for environmental problems onto an external ‘villain’. Instead, it is our doppelgangers and the sacrifice zones we create to maintain ‘the good life’ that come back to confront us. Sperling observes that suffering does not transform characters into victorious

heroes; in fact, fighting the ‘weird’ forces in *The Shimmer* most often backfires, until Lena figures out that fighting malignancy really means fighting aspects of yourself rather than external forces. As unusual as it is to see these tropes in a Hollywood film, Crosby points out that compromises were made in translating the novel to the screen by highlighting the ways in which the book is even more radically anti-melodramatic than the film: Instead of celebrating individualism, it embraces nameless actors, and the only suffering that is foregrounded and recognised is directly tied to environmental loss. In these ways the narrative breaks from traditional filmic rhetoric and denies the audience an easy scapegoat for environmental peril.

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Sara L. Crosby

One urgent concern binds together these reviews, as well as most ecocriticism these days: To quote Professor Davies Mancus, how can we ‘tell new kinds of stories about ecological collapse’ that impel audiences to rethink ‘their relationship to the biosphere’? Old ecophobic ways of thinking that relationship have led us to the edge of global ecosystem collapse and into an extinction crisis that will include humans, unless we can change our minds and practices quickly and dramatically. My colleagues are hopeful that Alex Garland’s *Annihilation* contributes to this critical change in thinking, what Professor Hageman terms an ‘ecological cultural revolution’, and, to some extent, I agree. As Professor Platt points out, the film ‘refuses a neat resolution’ with one of our most pernicious environmental practices, military imperialism, while, as Professors Davies Mancus and Sperling observe, its depiction of the permeability and ‘radical flexibility’ of human identity ‘open one up’ to posthuman ways of conceiving the connections between human and environment.

Very true, yet, I can't help worrying about the *story*, which is to say I worry about love. Many of the innovative epistemological and aesthetic gestures that my colleagues identify curl around a central love story, which, despite the holes Professor Hageman observes it poking in the solidity of the heteronormative household, has not changed fundamentally from the narrative John Winthrop told. As Winthrop knew, constructing ecological relationships goes hand in hand with telling love stories, and, whereas the novel recounts a truly new story of biophilic love, Garland's film defaults to the same old ecophobic romance plot. Replacing the lost and beloved pool with the lost and beloved Kane re-centers the narrative on the human, and then reuniting The Shimmer-improved couple, rather than killing one and turning the other into a massive blob monster, resolves that love story once again in their attachment to each other rather than to the overtly nonhuman environment. Even if the new Adam and Eve survive because they are now super-powered by alien DNA in some evolutionary fantasy, they are still just human 2.0, and the old exclusionary ecophobic structures of feeling that facilitated dominion over nature remain comfortably in place.

Okay, maybe I'm being too harsh. Maybe that old dominion love story has become so embedded in our cultural DNA that we need to work with it, rather than rejecting it wholesale. Just recently, I had a frank conversation with a colleague who admitted that he preferred the movie over the book because he found the novel 'cold'. After I harrumphed, he shrugged and confessed that maybe he was just old-fashioned in his need for narratives of human connection. I can understand that, but I just can't bring myself to see VanderMeer's narrative as lacking connective warmth or romance. It's just a new kind of romance, a love story that attaches us to the nonhuman and that values—loves—the nonhuman for its own sake. That kind of love, the kind of the love the biologist had for the pool, creates rather than stymies an ecological consciousness. It is truly revolutionary, and I wish the film had given that love a chance.

BIOGRAPHIES

Sara L. Crosby hails from an island off the coast of Louisiana, and she is currently an associate professor of English at the Ohio State University at Marion where she teaches classes on everything from early American literature to pop culture to environmental writing. She is a former NEH fellow and a 2018 Ratner Distinguished Teaching Award recipient. She

has authored a number of articles, including ‘Beyond Ecophilia: Edgar Allan Poe and the American Tradition of Ecohorror’ (*ISLE*) and two books, *Poisonous Muse: The Female Poisoner and the Framing of Popular Authorship in Jacksonian America* (University of Iowa Press, 2016) and *Women in Medicine in Nineteenth-Century American Literature: From Poisoners to Doctors, Harriet Beecher Stowe to Theda Bara* (Palgrave, 2018). Her current book project investigates why the U. S. is allowing South Louisiana to wash away—specifically, how the interplay between extractive interests (like the petroleum industry) and American popular culture’s representation of South Louisiana as a place of ecohorror has and continues to enable this unnatural disaster.

Andrew Hageman is Associate Professor of English at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. He researches intersections of technoculture and ecology in film and literature, and his publications range from ecology and food in David Lynch’s tv and cinema and the roles of infrastructure in literary works by China Miéville and Tom McCarthy to a recent exploration of how speculative fiction writers are imagining blockchain driven futures. Related to his work in this issue, Andrew co-edited the 2016 issue of *Paradoxa* with the theme ‘Global Weirding’.

Shannon Davies Mancus is an Associate Teaching Professor at the Colorado School of Mines and the director of the Nature and Human Values program, which introduces future engineers to general and environmental ethics through composition. Her work can be found in publications such as *Performing Ethos*, *The Cambridge History of Science Fiction*, and the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Twenty-first Century Feminist Theory*. Her manuscript project focuses on the ways in which genre functions as a performative framework for environmentalist narratives. She is one of the current heads of the ecomedia working group for the Association of the Study of Literature and the Environment, as well as the Digital Humanities Liaison for the Environment and Culture Caucus of the American Studies Association. Her work focuses on the political performativity of environmentalist media in visual and popular culture.

Daniel Platt is an Assistant Professor of English at Graceland University in Lamoni, Iowa, where he teaches U.S. Literature, Composition, and Film Studies. He received his PhD in English from the University of Oregon in 2015. His current projects include research on Midwestern environmentalism and Richard Powers’ *The Overstory*, working with ASLE to develop open educational resources for the Environmental Humanities, and the launch of a new interdisciplinary undergraduate program in Sustainability Studies at Graceland.

Alison Sperling received her PhD in Literature and Cultural Theory from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2017 and is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICI) Berlin. Her book manuscript, *Weird Modernisms*, examines the temporality of weird embodiment in Modernist literary texts through queer and feminist science studies and theories of the nonhuman. Her publications include essays and reviews in the journals *Rhizomes*, *Girlhood Studies*, *Paradoxa*, *Kunstlicht*, *PhiloSOPHIA: A Society for Continental Feminism*, *Science Fiction Film and Television*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. She has chapters in *Lovecraft Annual* and in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of 21st Century Feminist Theory*, with chapters forthcoming on Star Trek ecologies and on plants in speculative fiction. Her research interests include The Weird, queer and feminist theory, 20th and 21st Century American Literature, nuclear culture, contemporary science fiction, and the Anthropocene.

The Rain

(Denmark: Netflix, 2018)

Rebecca Gibson

The first episode of Netflix's first Danish original series *The Rain* (2018) is by far the weakest, despite its dramatic premise. In its later episodes, the show deftly integrates elements of Gothic and dystopian narrative into its portrayal of a young band of survivors in order to demonstrate how it is possible to grow beyond these tropes even during the apocalypse and maintain an idea of communal hope. *The Rain* is a show which privileges character development and relationship-building between the survivors to this end, drawing from multiples genres in order to demonstrate how the bonds between them grow stronger despite the desperate decision-making necessitated by their apocalyptic landscape, but its beginning relies too heavily on clichéd peril in the wake of improbable environmental disaster.

We watch as a devastating biological event sweeps Scandinavia: an incurable virus spread through rainfall decimates the human population and drives our two protagonists, siblings Simone and Rasmus, to shelter underground in a bunker with their parents. They experience a rapid-fire sequence of losses – first their father, then their mother, then finally the more symbolic loss of a boy contacted over their radio, a relationship which ends as abruptly as it began after their equipment is damaged beyond repair. The time skip of six years which follows as Simone and Rasmus grow to young adulthood alone would perhaps have been better as a flashback, as the real story begins when they are forced to leave the bunker.

The tough band of survivors who trick Simone and Rasmus into leaving the bunker reveal themselves slowly over the course of *The Rain*'s eight episodes, forming the heart of its narrative. After the first episode, *The Rain* is less concerned with the biological implausibility of its premise—that a band of monomaniacal scientists working for a company named Apollon, including Simone and Rasmus' father, release an untested vaccine into the atmosphere, believing it to cure all human disease, and accidentally create the fatal rain—than with the potential of its characters to grow and form relationships in the aftermath of a man-made apocalypse. The show focuses on one character's backstory per episode, taking the viewer

through the sequence of events that led them to their current circumstances. It saves perhaps the least sympathetic for last: Patrick, an outsider even among their ragged band, who has so far been characterised as selfish to an almost pathological degree, is revealed to be so hurt by their leader Martin's denial of their friendship that he gets drunk and pushes Simone (a rival for Martin's affection) out into the deadly rain. Still unsympathetic, it would seem, except for the fact that the rain doesn't kill her: this unexplained anomaly perfectly exemplifies *The Rain's* approach to its integration of Gothic tropes and themes, which are employed only as long as they are useful to the developing dynamic between the survivors. Patrick's thoughtless action triggers a series of events which begins with him leaving the camp but eventually resolves in him rescuing the rest of the group from Apollon headquarters, demonstrating where his loyalty truly lies and concretising the group as an example of the 'found family' trope.

It has been suggested by numerous critics that Gothic is a mode well-placed to capture anxieties surrounding climate change and environmental damage, and although this model has merit it necessarily restricts the definition of Gothic to something reactionary, a mirror which regurgitates the cultural concerns of its age. Asserting instead that Gothic is tied to its historical context but not defined by it allows for a more expansive field of study, and acknowledges that Gothic works more as a discourse or mode than a particularly well-defined genre. In this vein, I would argue that *The Rain* utilises ecoGothic elements as it sees fit and dismisses them when they no longer serve its purpose, which is to illustrate the potential for hope even in seemingly hopeless circumstances: the lethal beauty of the Scandinavian forests is played for atmospheric value as the band of survivors begin their journey, as Rasmus and then Simone both experience scares that standing water or rain has touched their bare skin. The sheer horror of something as seemingly harmless and ubiquitous as water suddenly becoming a deadly weapon is emphasised by the foregrounding of small mistakes which could have lethal consequences: there is no way for the group to protect themselves entirely from an element which is essential for their existence. Nature has truly turned against humanity in this dystopian future, but the viewer is reminded often that this is all a consequence of our hubris.

The structural similarities to Gothic texts such as *Frankenstein* (1818) should seem clear, then, but as the show progresses it sheds some of its horrific sensibilities in favour of a more action-focused narrative. The survivors' journey through the woods to the Apollon headquarters allows them to traverse multiple microcosmic communities, such as the cult-like settlement which provides them with clean clothes and fresh food and which ultimately proves

too good to be true. The flashbacks to the characters' lives on the day of the first deadly rainfall provides a sense of fractured identity which ties the show more closely to post-apocalyptic road narratives such as *The Road* (2006) and *The Pesthouse* (2007), as these brief flashes split the characters' stories—and identities—into a *before* and *after*. The rain does more than simply change the environment, as it forces each character to reassess themselves and either choose to begin anew, reinventing themselves from scratch, or cling more fiercely to the person they were before the disaster. The obvious symbolism of water washing away past sins and mistakes should be acknowledged here, but it is not deployed in such a straightforward manner: because this rain (usually) pollutes rather than purifies, it is to each other that the characters have to look for absolution and a way forward.

The characters of *The Rain* are forced to undergo this erosion in a capricious environment where few rules remain, and even they are subject to change – as when, for unexplained reasons, a drop of rain in one setting kills one character, while standing in it for minutes does not harm Simone. Perhaps these lingering mysteries will be answered by the events of the second season, confirmed by Netflix to be coming in 2019, but it seems more likely that the focus will shift to the shady manoeuvrings of Apollon and their plan to weaponise the rain for use against other countries. A more fitting plot development could not be imagined for an extended metaphor as to human interference and pollution of the environment, but it would be to *The Rain's* detriment if the focus on the young group of survivors was lost. After all, the affectionate bonds which keep them together even in the face of extreme risk marks *The Rain* out as a hopeful dystopia in a field which often offers none.

Caged by Frail and Fragile Bonds: A Review of Michael Pearce's *Beast*

(UK: Agile Films, Stray Bear Productions, 2017)

Isaac Rooks

A wide shot of the ocean opens *Beast* and immediately establishes Jersey's isolation. It initiates a montage of beautifully composed images introducing the island's landscapes. Nestled amidst these picturesque surroundings are memorials to a killer's victims. Photographs and flowers surround a lonely pole in a field and the roots of a fallen tree. A murderer stalks this community, raping and killing women. Two outsiders, Moll (Jessie Buckley) and Pascal (Johnny Flynn), fall in love against this paranoid backdrop.

The title and narrative suggest a fairytale. A young woman trying to escape her unkind family falls for a seductive stranger who emerges from the wilderness. This might be a riff on *Beauty and the Beast*, as a woman's love redeems an unrefined but misunderstood man. Alternatively, Pascal may be the Big Bad Wolf, rather than Prince Charming. The title could also refer generally to something non-human, or someone whose actions grossly violate social norms.

Beast engages a classic horror theme: fear of the unrestrained violence that may lurk beneath peoples' civilised facades. This applies not only to the enigmatic Pascal. In an introductory voice-over, Moll compares herself to a killer whale in captivity. In the wild, an orca's song travels vast distances to reach its own kind. In a tank, those cries echo and drive the orcas mad. *Beast* codes Moll's roiling interiority as animalistic. Her narration accompanies images of Moll plucking a dark hair from her neck and practicing her smile before a mirror. The film suggests that Moll struggles to repress her animalistic side, something confirmed by vague references to the dark past of this 'wild one'.

Pascal, a fellow wild one, enters Moll's life to save her from a man's unwanted advances. He then promises to rescue her on a deeper level. Examining a self-inflicted injury on Moll's hand, Pascal observes: 'You're wounded. I can fix that'. In Pascal's truck, Moll discovers a book featuring pictures of animals. Pascal muses that the illustrator forgot to include images of people, signaling that he understands the animal within himself and

recognises the same in her. Unlike Moll, with her mirror routine, Pascal embraces his animality. That difference comes through in their performances. In the early sections of *Beast*, Flynn's delivery has an almost lazy, relaxed quality, suggesting an individual at ease. In contrast, Buckley gives a tense and mannered performance. She becomes looser and more explosive as the characters' relationship progresses and Moll unleashes her pent-up wild side.

Moll and Pascal represent different elements of their Jersey home. The sunny isle seems an unlikely site for Gothic horror. *Beast* presents Jersey as having a mundane developed side. Moll's family lives in a spotless home in an affluent suburb. Yet Jersey has another side, an environment of jagged cliffs and raging seas. In the beginning, Moll primarily interacts with Jersey's countryside by leading sedate bus tours for the elderly. Pascal connects Moll to a less safe but more romantic part of Jersey. After meeting Pascal, a violent dream awakens Moll. She heads downstairs and stares out her home's patio doors at the ominously beautiful dark woods that stand just outside. Pascal, a poacher with scars on his face and dirt under his nails, represents something wild and ancient about the island. During an awkward dinner with Moll's family, her mother asks where Pascal is from. He claims deep roots on Jersey, dating back to Saxon lords who ruled the island. Pascal turns the question back on the suburb dwellers, asking what they are doing on his land.

The dirt on Pascal's hands becomes an important element in the film. Moll notices with pleasure how his work boots track dirt on her family's clean carpet. After a sexual encounter with Pascal in the woods, Moll rakes her nails across the couch cushions, leaving dirty trails. However, this earthy sexuality might be dangerous. Women are being abducted from their homes, their violated bodies dumped outside. One victim is found half-buried in soft earth, smothered after the killer stuffed her mouth with dirt. As accusations against Pascal overwhelm Moll, she visits this victim's shallow grave. She crawls in and covers herself with dirt, filling her own mouth with soil. Moll's character displays self-destructive tendencies throughout the film. Her relationship with this potentially dangerous man may be part of the same impulses. When choking herself, Moll seems to experiment with how much pleasurable dirt she could tolerate before it would destroy her.

Moll's relationship with Pascal is passionate and erotic. Their romantic encounters are linked to the land: they kiss on a cliff, embrace in the waves, and have sex in the dark woods. The film hints at a pheromonal quality to their attraction. Moll attributes her interest in Pascal

to his scent, which others find unpleasant. There is a sense throughout the film that an animal attraction based on their similarities draws the two together. The question becomes how much beast is in each of them?

Some might view *Beast* as accepting and perpetuating simplistic conceptual binaries of human/non-human and nature/civilisation. *Beast* arguably understands and presents the human/non-human division as a cultural construction, one whose repressive and judgmental connotations can have negative consequences. The film does less to undermine the nature/civilisation divide. However, in both cases, the film avoids attaching an unambiguous value judgment to the divisions. The human and civilised are not inherently superior to the non-human and natural. Nice guys in the film turn nasty when rejected. Self-righteous fathers protect their community through racist bullying. Moll's mother controls Moll abusively, switching abruptly between sweetness and venom. *Beast* also avoids romanticising the non-human and the natural world. It presents a scenario that resists the neat resolution of many horror texts. No matter the conclusion, *Beast* suggests that order and civility cannot be restored because they were always illusory. The film is ultimately about Moll's quest to figure out her place in the world and her relationship to those around her, and the film offers no easy resolutions to this journey either.

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Plumbing the Depths: *Ozark* as Rural Gothic

(USA: Media Rights Capital, 2017)

Amanda Hagood

A recent survey conducted by the Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation found that, despite similar occurrence of economic hardship in the last decade as well as a roughly equivalent rate of poverty, rural and urban citizens in the United States have very different perceptions about poverty (DelReal & Clement, 2017). 56% of rural respondents believed the government did more to help people in urban areas than people in the country, while their urban counterparts were most likely to believe the government helped both groups equally. 42% of rural residents (as opposed to just 16% of urbanites) believed immigrants, as a major ‘economic burden’, were part of the problem. For rural dwellers, these beliefs were closely linked to a sense that the urban poor had become overly dependent on federal assistance without ‘paying their dues’, combined with a sense that ruralites are more reliant upon, and more compassionate toward, their neighbors. These perceptions set the stage for an intense political rift, where ideas about wealth, work, and entitlement deeply divide red states from blue cities.

Into this highly charged atmosphere comes Bill Dubuque’s *Ozark*, released on Netflix in July 2017, which brings fast-talking Chicago financial advisor Marty Byrde (Jason Bateman), along with his wife Wendy (Laura Linney) and children, to the far-flung Lake of the Ozarks—a so-called ‘redneck riviera’ nestled in the hills of southern Missouri. Rather than a vacation, the Byrdes, with increasing desperation, seek a way to launder \$8 million in drug money for a powerful Mexican cartel that was double-crossed by Marty’s business partner (now dissolving in a barrel of acid). In their quest, they run afoul of the locals, including the Langmores—a family of small-time crooks nestled in their lakeside trailer compound—and Jacob (Peter Mullan) and Darlene Snell (Lisa Emery), laconic landowners (and self-declared ‘hillbillies’) whose folksy pronouncements on family and principle mask the fact that they control the Lake’s trade in heroin. Along the way, the show surfaces interesting questions about the economic and cultural dynamics of dependence and reward between rural and urban Americans.

The setting is crucial in telling this story. It shares some features of rural gothic convention, including one notable scene in which Marty's bike is nearly run off a heavily forested road by revenge-seeking locals in a pickup truck. But by and large, the landscape of the series is, well, *busier* than you might expect. No wonder: the winding Lake of the Ozarks has 1,150 miles of shoreline (Lake of the Ozarks Convention & Visitor Bureau, 2018) speckled with hotels and vacation homes, and was named the nation's best recreational lake by *USA Today* in 2016 (Holleman, 2016). The series is shot through with glimpses of this tourist economy at work: congested highways and motor courts, a strip club that becomes a key plot point, and powerboats thrumming across the lake to attend the revelry at Party Cove or get to waterborne church services. While this is a far cry from the Cahulawassee wilderness of *Deliverance*, it is still a landscape of deep economic disparity and simmering resentment. The career of hotel housekeeper Ruth Langmore (Julia Garner) demonstrates that the service economy built on Lake tourism is not adequate to keep local families out of poverty—not without a supplement of extralegal activity. As she says to her family upon discovering \$3 million in cartel money while cleaning the Byrdes' room, 'That much cash-money's ill gotten. We got as much right to it as he does'.



The Byrde family observes their new home, the Lake of the Ozarks, from local landmark Lovers Leap. This shot, one of the few actually filmed in Missouri (rather than Georgia), masks the heavy development around much of the lake. (*Ozark*, 2017). Image courtesy of Netflix.

Moreover the Lake's layered history provides a window into longstanding patterns of rural-urban relationships. Between 1929-1931, the Union Electric Company of St. Louis built the Bagnell Dam (then the largest project of its type in the world) bringing electric power—and vacationers—to the newly formed lake shores (Lake of the Ozarks Convention & Visitor

Bureau, 2018). In a story that will be familiar to many Ozarkers, Jacob Snell recalls how ‘they flooded my people out to make way for this lake’. This traumatic displacement continues to haunt him, and, by his own lights at least, provides a justification for the drug empire he and his wife have built, growing and processing their own poppies and distributing heroin through hollowed-out hymnals at a local church (another deliciously gothic touch). But Snell’s character disintegrates when exposed to light: on one hand, his farm redeems his lost heritage while supporting ‘scores of employees’, but on the other, and with a clear reference to the opioid crisis that is ravaging rural America, the Snells’ just desserts are multiplying the power company’s original sin, trapping the Lake community in an endless cycle of addiction, crime, and dependency.

The show’s climactic scene, in which Marty convinces the Snells to partner with cartel deputy Camino Del Rio (Esai Morales) to build a riverboat casino to meet both parties’ money laundering and drug distribution needs, brings these simmering tensions to a gruesome boil. The Snells are initially repelled by Marty’s proposal to flood a Missouri River tributary that flows across their property in order to create a legally viable location for their casino; as Darlene reprimands him, ‘Symbolism matters, Mr. Byrde. Maybe not to people who have no pride, no history. But to us’. (Her words, and her evident disgust toward the Mexican ‘foreigners’ at the table, recall the all-too-prevalent erasure of the history that immigrants bring to the United States when they arrive). They soften when Marty argues that, with the casino’s profits, they can purchase enough land to finally gain leverage with the power company that displaced their grandparents. But the deal—and Del Rio—are quite literally shot to hell when he jokes about going into business with ‘a bunch of rednecks’. A weighty and troubled word, redneck: in an earlier episode, Jacob explains (partly in order to justify a murder he is about to commit) that the difference between being a redneck and a being a hillbilly is the difference between acting out of anger and acting out of principle. The distinction arises once again here, with the Snells unable to concede the sense of pride that buoys their identity.

Ozark seems to want to push this question a little further, to really interrogate what it means to live honorably in an economy that is premised on the exploitation of a place or a people, or what it could look like for a rural community to thrive in a world whose governing relationships are truly globalized. But for the most part, it trucks in the language of rural caricature, rather than character, and presents us with familiar pictures of disempowered locals, be they beer-swilling trailer dwellers or naïve men of God. The show does offer more depth in

the form of its younger characters, particularly Ruth Langmore, whose talent and ambition lead her into a business partnership with the Byrdes that frays ties of kinship, especially with her father, Cade (Trevor Long), who rules the family from behind bars. In his search for less distracted parents, thirteen-year-old Jonah Byrde (Skylar Gaertner) forms a number of meaningful and complex relationships with local folks and gets interested in guns, leading his parents—perhaps ironically, given the level of violence they tolerate in their business partners—to fret. In doing so, both characters challenge stereotypes about poverty, criminality, and violence relating to rural and urban youth, doing more than any other element in the show to suggest that what we deserve is more complicated than where we live. As the second season, premiering in August 2018, promises both Cade’s release from prison and the development of the floating casino, there are choppy waters ahead—but also an opportunity to more thoroughly sound the depths of America’s rural-urban divide.

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Muscles and Spells: Violent Transcendence in AMC's *The Terror*

(USA: AMC, 2018)

Ian Green

Given the evident glee with which prestige television shows now kill characters large and small, it is disappointing that it has taken so long for a show to take violence as a serious subject in its own right. Much more than a plot device, violence dictates the terms of communication between individuals, as well as between individuals and their world. AMC's *The Terror*, based upon Dan Simmons' 2007 novel of the same name, uses the true story of the HMS *Terror* and *Erebus*, two British exploratory vessels that were lost forever in 1845 while searching for the Northwest Passage, to imagine violence as more than a contest between winners and losers, heroes and villains. It considers it, instead, as a way of being in the world. In this story, violence whittles away all human excess and asks whether the relationship between humans and nature will remain a death struggle from which either may or should emerge or survive.

The 'terror' of the title is something of a pun, referring both to the ill-fated ship and to a state of dark transcendentalist experience, not the ecstasy of anthropocentric self-recognition in nature, but the ecstasy of submission to nature. Emerson could look out at his New England forests and imagine a continent to the west bearing his own divine likeness. By contrast, this landscape is so dry and white as to reflect nothing human but the bone. *The Terror* thus approaches the whiteness of the land with same ambivalence with which Melville considered the whiteness of the whale: as the visible aspect of nature's invisible spirit, with which we might achieve contact only in moments in which nature's enormity consumes the human mind.

This, then, is a form of cosmic horror as well, in which the human mind recoils as it discovers that it is part of a larger natural reality that it does not understand. There is something larger out there, something that seems more monstrous the more it reveals the limits of our claims to sacred interpretive command. The desperate survivors of the *Terror* and *Erebus* look out at the Arctic and wonder whether God is present there. As far as they can tell, no, God is not. But something surely is.

Nature holds its secrets like a haunted mansion, while humans blunder through. The very presence of the stranded crew is disruptive. And so, humanity and nature enter into their tense negotiations over whether humanity can break through for its own ends, whether nature will obliterate humanity, whether both will destroy the other, or whether there is some other form of balance. Even so, *The Terror* never forgets that this violent conflict also produces and is itself a form of wonder. By the end of the first episode, in fact, the survivors find themselves literally in nature's crushing grip. Later they will be assaulted by hail stones the size of baseballs, blinded by fog as thick as smoke and even forced to hang, weightless and small, in the black depths of the arctic sea. The crew wants to dominate this land, and we want to see them try, but, in a way, we also want to see them fail. We want their smallness to reveal the largeness of the cosmos. Perhaps they do too.

The show makes fine use of the garish white light of the Arctic, to render even the worst things alien, strange, and beautiful. Men drown, starve, waste away, find themselves the victims of something living out there on the ice. Their deaths are ugly. So too is the desiccated frozen desert in which they take place. Indeed, the landscapes of the show are unlike any Arctic with which viewers are likely familiar. Sea ice bobs in alluring circles and the frozen pack hardens into marble. Land, when it appears, is a rocky shore as desolate and vast as the moon. It is all too big to take in and too claustrophobic to offer comfort. By contrast, brief flashes of cinematic impressionism draw us into interior spaces of the human mind that are no less alluring or mute. In all cases, the violence is sublime. Brutality offers fleeting glimpses into an invisible world beyond our assessments of good and evil, life and death.

In the first moments of *The Terror*, a Netsilik man refers to what he calls 'Tuunbaq', the thing 'always coming', the thing 'made of muscles and spells'. The survivors, whose spells become clearer as their muscles recede from their starving or violently-rent bodies, the world itself, which appears to contain both its material element and its supernatural inherence, and the creature that seems to work as nature's violently interventionist agent are all such things, all bound together through the sublime moment of death, in which body and soul, the world outside and the world within, cannot deny one another. This kind of dark transcendentalism maintains the Emersonian view of contact between humanity and nature, but offers universal death in lieu of universal life. Neither humanity nor nature are evil in their violent works. Instead, violence, even death, is the link between the muscles and the spells.

None of this is to say that the show ignores the genre possibilities inherent to the plot. The *Terror* and *Erebus* quickly transform into haunted houses. The weaknesses of the human psyche inevitably appear. Gore attends. However, even these genre elements serve not only to comment upon the show's transcendentalist themes, but also to make valuable contributions to transcendentalist discourse. The sublime relationship of humanity to nature, in this show at least, is not one of comfortable assurances, but of incomprehensible portents. Why wouldn't these sailors imagine creatures that they cannot control as monstrous? Why wouldn't they imagine modes of inquiry that go beyond maps and sextants as shamanism? The survivors have a place in the natural order, but they are owed no answers.

Late in the show, a character asks whether it is possible that we are not the heroes of this story. Shortly thereafter, the creature that has stalked the crew from the start, so wondrous as to be horrible, confronts its own brutal end. What conclusion can a show like this one offer, when it asserts violence not as victory but as mute balance? If violence is our way of being in the world, then what are we and the world to do with one another? In the final outcome, can there ever be forgiveness on either side? *The Terror* knows that that lack of resolution, itself a cycle of unending violent struggle for meaning, is all the balance that there will ever be.

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**Girl Meets Shark:
From *The Shallows* (2016) and *47 Meters Down* (2017) to *The Meg* (2018)**

Karen J. Renner

Steven Spielberg's 1975 film, *Jaws*, established many tropes of the shark movie but none as long-standing as the idea that fighting sharks is men's work. As Stacy Alaimo (2001) argues, shark movies are part of a larger set of films that 'us[e] nature as a site of man making' (p. 282). Jane Caputi (1978) goes even further, claiming that the primary purpose of *Jaws* and films like it is 'to instill dread and loathing for the female and usually culminate in her annihilation' (p. 305).



Figure 1

Recent films have broken with this tradition, though, by casting female protagonists in battle against selachian adversaries. To be sure, women had entered the genre before, as part of shark-fighting teams—as in *Deep Blue Sea* (1999)—or paired up with male romantic partners, as in *Open Water* (2003) and *The Reef* (2010). However, *The Shallows* (2016) and *47 Meters Down* (2017) are two recent shark films that are distinct in being almost entirely female centered. But rather than simply subbing women in for men, these films imagine a deeper relationship between shark and she-hero. The sharks in these films force their female counterparts to face their deepest, unresolved psychological conflicts. In *The Shallows*, this encounter steers protagonist Nancy back onto her true life path. In *47 Meters*, however, the shark is an instrument of punishment.

The Shallows opens with Nancy receiving a lift from a generous local to a little-known Mexican beach. She tells him that her mother surfed at this very-same beach when she found out she was pregnant with Nancy. During a phone call with her sister and father, we learn further that Nancy's mother has recently lost a battle with cancer and that her death so rattled Nancy that she dropped out of medical school, having lost faith in its potential. 'Not everyone can be helped', she flippantly tells her dad (*The Shallows*, 2016).



Figure 2

Nancy's shark encounter is an unfortunate accident: she surfs upon a dead whale that is serving as the shark's dinner. Before she can escape, the shark has bitten her leg and left her stranded on a reef that rises just above the surface during high tide; thankfully for Nancy, it is low tide – at least for the next few hours.

Nancy is incredibly competent. She uses a necklace and earring to stitch up her wound and is resourceful enough to recognise that her surfing gear can serve as both tourniquet and compression bandage. At one point, she records an SOS and what she thinks might be a final goodbye on the GoPro of a surfer who did not fare as well against the shark. During the message, she makes it clear that even though her experience has been a harrowing one, it has also inspired an epiphany. She says, 'Dad, I gotta get off this rock soon, but I'm going to fight. Just like she taught us. You were right' (*The Shallows*, 2016). The end of the movie shows us that Nancy not only survived but is thriving. After calling Nancy 'Dr.', her younger sister says, 'Ma would be proud of you'. Together, they enter the water to surf while their father looks on happily.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Lisa of *47 Meters Down* is neither as strong nor as fortunate as Nancy. She is on vacation with her sister, Kate, only because her boyfriend dumped her. ‘It’s my fault’, she declares. ‘He got bored’ (*47 Meters Down*, 2017). To cheer her up, Kate, who is far more daring than her sister, takes her out dancing, and they hook up with two men who invite them on a shark-cage dive the next morning. Lisa continually questions the safety of the venture but is swayed against her better judgment by the desire to prove to her ex-boyfriend that she is more adventurous than he believes. ‘Just think of the photos’, Kate says. ‘They won’t be the kind of photos that a boring person would take’ (*47 Meters Down*, 2017). Later on, when Lisa balks again, Kate teases, ‘You’re not going to make Stuart jealous with photos taken inside a boat’s bathroom’ (*47 Meters Down*, 2017).

Even after Lisa and her sister become stranded at the eponymous depth of 47 meters after the cage’s cable snaps, Lisa still can’t help thinking about impressing her boyfriend. When Kate asks her, ‘What do you think Stuart would say if he could see you now?’ Lisa confidently replies, ‘He would lose his mind’ (*47 Meters Down*, 2017).

Lisa does have a momentary transformation. Realising their oxygen tanks are quickly depleting and the sharks showing no sign of departing any time soon, Lisa works up the courage to swim over a dangerous ocean abyss to alert a rescue diver to their location. But ultimately the outcome is tragic: though Lisa is rescued, her sister is attacked by a shark and presumably killed. The final image of the film emphasises the tragedy of Lisa's trauma rather than the triumph of her survival: as she ascends to the surface, she whimpers her sister's name continuously.



Figure 5

Unlike Nancy, Lisa is punished for choosing adventure, seemingly because her reasons for doing so are far less meaningful (to impress an ex rather than celebrate a dead mother). However, it is Kate who receives the film's most serious retribution, and for what? Refusing domestication? As much as the two films may differ in tone, they are therefore quite similar ideologically: whereas *The Shallows* rewards Nancy for returning to her family and her career of caretaking, *47 Meters Down* kills off Kate, the woman who embraces everything that Nancy must reject, and warns Lisa that she is far safer staying in domestic waters. If shark films traditionally use nature as a site of man-making, as Alaimo claimed, these films could be said to use nature as a site of woman-making, as long as the definition of 'woman' is as traditional as Alaimo meant the word 'man' to be.

The Meg (2018) pits megalodon against mega-action star Jason Statham, and the film signals that the genre isn't veering any further from traditional gender roles. Sure, Statham's character, Jonas, is a kinder, gentler version of the typical tough guy. He's good with kids, respectful of women, and works with a large team of men and women to take down the shark. But essentially this is Jonas's party. The shark is just a means of showcasing his pluck and grit. It is the sharks that suffer – and quite violently. Jonas surfaces with nary a scratch. And if Jonas has any unresolved issues, it's only because no one believed him the first time he said there

was a giant, unknown creature lurking in the ocean depths. Jonas ends the movie just as he begins it, only with a vindicated reputation and a new chance at love.



Figure 6

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Siren Sisters: Feminist Mermaid Ecohorror in Agnieszka Smoczyńska's

***The Lure* (2017)**

(Poland: WFDiF, 2015)

Kristen Angierski

'Up where they walk, up where they run/
Up where they stay all day in the sun/
Wanderin' free - wish I could be/
Part of that world'.

—Disney's *The Little Mermaid* (1989)

Unlike their red-headed Disney counterpart Ariel, the fanged mermaids of Agnieszka Smoczyńska's Polish film *The Lure* are not at first particularly interested in becoming 'part of that [human] world'. Indeed, mermaid sisters Golden (Michalina Olszańska) and Silver (Marta Mazurek) initially come ashore for a temporary 'vacation' among the humans of 1980s Poland before swimming on to America. But fate predictably intervenes. Following the film's fairytale source—Hans Christian Andersen's 1837 *Den lille Havfrue* (*The Little Mermaid*)—the narrative shifts from glitzy spring-break sister romp to tragic interspecies love story. A mermaid (Silver) falls in love with a human man (Mietek, played by Jakub Gierszał) and attempts to become human herself, only to lose her tail, her voice, his love and her life in the end. *The Lure* rewrites the anti-feminist messaging of the Danish original by giving the doomed mermaid a growling vampiric sister who takes ecohorrific revenge on the exploitative humans profiting off the mermaids' magnetic musical gifts and beautiful 'tails': the latter a crude term used to describe women's genitalia, signifying their dual oppression as women and as fish. They are also 'foreigners' on notoriously and increasingly nativist Polish soil. Ultimately, *The Lure*'s ecohorror highlights the self-murdering sacrifices that are prerequisites to assimilating into 'that' world: the world of Poland, of cisheterosexual womanhood, and of terrestrial humanity.



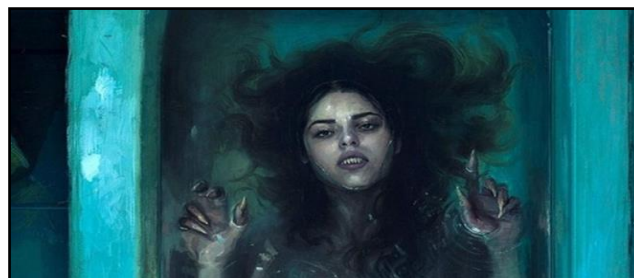
Golden and Silver's oppositional names and aesthetic map onto their divergent attitudes toward 'belonging', evident from the first moment we meet them. Silver looks on Mietek curiously; Golden, like a predator homing in on prey. While Silver yearns to metaphorically capture a human heart, Golden literally eats one. But Silver is not universally compliant. When Mietek's family discovers Golden's darker appetites—and when Silver inconveniently asks why they are never paid for their performances at the adult nightclub where the family also works—the humans attempt to murder them. Like 'the undocumented' and like animals, then, Golden and Silver are economically exploitable and vulnerable. They are also outside the purview of the law and human rights, both of which necessitate citizenship. Emboldened by the mermaids' foreignness and statelessness, the first time the club-owner meets them he demands that they undress and, noticing they are 'smooth as Barbies', probes an alternate vaginal opening in their tails. After this violation, the owner asks with false polite deference about their Polish language skills, an iteration of the trope by which racial and ethnic Others are expected to explain their 'real' origins.

After the attempted murder, one might expect Silver and Golden to return to the sea. But Silver is hopelessly in love and undergoes tail-removal surgery to become the 'complete' (that is, under an ableist and cisheterosexual paradigm) woman Mietek desires. Becoming part of 'that world' requires blood (menstruation) and radical bodily mutilation that is also a form of suicide; in a gruesome body horror scene, Silver 'kills the mermaid and saves the woman', but even this radical level of assimilation and tragically strict adherence to patriarchal demands (she becomes literally voiceless) cannot save her. The first time Silver and Mietek have sex post-surgery, she bleeds heavily. The visibility of her painful sacrifice and the loss of Silver's marketability repulse Mietek and he falls in love with and then marries someone else. As in *Den lille Havfrue*, a tail-less mermaid must earn the love of a human or she will turn into sea-foam the morning after her lover gets married: unless she kills him. Sensitive Silver cannot kill and fulfills the awful curse. In her grief and rage, Golden rips her sister's fair-weather lover's throat out before returning to sea, alone. *The Lure's* vision of non-human revenge, the central plot criterion for ecohorror, is thus also the violent revenge of the dehumanised: women,

immigrants, refugees, and animals. This interweaving of non-human and human oppression marks *The Lure* as an ecofeminist film that thematises the exclusionary basis and impenetrability of ‘that [human, white, male, documented] world’.



In contrast to love-addled Silver, Golden perceives early on the hypocrisies of an overwhelmingly ‘sad’ human world and sticks to its underground: the space Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) eloquently describes in *Borderlands/La Frontera* as home to ‘the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed’ (p. 25). As a half-fish woman quite content with her fish-ness, Golden represents a queer and transcorporeal (Alaimo, 2010) ecopolitics that rejects assimilation. Neither here nor there but trawling the margins of human society and its underground populations (she sings punk rock with humanoid King Triton) she is without a place, a voluntary refugee who, as Carole Murphy describes in *Beasts of the Deep: Sea Creatures and Popular Culture* (2018), ‘draws on both ancient fears of the sea as the repository of unknown monsters and more recent fears of the perceived threat of ‘refugee-as-invader’ and consumer’ (p. 154). Moreover, she is gendered; fear of the deep unknown of the ocean and of female sexuality collapse in the figure of the temporarily terrestrial siren.



Poster Art by Sam Spratt

In short, Golden is a nativist purist’s worst nightmare: a literal consumer of Poland’s male ‘resources’ a non-human ‘pollutant’ who breaks the law and embraces her Other-ness and love of the sea. (In one of the most sadly poignant moments of the film, Golden stares longingly

at an oceanic screensaver.) While the film lacks the more explicit ecological messaging of *Freeform*'s mermaid television series *Siren* (2018) in which mermaids are forced to the surface when overfishing depletes their food source, *The Lure*'s tragicomical, musical exploration of non-human exploitation and dehumanisation speaks to the enmeshed (il)logics of misogyny, nativism, speciesism, and ecophobia. *The Lure* is thus a smart, if at times aggressively weird, ecohorror feminist film that problematises the links between humanness and citizenship and, in so doing, suggests an aquatic alternative in the form of border-defying mermaids and vengeful siren sisters.

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‘We’re not the only animals in the woods’: *The Ritual* (2017)

(UK: The Imaginarium, 2017)

Caitlin Duffy

David Bruckner’s (2017) *The Ritual* is based on Adam Nevill’s (2011) British horror novel of the same name and was adapted for the screen by Joe Barton. It tells the story of a group of four urban men who go on a lads’ holiday to a hiking trail in northern Sweden in memory of their recently deceased friend, Robert (Paul Reid). After one member of their party, Dom (Sam Troughton), injures his knee, the hikers take an off-trail short-cut and end up facing a number of obstacles, including ‘fucking pagan hillbillies’, a demanding Nordic god, and the maze-like wilderness itself. Throughout the film, Luke (Rafe Spall) also contends with overwhelming guilt occasioned by his cowardly inability to prevent Robert’s murder. *The Ritual* goes beyond the usual destabilisation of human identity in the wilderness and instead uses Luke’s guilt to illustrate the continuities of violence between modern civilisation and ancient wilderness. It is this added layer that makes *The Ritual* a truly exciting piece of ecohorror cinema.

The first half of *The Ritual*, however, is grounded in old ecohorror tropes and characterised primarily by anxieties surrounding the wilderness. Armed with a map and compass, Hutch (Robert James-Collier) promises the others that they will be out of the forest before sun-down. However, as the forest grows darker, these pieces of technology, thought to provide humanity with some mastery over nature, become useless and inaccurate. Even Phil’s (Arsher Ali) memory foam boots seem to fail. In these initial moments, all of the fear and terror of *The Ritual* appears to emerge from the wilderness itself. When the group comes across a gutted deer hanging from a tree, they attempt to attribute the gory spectacle to nature rather than humanity, claiming that a bear is just as likely to have placed the deer carcass in the trees as a human hunter.

The film ultimately frustrates this desire to completely blame nature, and one thing that sets *The Ritual* apart from other ecohorror films is its refusal to present a singular site of violence or monster to its audience. The wilderness appears threatening through its excess and strangeness, but the city is also marred by the criminal violence connected to Robert’s murder. The forest is menacing in large part because it is the habitation of the Jötunn, a mysterious

figure from Norse mythology, however the film's human characters are equally capable of chaotic violence. The forest-dwelling pagans capture members of the small hiking party in order to present sacrifices to the Jötunn within their small backwoods community. Of course, this violence could be attributed to their degeneration as a result of considerable time spent in the wilderness. Hutch makes this very argument by ascribing the disturbing signs of human decay within and surrounding the cabin they reluctantly spend the night in (including the impenetrable markings on the trees and the wooden humanoid effigy with antlers in the attic) to the dangerous influence of too much time spent in the wilderness. According to Hutch, living 'in the middle of nowhere' can make a human 'go fucking mental'. However, *The Ritual* troubles the ability to find nature as the only source of horror through the urban murder of Robert, which is repeatedly reenacted in Luke's guilty subconscious and represents the film's original trauma.

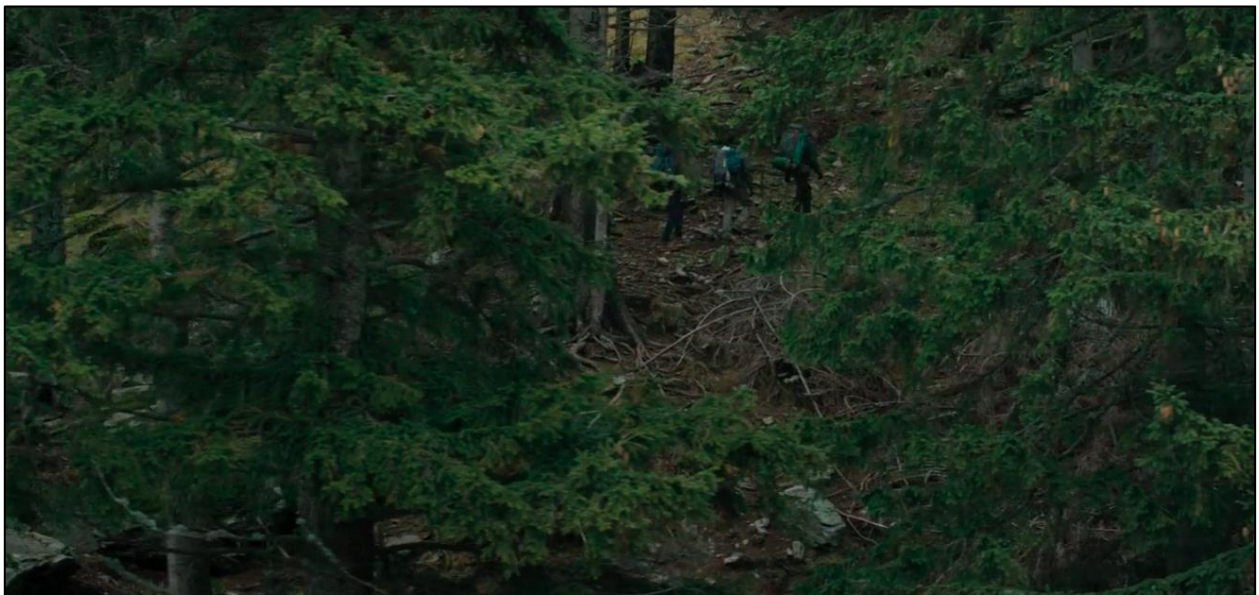


Figure 1

The Ritual's most powerful demonstration of the major role humans play in the creation of violence in both civilised and wild environments can be found in its material depiction of the hikers' submersion into the wild. Although this is a common feature of ecohorror films, Bruckner's lengthy and recurring shots of the forest make it feel freshly terrifying. Just as much as Bruckner's forest shots often contain the hidden Jötunn, they also often envelop the four hikers (see Figures 1 and 2). Eventually, the forest even invades Luke's memory of Robert's urban murder (see Figure 3). David Bruckner's forest shots also effectively cause the audience

to experience the paranoiac urge to examine every detail of the *mise en scène* to find the lurking unknown danger (see Figure 4). As the audience searches the filmic image, the hikers scrutinise the wild for human traces. During the first half of the film, these traces represent hope of rescue for the hikers. Upon finding a mysterious trail, Dom happily exclaims ‘a path means civilisation!’; when they come across chopped trees, Dom again notes that they are ‘man-made! We’re getting somewhere!’; Hutch explains that they will get found eventually because ‘we’re on a path in the woods. It is near a hiking trail’. However, during the second half of the film, after members of the hiking team begin to be picked off one by one, these human traces take on a very different meaning. Suddenly they represent the dangers promised by the ‘fucking pagan hillbillies’: when they come across a path lined by torches, Dom pointedly murmurs, ‘we shouldn’t go that way’; upon finding a red tent containing a credit card that expired in 1984, among other human items, Phil observes, ‘that’s a bad sign, isn’t it?’



Figure 2



Figure 3

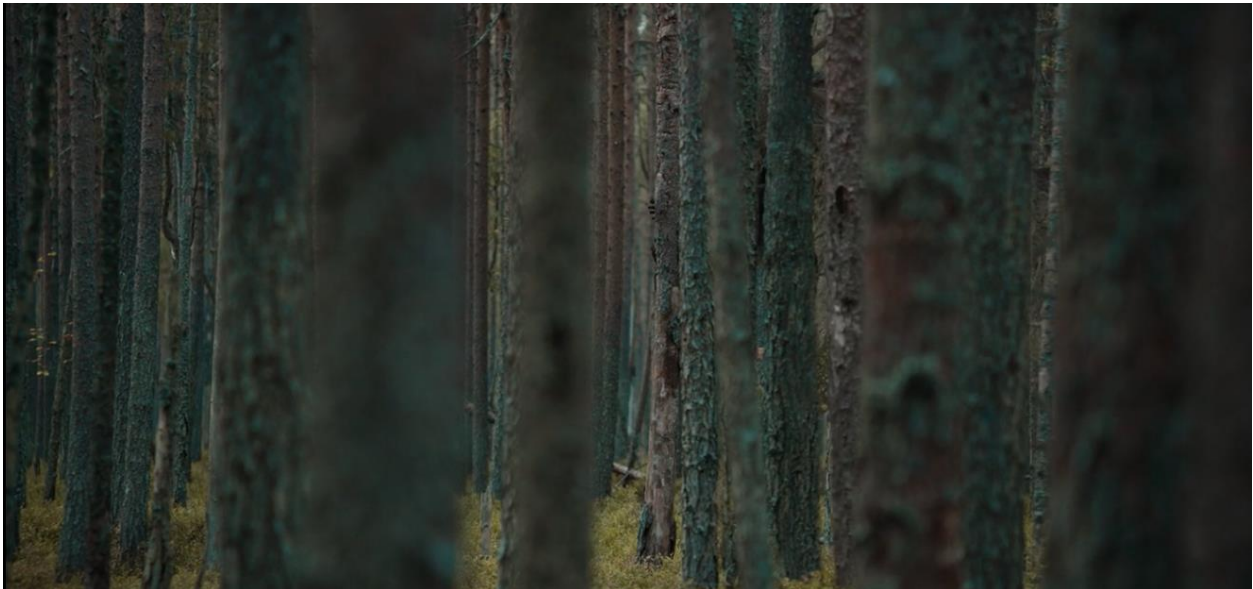


Figure 4

Although *The Ritual* appears to argue against the traditional ecohorror vision of the wilderness as inherently violent and degenerative, the film also presents the wild as capable of causing massive change within its human inhabitants and visitors. As the film progresses, the identities of the four urban hikers change. They begin the trip as fairly typical urban millennials, sharing sarcastic jokes, taking selfies on their cell phones, and indulging in drunken memories from their days together at university. Their time spent lost and stalked in the forest mutates them: they slowly lose their faith in maps and compasses, they physically fight each other, and panic after spending a night in an ominous cabin bearing the markings of witchcraft. After waking up to find himself naked and praying to an unknown statue on the cabin's second floor,

Phil emptily declares that ‘It got inside my head...I can’t get it out of my fucking head’. However, this time spent in the woods also strengthens them. Dom, once known amongst his friends as being incapable of sustaining even the most minor injury without complaining, manages to silently bear his pain and later heroically accepts his own fate as a human sacrifice for the Jötunn; At the film’s conclusion, Luke finally overcomes his paralysing cowardice and guilt by entering his recurring vision of the liquor store aisle and refusing to submit to the Jötunn. The film ends with a romantic vision of nature as a regenerative force. After exiting the forest, Luke emerges in an open field as the sun rises. The claustrophobic shots which characterised the film leading up to this moment (including the liquor store scene, with its tight aisles and unrelenting led lighting, as well as the forest scenes comprised of endless rows of looming trees), are replaced with the open expanse of field and sky (see Figures 5, 6, and 7). *The Ritual*, however, manages to maintain its complex depiction of the human-wilderness relationship. Even in this scene of rebirth, Luke’s face betrays his profound sense of loss and his awareness that, despite escaping the forest and returning to modern civilisation, deliverance from violence is a mere fantasy (see Figure 8). Danger lurks in all environments.

The Ritual’s ominous visual depiction of wilderness is terrifying in its all-encompassing excess; however, the film’s narrative complicates the ecohorror subgenre. Violence exists in both the modern civilised and the backwards wild environments of the film, suggesting that non-human nature is not entirely to blame for the horrors of *The Ritual*.



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

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**A Libertarian's House Cannot Stand:
Trey Edward Shults, *It Comes at Night*
(USA: A24, 2017)**

Khara Lukancic

'Fear turns men into monsters', reads the tagline of *It Comes at Night* (2017). Indeed, this is the case in this exemplary film of ecohorror about a horrific and contagious disease that has spread into a worldwide pandemic. During the only truly revealing conversation of the film, the main character, Paul (Joel Edgerton), is sharing a drink with Will (Christopher Abbott), a man who had previously broken into Paul's house looking for shelter. In the scene, the two men are making an attempt to bond amidst the chaos around them and begin talking about their pre-pandemic lives. Will says he performed odd jobs here and there but ultimately identifies as a mechanic. After a moment of slight condescension, Paul says he had been a history teacher – a shocking revelation after seeing the horrors of which he is capable. Throughout the movie Paul's primary concern is for self and family. He shows no compassion that does not benefit his own survival. The film deploys this ugly characterisation to facilitate a critique of libertarianism, the political ideology that encourages caring about yourself and your family and not wishing to benefit those in the community beyond your immediate family.

A. David Gordon (2015) summarises libertarianism in *The SAGE Guide to Key Issues in Mass Media Ethics and Law*, noting '[a] Libertarian view [...] places a great deal of emphasis on individuals' freedom to decide for themselves—rationally—what the best course of action may be in any given situation. This personal autonomy can, of course, lead to "wrong" decisions being made, especially if the person making them has a weak or undefined sense of ethics, or lacks them entirely' (p. 43). Paul's actions throughout *It Comes at Night* evokes such questionable morality in his flawed application of libertarianism during a mortal crisis. Paul assumes the role of man of the house; he makes the important decisions monolithically, without considering the input of his family and certainly without regard to those he deems as outsiders. His decisions are made with the intention of self-preservation, and he does not hesitate to kill to protect his family from the dreaded disease. He commits atrocities while enacting his brand of libertarianism.

The film opens inside a small, boarded up home in which Paul and his family have taken refuge from the disease. Paul, his wife, and their son wear gas masks as an elderly man sans gas mask gasps for breath. The elderly man is Paul's father-in-law. The father-in-law has black lesions all over his body and his irises have turned black. These are the visible symptoms of the fatal disease featured in the film. After his breathing becomes so labored that it is affectively painful to watch, Paul wheels him out into the backyard woods in a wheelbarrow, dumps him onto the ground, and shoots him in the head. The once kind-hearted school teacher then rolls his father-in-law into a pre-dug grave, pours gasoline on him, and sets him on fire.



Figure 1. Paul's Father-in-Law infected with the disease

Gordon (2015) admits '[u]sing the Libertarian approach places a considerable burden on individuals faced with the needs to make an ethics choice and thereby become 'moral agents'. This is exactly where problems can arise' (p. 54). In fact, the case for communitarianism over libertarianism in the narratives of horror films is made in 'The Ethics of Horror' (Lukancic, 2017) which commends the community-focused decisions in *The Bye Bye Man* (2017) and criticises the selfish libertarianism in *Rings* (2017). *It Comes at Night* follows *Rings* by having

the protagonist protecting himself and ignoring the predicaments of others, but it depicts this behavior in order to critique it as evil.

Paul's selfish monstrosity continues to be foregrounded when Will breaks into Paul's house looking for shelter. Instead of providing this shelter, Paul takes him into the woods and ties him to a tree, leaving him there overnight. The next day, Paul goes to check on Will to ensure he doesn't exhibit any of the symptoms of the disease. After Paul determines that Will does not have the disease, he only invites him into their home after Will promises to share his provisions. Thus, Paul welcomes Will's family into his home only to exploit the supplies offered to his own benefit.



Figure 2. Paul interrogates Will

In the climax, the family dog that had wandered off earlier in the film ends up inside the house. It visually displays signs of the disease. The red door at the front of the house is the only way in or out – Paul is the only one with a key to the door. Hence, if the door was locked, how did the dog get in? The two families argue and blame each other before agreeing to sequester themselves in separate ends of the house for a few days, just as a precaution, until it could be verified that no one had contracted the disease from the infected dog.

About a day into the quarantine, Will and his family want to leave. For Paul, this is not an option. The film suggests that they wish to leave because their son has begun to show signs of the disease. The child keeps his eyes closed for the remainder of the movie, following his

parents' instructions. Thus, we never know for certain if the child is infected. When Will and his family try to escape into the woods, Paul kills them. He shoots their baby in the hands of the mother. This brutality is monstrous.

The film imparts its greatest criticism of libertarianism in its final scene. All the vicious acts Paul performs throughout the movie are in vain. He is unable to keep his family safe. After all his monstrosity, Paul is unable to guard his family from the disease. After their son dies from the disease, Paul and his wife, Sarah (Carmen Ejogo), sit across each other at the kitchen table. The film ends with Paul and Sarah silently looking at each other, both showing signs of the disease.

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Kristen Angierski is a PhD. candidate at Cornell University where studies climate change ethics, food politics, and ecofeminist materialisms. She is at present completing a dissertation on ecohorror and appetite in the Anthropocene. Her work considers the strange environmental utopias enacted through a myriad of dietary practices and eating disorders. She is also interested in, and has taught classes on, dangerous women in contemporary ecohorror--from witches to starving saints to man-eating mermaids. Kristen's work on the film *Okja* and the genre of slaughterhouse echorror will appear in a forthcoming edited collection and she will be at the ASLE conference this June to present on the ecohorror mermaid television series *Siren*. She lives in Ithaca, NY, with her two cats.

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Sara L. Crosby hails from an island off the coast of Louisiana, and she is currently an associate professor of English at the Ohio State University at Marion where she teaches classes on everything from early American literature to pop culture to environmental writing. She is a former NEH fellow and a 2018 Ratner Distinguished Teaching Award recipient. She has authored a number of articles, including 'Beyond Ecophilia: Edgar Allan Poe and the American Tradition of Ecohorror' (*ISLE*) and two books, *Poisonous Muse: The Female Poisoner and the Framing of Popular Authorship in Jacksonian America* (University of Iowa Press, 2016) and *Women in Medicine in Nineteenth-Century American Literature: From Poisoners to Doctors, Harriet Beecher Stowe to Theda Bara* (Palgrave, 2018). Her current book project investigates why the U. S. is allowing South Louisiana to wash away—specifically, how the interplay between extractive interests (like the petroleum industry) and American popular culture's representation of South Louisiana as a place of ecohorror has and continues to enable this unnatural disaster.

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Caitlin Duffy is a PhD candidate in the English Department at Stony Brook University. Her scholarly interests include 19th century American gothic literature and American horror cinema. Her work has been published in *The Journal of Dracula Studies*, *Poe Studies*, and in

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Rick Hudson is an English Literature and Creative Writing academic who specialises in the study of horror / Gothic; fantasy and sf texts principally from a Bakhtinian and psychoanalytic perspective. He is also a writer in his own right whose fiction includes both experimental literary fiction, popular horror fiction and fiction which is located in the much disputed territory between these two poles. He has seen his fiction published along side that of writers including Neil Gaiman; Clive Barker; John Carpenter (yes, THAT John Carpenter); Shaun Hutson; Bentley Little; Storm Constantine; Graham Masterton and Guy N. Smith as well as broadcast by BBC Radio. He also contributes articles to consumer magazines available from W.H. Smith's and other major retailers that focus on the gaming industry.

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Khara Lukancic is a doctoral student in Mass Communication and Media Arts at Southern Illinois University. She has authored two film reviews in academic journals and three book chapters in edited collections: “#MeToo Masculinity: Critiquing Gendered Aggression in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991 and 2017)” (in *A Celebration of Disney*, Blurb, 2019); “Weeping Angels: *Doctor Who*'s (De)Monstrous Feminine” (in *Gender and Contemporary Horror in Television*, Emerald Publishing, 2019); and “‘I Seek The White Mask’: The Intertextuality of *Halloween* and *Moby-Dick*” (in *A Celebration of Slashers*, Blurb, 2018). Her academic interests include: Gothic/horror studies, film and television criticism, media ethics, and gender/sexuality studies. She is the Assistant Editor of *Film Criticism*.

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Elizabeth Parker is the author of the forthcoming monograph *The Forest and the EcoGothic: The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination*, which will be published with Palgrave Gothic later this year. She is the founding editor of *Gothic Nature: New Directions in Ecohorror and the EcoGothic* and television editor for *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*. She is co-editor of *Landscapes of Liminality: Between Space and Place* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2016) and the forthcoming collection *'Isn't It Ironic?' Receivership and Responsibility in Popular Culture*. She has co-organised several conferences on space, place, and the relationship between the Gothic and the nonhuman and has published her work in various titles such as *Plant Horror!: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film* (Palgrave, 2016) and *Beasts of the Forest: Denizens of the Dark Woods* (Indiana University Press, 2019). She has taught English Literature and courses on Popular Culture at a number of universities across the UK and Ireland and currently works at St Mary's University, Twickenham. Passionate about all things ecoGothic, she is keen to develop an ecohorror/ecoGothic research hub in the UK and is very open to collaborative opportunities.

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Daniel Otto Jack Petersen is a PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow where he is completing his dissertation on an 'ecomonstrous' reading of the fiction of R. A. Lafferty. His research focuses on monster theory, material ecocriticism, object-oriented ontology, ecotheology, Native American Studies, and frontier storytelling. His wife, children, and dog lovingly indulge his enjoyment of punk and heavy metal music, horror fiction and films, Mexican food, and hill walking. Originally from the midwestern USA, he deeply admires the mountainous terrain of Scotland, yet still misses the flatlands of his youth. He can be spotted in the wild bending over mud puddles earnestly snapping photos of them with his phone.

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Daniel Platt is an Assistant Professor of English at Graceland University in Lamoni, Iowa, where he teaches U.S. Literature, Composition, and Film Studies. He received his PhD in English from the University of Oregon in 2015. His current projects include research on Midwestern environmentalism and Richard Powers' *The Overstory*, working with ASLE to develop open educational resources for the Environmental Humanities, and the launch of a new interdisciplinary undergraduate program in Sustainability Studies at Graceland.

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Isaac Rooks received his Ph.D. in Cinema and Media Studies from the University of Southern California in May 2019. His research centers on media depictions of animals and landscapes, with an emphasis on how popular cinema uses these subjects to process traumas related to environmental catastrophes and colonial violence. His doctoral project is a work of ecocriticism, exploring the depiction of animals and landscapes in horror films featuring animal antagonists. Isaac has presented at numerous conferences, including the annual conferences of the Society of Cinema and Media Studies and the National Communication Association. His articles have been published in several journals and anthologies.

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Jennifer Schell is a Professor in the English Department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Her specialties include North American literature, Arctic writing, animal studies, and environmental humanities. Her book entitled, "*A Bold and Hardy Race of Men*": *The Lives and Literature of American Whalemen* was published in 2013 by the University of Massachusetts Press. She recently completed a series of articles on ecogothic and ecohorror, and she is currently working on a book manuscript entitled, *Ghost Species: North American Extinction Writing and the Ecogothic, 1820-2018*. She draws inspiration for her scholarship from the Alaskan wilderness, which she enjoys exploring with her two canine companions when the temperatures are not too cold for comfort.

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Michael Wheatley is a creative writing and practice-based PhD researcher at Royal Holloway, University of London. His thesis, entitled 'EcoWeird: An Ecocritical Re-evaluation of Weird Fiction', reconsiders the Weird as an ecological mode. His debut collection of short stories, *The Writers' Block*, is published by Black Pear Press. Further prose and poetry has been published in various literary magazines including *Three Drops from a Cauldron* and *Inside the Bell Jar*. Other research interests include: metafiction, the tortured artist, and cannibalism.

Forest 404: Interview with writer Timothy X Atack

Interview by Elizabeth Parker

Forest 404, the new and distinctly immersive BBC podcast, is part story, part academic discussion, and part soundscape. The narrative is set in the future, in a fast and dazzling world of technology, where ‘untouched’ Nature is almost entirely unknown. It centres on the story of one young woman, Pan (voiced by Pearl Mackie), who one day discovers an audio file of a forest soundscape – and her dangerous journey to find and understand the origins of this ‘music’. Timothy X Atack, writer of the series, sat down with *Gothic Nature* to discuss this innovative eco-thriller.



EP: What inspired you to write *Forest 404*?

TA: For about 10 years I worked in the BBC archives, and for a while was part of a team trawling through unlabeled media to see if any of it was unique in our collection, undigitised. I think I'd just spent a morning listening to a penguin colony in South Georgia, a solid hour of KWARK KWARK KWARK KWARK...then I loaded up a mystery DAT, and this gorgeous atmosphere burst through the headphones: a Sumatran rainforest with a lonely, eerie birdsong punctuating the buzz at regular intervals. Every now and then the recordist, Sue Western, would lean into the mic and whisper some comment about her surroundings. I was totally mesmerised by it.

I ended up buying the rights to the recording to use in a theatre show *The Bullet And The Bass Trombone*, made by my own company Sleepdogs. Then, in 2018, when producer Becky Ripley approached me with a proposition for a drama podcast where the main emotional prompt was ‘what does it feel like to listen to recordings of the natural world?’ the Sumatran recording immediately sprang to mind as a catalyst. I suggested we shift the story into sci-fi, to imagine a world where whoever was listening to this recording lived in a post-natural environment, someone who had never known a tree... and I built the story from there, bit by bit.

I run a company called Sleepdogs with my partner Tanuja Amarasuriya (a director and sound designer) and we do quite a lot of field recording. In many of our projects, music is constructed from what we capture. Whenever we travel we spend quite a bit of time behind microphones, listening, and we often discuss how there’s every chance we’re hearing bioacoustics that will disappear one way or another – perhaps within a scarily short space of time thanks to the climate crisis. So it felt important to meet those feelings head-on in fiction.



EP: *Gothic Nature* centres on new research in the areas of ‘eco-horror’ and the ‘ecoGothic’. In short, it is interested in interrogating cultural discussions of the darker sides of the natural world – and the darker sides of *our relationship* to the natural world. In what ways do you think *Forest 404* interacts with some of these ideas?

TA: Well. Here we go.

I feel the ‘conquest of nature’ philosophy that has driven western civilisation’s last few hundred years—and in turn the cultural makeup of global capitalism—means that we so often frame the natural world as a service provider. We like the bits that are beautiful or useful to us, and filter out or throw out the rest.

But I don’t say this in a holier-than-thou way (I hope) because I’m as likely as any fellow city dweller to avoid the sludgier, more entropic parts of my surroundings whenever I’m outside the city – and to be clear, my idea of total *hell* is a survival holiday or anything along those lines. Camping? Hate it with a passion. I’m a proper homebody and I’m pretty much lost without my technology.

So it’s been frighteningly easy for me to excavate that unsound, disconnected part of my personality, and portray a civilisation where people are in force-10 denial about our place in the natural world – physically, scientifically, emotionally. Because I’m already steeped in those denials.

The authorities in the world of *Forest 404* describe the historical presences of trees and flowers as a massive ‘rupture’, they’re considered representative of disease and decay; tumorous or cancerous in the eyes of this future society. They look upon forests and jungles and gardens in the same way we look upon the Elizabethans throwing their shit directly into the street, it’s kind of “why would you ever tolerate that?” I was pretty shocked with how easy it was for me to write these more vituperative and dismissive attitudes, but it felt... *right*. It felt horribly honest. I went inwards to the part of me that, when confronted by the wider biosphere beyond my cosy corner of Bristol, feels properly, stupidly small... and kind of runs away from the full implications of it.

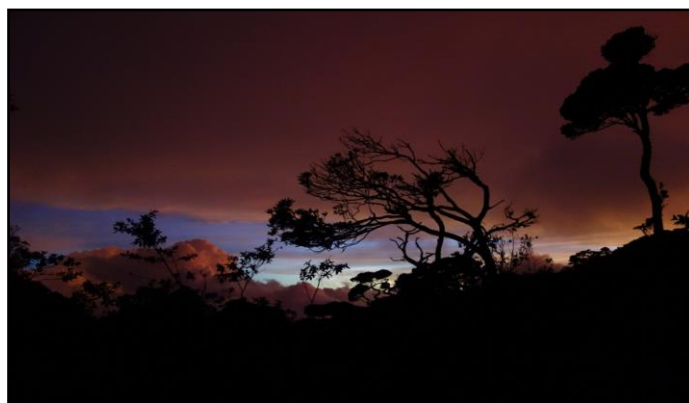
Generally speaking, I like my stories to have an unanswerable question at their heart, and so the key one in *Forest 404* became about how we live with things that make us feel so ridiculously small. Because we're undoubtedly tiny little blips – as individuals, as a species. I reckon homosapiens could well be the species equivalent of around 2 years old right now: just about becoming self-aware, just becoming capable of properly independent perspective through language and co-operation. And the climate emergency is our species' identity crisis, our toddler temper tantrum which we'll have to grow out of, to face facts, if we're ever going to survive.

So, in *Forest 404* I wanted to show all these fears, these denials, from some very personal points of view, through different kinds of people at very different ends of the philosophical spectrum. One of the protagonists utterly despises the idea of the natural world, another is on a quixotic quest to preserve it out of deep love, and then our hero Pan is torn between the two; she's curious but totally uninformed, without a language for any of the issues.

EP: The BBC bills your series as an 'eco-thriller'. Is this how you would categorise it and to what extent do you think 'genre' is important?

TA: A listener on social media recently categorised it as 'Queer sci-fi eco-quest with non-fiction and sound art satellites', which I like, a *lot*.

I'd probably emphasise the sci-fi and, yep, sure, I'm an old-school geek but I think it's crucially important as a genre. I'm going to make a grand claim that if we ever get out of this mess of our own making, if there's any cultural form that might end up saving us, it'll be sci-fi or speculative fiction. Where else do we look to our future and ask: do we seriously want this? Because right now politics is a fucking shower, innit?



EP: Tell us a little bit about the show’s interdisciplinary nature and why it was important to you to blend fact and fiction, merging the story with interviews from experts, soundscapes, and public engagement.

TA: this was a part of the podcast’s identity that had already been put in place by Becky Ripley and the commissioners at the BBC, well before I came on board. It really drew me to the project. With *Sleepdogs*, we often make shows where the line between fiction and reportage is blurred, it’s something which began as an emotional expression, but in recent years has become more and more political, we look back on those stories and they feel like post-truth explorations – only pre-Brexit, pre-President Trump. One of the reasons we need to teach storytelling better in schools is because we desperately need the ability to discern between the healthy use of fiction and the instances where fiction lurks in disguise and can do serious damage; to know when we’re being fed a story rather than fact. So it felt good to be part of a big ambitious crossover project with the BBC, and I was very happy to jump through the kind of hoops we had to jump through to make it all work.

Emotionally, I think it’s a lovely act of balance to take this cranked sci-fi story and anchor it with non-fiction talks and moments of relative calm. The scientific investigation by Alex Smalley and team at the University of Exeter was always at its heart, as well: it was in place well before the dramatic proposition, so I’m in the weird situation of hoping that some of its findings might prove me wrong about, for instance, my answers to your second question...!

EP: To my mind, the title evokes both HTTP 404, the ‘page not found’ error message, and Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*. I wondered if you could talk a little about the inspiration behind the title.

TA: I take ages with titles. Sometimes I can’t write another word until they’re right. For a while the story was called things like *CLICK HERE TO REMEMBER FOREVER* or *THE LAST MUSIC* or *ECHOSPHERE* (geddit?) but what I was searching for was something that felt like it contained not just the presence of nature AND sci-fi, but also a sense of loss. Tough when you also need something that’ll show up on a search engine AND give good graphics on your app.

I think the final crunch came when I forced myself to say out loud, simply, what the story was: “Pan searching for the Forest”. And, lo and behold...

EP: As someone who writes specifically on the archetype of the forest—a space we tend to view in extremes, as either enchanted and magical or Gothic and terrible—I was intrigued by the fact that of all the spaces in Nature you could have selected, you chose a *forest* as the dominant image. Why was this?

TA: Again, I didn’t choose it! In fact, the original working title for the podcast was just ‘FOREST’. I think the original inspiration came from BBC commissioner Rhian Roberts’ favourite childhood haunt.

But what I found very easy to connect to was the rainforest as a totem for ecological loss. I think that’s probably becoming a dominant 21st century trope.

I grew up on the edge of two forests in different parts of the world: my family are from Yorkshire, living in a house my mum still owns, just up the road from Hardcastle Crag in Hebden Bridge – where my Dad helped run a working men’s club on the edge of the river Calder, hidden under the trees. But when I was very young we moved to Rio De Janeiro, and we lived in a district of the city on the slopes of Corcovado, a patch of tropical forest slap bang next to us—a tiny part of the Mata Atlantica—that once in every while we’d walk through to get to friends’ houses. It was full of humming birds.

Meanwhile Hardcastle Crag is mostly steep slopes of dense oak, beech and pine. Every year there’s an arts festival in town which means you’ll find artworks hanging from branches or sprouting from the bracken.

So I don’t know if the forest represents a binary of magic/nightmare for me in that way. I think it’s more a constituency all of its own. One thing I do love is a forest ruin, though – anything overgrown or abandoned or repurposed by the plants. There’s a kind of statue-of-Ozymandias buzz to anything like that.

EP: Landscape writer Jay Appleton talks about how we, as a species, have evolved from ‘forest-dwellers’ to ‘apartment-house-dwellers’. Could you talk a little about your views on our relationship to the forest today?

TA: What interests me is that, in the British Isles, we’ve got a landscape that was once so heavily forested it was kind of the islands’ dominant presence, and I’ve always wondered what kind of ghosts of the wildwood modern Britons live with.

On the one hand, so many of our screen stories use woods and forests as a dreamscape... on the other hand maybe that’s because they’re just relatively easy to film in.

I’ve seen a few theatre shows/live art performances in forests. They always seem to have a strong element of pagan ritual, they’re often protracted, lengthy; time-focused as opposed to action-focused, as if we secretly suspect time operates differently between the tree trunks.

The city mirroring the forest also intrigues me. Modern buildings sway and creak in the wind; birds nest on telephone posts. I live next to the M32 and we often describe the noise as our equivalent of a river or distant seashore, the sound has tides...

But most of all I feel we visit the forest as if it were a loved but slightly weird parent: most of us only do it occasionally, with pangs of contradictory filial emotions.



EP: The main character in *Forest 404* is of course called Pan. This immediately brought to my mind Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1890) and thoughts on how the mythical god is varyingly presented in our stories as either merely playful and disruptive, or as decidedly sinister. What are your associations with 'Pan' and in what ways did these inspire your creation of the protagonist?

TA: actually, I can't tell you the reason Pan is called Pan without spoiling some of the key-changes that occur during the story...! The explanation was cut from the final draft of the podcast script... but...

Maybe I can just say any connection to the myth of Pan/Faunus/Pushan is merely a happy coincidence, maybe a subconscious decision?

EP: For me, the descriptions of Fume Town are some of the most disturbing in the series. I know that for many people—for example, David Lynch, who has a love affair with the industrial—these spaces can be every bit as exciting as they are disturbing. How do you personally envision Fume Town?

TA: The entire structure of the sub-city in *Forest 404* came from an image that once struck me as a teenager, going through the stuff collected in my parent's attic in Leicestershire. I wondered what it would be like for the loft to not just be the top of the house, but for the house itself to be underneath some unstoppable, ever-growing, out-of-control pantropolis; if you were an adventurer tunnelling deep into the urban past, you'd have to access this house downwards, pulling away the roof tiles, clambering into this neglected, insulation-filled attic before descending into what used to be bedrooms and living areas etc. It was probably all heavily inspired by JG Ballard's short story 'The Concentration City'. I made myself feel claustrophobic just by thinking about it, and the image stuck with me for many years until finding its home in *Forest 404*.

There's also a sketch in the comedy series *Absolutely* (1989-) where a character called Don McDiarmid reports on a trip to London but isn't at all impressed by it – he describes it as kinda samey, nothing much to see, Marble Arch and Piccadilly Circus looking identical to him... and

on further interrogation it emerges that he never once left the Underground. I've never been able to look at a tube station the same way since. Whenever I'm in London I take a while to imagine Oxford Circus or Paddington as an environment people spend their entire lives in, never leaving. It's especially interesting when images of the natural world are plastered all over the ad hoardings, like they're goading you, laughing at every life choice you've ever made. Perhaps I imagine Fumetown as a bit more like Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) than David Lynch. It's a place where the inhabitants are actually proud of the curve of the massive metal ducts bifurcating their living rooms.

EP: The most moving moment of the series for me personally is when we discover that the hugely feared and potentially deadly 'virus' that accompanies an awareness of Nature is simply *human regret* for our destruction of the natural world. The fact that Nature is only really known in 'The Slow Times' and is thoroughly distanced in 'The Fast Times' made me think too of the arguable 'mania' of contemporary society. This idea that if we stop or slow down, we will immediately feel sad is beautifully demonstrated when Pan is surprised to discover that her mind, when read by a computer, is filled with sadness. Could you talk a little bit about these ideas?

TA: In some ways obviously it's a big brutal sci-fi metaphor for our current predicament. But beyond that I think it's totally possible to feel deeply sad for something you're *unaware* is missing.

What interested me in storytelling terms is that this sense of an almost spiritual loss could lead instead to a terrible revulsion, a running-away from the grief, something that broke people's brains if they dwelt on it long enough. In the world of *Forest 404* the root cause is discovered through technology, scanning the contents of a mind... but of course we already have our own omni-present version of this revulsion: the derision towards belief structures that extol balance and mindfulness and co-operation rather than individualistic gain. Faced with big perturbing questions about how we best live together, we've opted for a model of selfishness.

It really interests me how any future humans will look back on the current era, how its mass delusions and failures of co-operation will be re-written into victories – should we survive. Feeling sad or shameful about the past is seen as weak, navel-gazing, and I wanted to write a story where feeling sad and shameful became the only feasible way to move forward, the one

thing that brought some kind of hope. The whole story kicks off because someone - in the immortal words of *The Wire* (2002-2008) - gives a fuck when it's not her turn to give a fuck.

EP: And finally: to what, if any extent, do you think our stories can change our relationship to the nonhuman – and can you name some of your standout examples?

TA: Oooh yeah. They completely can, always have. In some ways our very oldest stories, the pre-agrarian ones, are about the living rocks and the sentience of the landscape itself, humans as an integral part of their environment... rather than as some kind of chosen children of the cosmos, shaping it, destined for greatness.

And what I love about sci-fi as a genre is that these oldest stories have been transposed and re-embodied into technological beings like HAL 9000 and R2-D2 and the TARDIS... the rocks and trees are now robots and computer programs, all of them still somehow imbued with an essence equalling more than the sum of their parts, holding the possibility of mystery and magic. I find a big weird hope in that kind of thing – in humans creating myths about the inner lives of non-human things. We adore stories about random objects that aspire to the condition of humanity because, deep down, we suspect that's our own story.



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