

‘That Awful Secret of the Wood’: The Forest and the EcoGothic.

Elizabeth Parker

Trinity College Dublin, 2015



Thesis submitted to Trinity College Dublin for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

I agree to deposit this thesis in the university's open access institutional repository or allow the library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgment.

Elizabeth Parker

SUMMARY

When we imagine the forest, we tend towards extremes. It is commonly read as a *binary* space: as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. When it is ‘good’, it is a remedial setting of wonder and enchantment; when it is ‘bad’, it is a dangerous and terrifying wilderness. It is with its fearsome associations that this thesis is concerned.

Sarah Maitland, in her book *Gossip From the Forest* (2012), argues that ‘inside most of post-enlightenment and would-be rational adults, there is a child who is terrified by the wild wood’.¹ The implication in her wording is that the modern adult who fears the forest does so *despite* the fact that he or she is ‘post-enlightenment’ and ‘would-be rational’. It is suggested, therefore, that such fears are today not only unfounded, but regressive and irrational. Nonetheless, as she continues, there is much evidence to suggest that we continue to be ‘terrified by the wild wood’. Popular culture abounds with seemingly infinite examples of the foreboding forest. It is, as a site of trial, trepidation, and terror, one of the most enduring and pervasive in our fictions. The central question of this thesis, therefore, is *why* do we continue to find this landscape so frightening? This thesis seeks to answer this question by examining a range of twentieth and twenty-first century Gothic texts, each of which features a fearsome forest.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, each of which interrogates the reasons behind our fears of the forest. Chapter One, ‘Theorising the Forest: Approaching a Dark Ecology’, provides a theoretical foundation and methodological context for the study. Here, I introduce the ‘ecoGothic’, contextualise it within wider theories such as Human Geography and ecocriticism, and formulate my own parameters for this new and still evolving term. I highlight the thread that will run throughout this thesis that our fears of the forest are all the more intense in an age of environmental crisis. I then discuss the idea that we have, in the words of Robert Pogue Harrison, now lost the ability to see the forest as ‘strange, monstrous, and enchanting’.² I argue that our more fearsome portrayals of the woods in our fictions in fact ‘remythologise’ this setting. I outline in this chapter what I call the ‘Seven Theses’: what I argue to be the seven main reasons that we fear the forest. These are: civilisation is defined as *against* the forest; the forest is associated with our fears of the *past*; the forest is a setting we associate with *trial*; the forest is an environment in which we are *lost*; the forest is a *consuming* threat; the forest is a site of the *human unconscious*; and the forest is an *antichristian* space. These ideas run throughout this study. The remaining chapters then address some of the ways in which the fearsome forest most commonly manifests in our fictions. In Chapter Two, “‘What if it’s the Trees?’: The Animated Wood”, I discuss the forest as a living and animate threat. I argue that the animate forest is so unnerving because it firmly undermines any ideas of Nature as merely a passive resource. In Chapter Three, “‘Where the Wild Things Are’: Monsters in the Forest”, I examine the tendency to view the woods as home to our monsters. Here, I discuss the ways in which monsters may embody our fears of this environment. I argue that monsters in the forest are usually so terrifying because they symbolise an imbrication between human and nonhuman Nature. In these creatures, we see the human and the forest monstrously made one. In Chapter Four, “‘It Isn’t Right to Build so Close to the Woods’: Humans in the Forest”, I discuss fears of the forest as an unsuitable and hostile site of human habitation. Here, I argue that there are two main reasons that we fear the settlement of humans in the woods. In the first, it is the *forest* that is feared: it is seen as an infectious space that will make monsters of those

¹ Sara Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest: The Tangled Roots of our Forest* (London: Granta Books, 2012), p. 200

² Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p. 121.

within it. In the second, it is the *humans* that are feared: the forest is only *made* Gothic by human intrusion. In each of these explanations, the central subject of concern is the uncertain place of humans in Nature in the modern world.

Taking into account the fact that the ecoGothic is a very new area in literary studies, this thesis concludes by gesturing towards further research that would prove valuable in shedding more light on this field. In an age of escalating environmental crisis, it stresses the extreme importance of continually interrogating our relations to – and fears of – the natural world.

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iii.
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	v.
Introduction: Into the Woods	1.
Thesis Overview	1.
Chapter One: Theorising the Forest: Approaching a Dark Ecology	12.
1.1 'The Echoing Green'	13.
1.2 Theorising Ecophobia: Ecocriticism and the EcoGothic	16.
1.3 'That Theatre of Superstition': Mythologies and the Forest	28.
i. Why We Fear the Forest (Seven Theses)	36.
ii. 'Landscapes of Our Minds': Psychoanalysis and the Forest	43.
iii. Hallowed Be Thy Horror: Christianity and the Forest	52.
1.4 Conclusion	60.
Chapter Two: 'What if it's the Trees?': The Animated Forest	63.
2.1 'The Willows Were Against Us': Blackwood's Forests	69.
2.2 The Forest's Revenge: When Nature Gets Nasty	82.
2.3 'Angry Molesting Trees': The Rape of Nature	97.
2.4 'Monstrous Mother Natures': The She-Devil in the Wilderness	107.
2.5 Conclusion	129.

Chapter Three: Where the Wild Things Are: Monsters in the Forest	132.
3.1 Here Be Monsters	135.
3.2 Ambiguous Monsters	142.
3.3 ‘She was an Old Lady with the Fur of a Horse’: Witches in the Woods	156.
3.4 ‘Forest Assassins’: Wolves in the Woods	176.
3.5 Conclusion	210.
 Chapter Four: ‘It isn’t Right to Build So Close to the Woods’:	
Humans in the Forest	215.
4.1 ‘What Lies Beneath’: That Awful Secret of the Woods’	223.
4.2 ‘You Are What You Eat and We Are What We Are’: Cannibals in the Woods	240.
4.3 ‘The Death of Nature’: Constructed Wilderness	259.
i. Paradise Lost: <i>Innocence</i> and <i>The Village</i>	260.
ii. Human-made Hells: <i>The Hunger Games</i> and <i>The Cabin in the Woods</i>	274.
4.4 Conclusion	287.
 Conclusion: What is ‘That Awful Secret of the Wood’?	290.
 <i>Bibliography</i>	305.
<i>Filmography</i>	336.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is very common for those who write PhDs to complain about them. Several of us (well, at least my friends and I) have described the process as analogous to slowly birthing an oversized and likely antlered beast. However, it is, simultaneously, an extremely privileged experience. To be allowed to research and write on the subject you love is to be lucky indeed.

I am blessed to say that there are many who have supported me in the writing of this thesis. Firstly, I must thank the Irish Research Council (the IRC), who have supported the last two years of this work. I can't begin to convey the pressure you removed by funding this project – and I am forever grateful. My thanks to Dr. Bernice Murphy, who supervised this thesis. You have always been wondrously humorous and extremely kind. Thank you for helping me to see the wood for the trees. To Dr. Jarlath Killeen, for your invaluable advice early on in this work, and for being so approachable throughout my time in Trinity. To Diane Sadler, who has helped with a million little things: you are the heart of the Department. My sincerest thanks to those of you who have kindly helped me to locate the obscurest of articles, and who have diligently read and advised on various chapters in this thesis: Dara Downie, Niall Gillespie, Noelle Mann, Kait Forrester, and Brian Showers. My thanks, too, to Jennifer Harwood Smith, who will simultaneously print your thesis and knit you a scarf – you are magic!

My love and thanks to my family. Firstly, to mum and dad, who have always supported me and never allowed me to take myself too seriously. Thanks for all the walks in the woods – although I'm quite certain the ones in the dark are entirely to blame for this thesis! Secondly, to Granny and Don-Don. To both of you for your love and kindness, but especially to Don-Don, for his enthusiastic support of my studies. You are the only person who I know would have delightedly read every word of this thesis, and I'm so sorry you're not around to see it finished. I know, however, that you have been cheering me on its completion. Thirdly, to Auntie Jane, who sent me little care packages and provided a haven in which to work when it was needed. You are a truly beautiful soul and I have so much admiration for you and your way of living. Fourthly, to my second family, the Kinanes. To Norrie, Brian, Amy, and Conor – you have given me a home away from home and I love you all.

My love and gratitude to all of my friends. To the wonderful people who make up my PhD community: Margot Blankier, Jennifer Trieu, Kait Forrester, James Little, Stephen O'Neill, Conor Linnie, Brian McManus, Peter Doherty, Sarah Cleary, Emily Bourke, Jennifer Harwood Smith, Edward O'Hare, and Kate Roddy. Special thanks to the last three for the bad (really bad) movie nights – how could one ever survive academia without *Sharknado*? Thanks to Meg Black and Michael Belcher for all your kindness, ridiculous post, and many giggles – one day I *will* make it out to Nashville to visit you. To Rehana Jomeen and Tiffany Hearsey, you are two of the strongest and most beautiful women I know. To Vicky Reed, my spirit animal in human form. To Shelley Maddock, who in some ways is simply the love of my life! And to my main ladies: Sammy, Sarah, and Tania, my sisters for always.

Most of all, my thanks and love to Ian. You have helped me with this in so many ways, from helping me to battle truly monstrous footnotes, to making sure there's always chocolate in the fridge. You have held my hand through the woods.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1.1:* Laurent Broussouloux, ‘The Eye of the Forest’ (2012).
- Figure 1.2:* William Blake, *The Temptation and Fall of Eve* (1808).
- Figure 2.1:* Film poster for *Otesánek* (2000).
- Figure 2.2:* Illustration from *Pan’s Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* (1912).
- Figure 2.3:* Sketch design of Little Otík (2000).
- Figures 2.4*
and 2.5: The haunted forest in Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937).
- Figure 2.6:* The reversed ‘rape of nature’ in *Evil Dead* (2013).
- Figure 2.7:* The monstrous tree consumes human infants in *The Guardian* (1990).
- Figure 2.8:* Camilla (Jenny Seagrove) merges with the tree in *The Guardian* (1990).
- Figure 2.9:* ‘Sanctuary’ in *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012).
- Figure 2.10:* ‘The Dark Forest’ in *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012).
- Figures 2.11*
and 2.12: ‘She’ (Charlotte Gainsbourg) ‘melts into the green’ in *Antichrist* (2009).
- Figure 3.1:* Kiki Smith, *Infiltrator* (2000).
- Figures 3.2*
and 3.3: Images of ‘lostness’ in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *YellowBrickRoad* (2010).
- Figure 3.4:* Baba Yaga and her hut.
- Figure 3.5:* The Blair Witch Woodcut.
- Figures 3.6*
and 3.7: Kiki Smith, *Daughter* (2004).
- Figure 3.8:* The Feast in ‘The Company of Wolves’ (1984).
- Figure 4.1:* Film poster for *Jug Face* (2013).
- Figure 4.2:* The Entrance to the Black Lodge in *Twin Peaks* (1990-1).
- Figure 4.3:* The Pit in *Jug Face* (2013).
- Figure 4.4:* A ‘Monster’ in *The Village* (2004).
- Figure 4.5:* The Layers in *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012).
- Figure 4.6:* The Hand of ‘God’, in *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012).

‘You are alone, in a dark wood. Now cope.’

— Francis Spufford, *The Child That Books Built*.³

³ Francis Spufford, *The Child that Books Built* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2002) p. 63.

INTRODUCTION: INTO THE WOODS

Thesis Overview

‘Inside most of us post-enlightenment and would-be rational adults there is a child who is terrified by the wild wood’.

— Sara Maitland.¹

‘The woods are just trees,

The trees are just wood.

I have no fear,

Nor no one should’.

— Little Red Riding Hood, *Into the Woods*.²

When we imagine the forest, we tend towards extremes. It is commonly read as a *binary* space – as either ‘good’ or ‘bad’. When it is ‘good’, it is a remedial setting of wonder and enchantment; when it is ‘bad’, it is a dangerous and terrifying wilderness. It is with its fearsome associations that this thesis is concerned.

¹ Sara Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest: The Tangled Roots of our Forest* (London: Granta Books, 2012), p. 200.

² Stephen Sondheim, ‘Prologue’, *Into the Woods*, (1986). Musical.

Nowadays, for the majority of humankind in the West, there is little practical reason to be afraid of the woods. For most of us, this environment does not feature in our everyday lives and it does not present a threat to our existence. Most of its predators that have been seen to endanger humans, such as wolves and bears, are now threatened with extinction – and it is much more common for humans to die in towns and in cities, than in the midst of the woods. In this light, then, the woodland setting is just not that dangerous. Maitland's wording (in the quotation above) illustrates such thinking. The implication is that the modern adult who fears the forest does so *despite* the fact that he or she is 'post-enlightenment' and 'would-be rational'. It is suggested, therefore, that such fears are today not only unfounded, but regressive and irrational. As Little Red Riding Hood informs us in *Into the Woods* (1986), 'the woods are just trees' and 'the trees are just wood', and no one 'should' have any cause for anxiety. Nonetheless, as Maitland continues, there is much evidence to suggest that we continue to be 'terrified by the wild wood'. Popular culture abounds with seemingly infinite examples of the foreboding forest. It is, as a site of trial, trepidation, and terror, one of the most enduring and pervasive cultural images in our fictions.

This leads us to the central question of this thesis: *why* is it that we continue to find the forest so frightening? This, in turn, spurs several further and related questions. What is that 'awful secret of the wood', which Arthur Machen announced, but never revealed?³ Why, when we seek in our fictions for a setting to unnerve and to terrify, do we return again and again to the surroundings of the forest? What is it about this environment that has led it to be classified as a 'landscape of fear' and to be recognised so easily as a Gothic locale?⁴ Why is the idea of 'horror in the woods' now a 'cliché',⁵ yet continually desired? Katherine A. Wagner argues

³ Machen uses this intriguing term in his Gothic tale *The Great God Pan* (1890), which though filled with an ambient sense of a very Gothic forest, never in fact elucidates why it is so frightening.

⁴ Yi-fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1979), p. 1.

⁵ Rick McDonald, 'Sacred Violence and *The Cabin in the Woods*', *Slayage: The Journal of the Joss Whedon Studies Association*, Fall 2013, Vol. 10, Issue 2, p. 4.

that when the same ideas are repeated in horror it is because they ‘resonate with wider cultural fears’⁶ – and so the question arises, with Gothic depictions of the forest, as to what exactly these fears might be. I contend, throughout this thesis, that images of the frightening forest play into our wider anxieties when it comes to what Val Plumwood has termed the uneasy ‘dualism’⁷ between humankind and Nature.⁸ This ‘dualism’, I suggest, is born of our fears of the natural world, of what Simon C. Estok has termed ‘ecophobia’.⁹ Our fears of the forest, I argue, are inevitably linked to these fears of nonhuman Nature. Such fears, moreover, are especially relevant in contemporary society, as we live in an age of anthropogenic (human-caused) ecological crisis. This crisis, as Cheryl Glotfelty argues, is ‘the most pressing issue of our time’.¹⁰ I do not mean to imply that the forest has become frightening as a result of such concerns: its more menacing associations of course predate such awareness. Instead, I mean to suggest that in a time when ‘most people are aware that human beings are harming nature’,¹¹ there is a pervasive (if sometimes latent) guilt in our relations to the natural world: any ideas of fearsome Nature become, in this context, all the more terrifying. Moreover, this context means that it is now, more than ever, essential to examine our portrayals of Nature in our fictions. Kevin Corstorphine contends that ‘a critical examination of the representation of nature in fiction is crucial to an understanding of our relationship with it’.¹² Meanwhile, Stacy Alaimo argues that our fictional depictions of Nature carry very ‘material consequences’.¹³

⁶ Katherine A. Wagner, ‘Haven't We Been Here Before?: The Cabin in the Woods, the Horror Genre, and Placelessness’, *Slayage: The Journal of the Joss Whedon Studies Association*, Fall 2013, Vol. 10, Issue 2, p. 21.

⁷ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 81.

⁸ I explain my own capitalisation and usage of this term towards the end of this section.

⁹ Simon C. Estok, ‘Theorising in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia’, *International Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)*, Spring 2009, Vol. 16, Issue 4: 203-225, p. 203.

¹⁰ Cheryl Glotfelty, ‘Preface’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. xii.

¹¹ Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany* (New York: SUNY Press, 2011), p. 1.

¹² Discussed by Andrew Smith and William Hughes, ‘Introduction: Defining the EcoGothic’, *EcoGothic*, eds Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 9.

¹³ Stacy Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films’, in *Beyond Nature Writing Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, eds Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Virginia: The UP of Virginia, 2001), p. 280.

They not only provide ‘stunning insights into how the arguments, images and rhetoric of environmentalism have been received’.¹⁴ but ‘these texts’, she argues, ‘shape contemporary responses to environmentalism’¹⁵. Consequently, they may be read, as Hubert Zapf insists, as ‘ecological forces’.¹⁶

In order to explore the questions posed above, I examine a wide selection of twentieth and twenty-first century horror films and literature, each of which features a fearsome forest. The thesis is divided into four main chapters, and each of these approaches the fundamental question, ‘why is the forest frightening?’, from a different angle. Chapter One provides a theoretical foundation and methodological context for this study. Here, I introduce the movement of the ‘ecoGothic’, contextualise it within wider theory, and formulate my parameters for this new and evolving term. I then discuss the significance of various mythologies when it comes to our fears of the woods. I highlight the connections between the so-called ‘deaths’ of myth and Nature, and contend that in the ecoGothic such ‘deaths’ are simultaneously undermined. Within this context, I introduce what I have termed the ‘Seven Theses’: what I argue to be the seven most predominant and recurrent reasons that we fear the forest. In short, these are: the forest is *against civilisation*; the forest is a space we associate with the *past*; the forest is a site of *trial*; the forest is a setting in which we are *lost*; the forest is a *consuming* threat; the forest is a site of the *human unconscious*; and the forest is an *antichristian space*. These last two ideas are given their own subsections, so that they might be introduced in more detail. These ‘Seven Theses’ are seen throughout the texts in this work, and so each chapter ends with a contextualised discussion of their relevance.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures’, p. 280.

¹⁶ Quoted in Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 118.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four are each concerned with some of the most common ways in which the forest manifests in our fictions as a fearsome locale. They address, respectively, the forest as an *animate* threat, as a home to our *monsters*, and as a setting which is wholly unsuitable and at times even *hostile to human settlement*. Chapter Two, “‘What if it’s the Trees?’: The Animated Forest’ is focused on texts in which the forest is frightening because it is animate: it is shown as sentient and living in an age where we widely view Nature as a ‘passive resource’.¹⁷ It begins with a discussion of some of Algernon Blackwood’s tales of Gothic Nature, which interestingly introduce the themes that resound throughout the subsequent texts. I discuss *The Willows* (1907), ‘The Transfer’, and ‘The Man Whom the Trees Loved’ (1912). I then focus more explicitly on the idea that we now fear the animate forest in the main because we fear Nature’s *revenge*. I examine Jan Švankmajer’s *Otesánek* (2000) and M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Happening* (2008), as two texts in which we have animate trees that symbolise Nature’s revenge on modern humanity. I then expound on the motivations behind Nature’s revenge, highlighting what Carolyn Merchant has called ‘the rape of Nature’.¹⁸ Here I discuss the animate forest as a *reversal* of such violence, focusing on Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead* franchise (1981-). This serves as an introduction to texts in which the forest becomes animated through women as a means of ecofeminist revenge. Connections are made and destroyed between the reductive identifications between ‘passive’ women and ‘passive’ Nature. Here, I examine William Friedkin’s *The Guardian* (1990), Rupert Sanders’ *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), Naomi Novik’s *Uprooted* (2015) and Lars von Trier’s *Antichrist* (2009).

Chapter Three, “‘Where the Wild Things Are’: Monsters in the Forest’, examines our fears of the woods as an environment we associate with monsters. Here, I examine Monstrous

¹⁷ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

¹⁸ Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 91.

Geography,¹⁹ which is the relation between monsters and the landscapes in which we set them, with regard to the forest. I argue that our monsters in the forest both reflect and embody our fears of this landscape. More specifically, I argue that they do so by undermining the imagined distinction between humans and the wilderness: by destroying what Val Plumwood has called the ‘human-nature dualism’.²⁰ Of all the many monsters that dwell in the woods, I choose to focus on three main categories. The first is what I term ‘Ambiguous Monsters’: those that resist obvious classification. Here, I examine Stephen King’s *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* (1999), Jesse Holland and Andrew Mitton’s *YellowBrickRoad* (2010), and Robert Holdstock’s *Mythago Wood* (1984). I then focus on two traditional monsters associated with the forest through history and mythology: witches and wolves. With the first, I examine the fairy tale ‘Hansel and Gretel’ and then several texts in which this monster is bound to the woods: Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez’s *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), Jessica Hausner’s *Hotel* (2004), and Lucky McKee’s *The Woods* (2006). With wolves, I analyse the classical tale of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ as a warning against the fragility of our boundaries between humans and Nature. I then discuss Catherine Hardwicke’s *Red Riding Hood* (2011), Anthony Schmitz’s *Darkest Desire* (1998), John Ajvide Lindqvist’s *Little Star* (2010), and Angela Carter’s collection of wolf stories in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979).

Chapter Four, “‘It Isn’t Right to Build so Close to the Woods’: Humans in the Forest”, examines texts wherein the forest is feared as an unsuitable and dangerous site of human habitation. Here, I argue that there are two main reasons that we fear the settlement of humans in the woods. In the first, it is the *forest* that is feared: it is seen as an infectious space that will make monsters of those within it. In the second, it is the *humans* that are feared: the forest is

¹⁹ Chet Van Duzer, ‘Hic Sunt Dracones: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), p. 433.

²⁰ Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 81.

only *made* Gothic by the humans within it. The texts are structured in line with these two explanations. In regard to the more obvious theory, that it is the forest that is feared, I discuss firstly David Lynch and Mark Frost's *Twin Peaks* (1990-1), T. E. D. Klein's *The Ceremonies* (1984), and Chad Crawford Kinkle's *Jug Face* (2013). In each of these, we find that the 'awful secret of the wood' is something which quite literally lies *beneath* the forest – and this is a theme that interestingly continues in each of these texts with forest communities. I then discuss texts with woodland cannibals, looking at Jack Ketchum's *Off Season* (1980), Richard Layman's *The Woods Are Dark* (1981), Lucky McKee's *The Woman* (2011) and Jim Mickle's *We Are What We Are* (2013). In order to examine the contrasting idea that the forest is only made frightening by the *humans* within it, I discuss texts which engage with themes of our 'fragmentation' from the natural world.²¹ I examine Lucile Hadžihalilović's *Innocence* (2004), M. Night Shyamalan's *The Village* (2004), Suzanne Collin's *The Hunger Games* (2009) and Drew Goddard's *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012).

When discussing so many texts, it is essential to contextualise and theorise them within various overarching methodologies. First and foremost, this thesis forms a part of the emerging field of ecoGothic studies. The 'ecoGothic' is a comparatively nascent term and is one that I spend considerable time examining and expounding in Chapter One. In short, however, it essentially revolves around the study of our representations of what Tom J. Hillard has called 'Gothic Nature'²² within Gothic fictions. The ecoGothic is informed by and crosses over with several surrounding areas of theory. It belongs to the emerging critical trend towards 'nonhuman studies', which has been defined by Elizabeth Grosz as analysis that focuses on the 'animal, plant, and material forces that surround and overtake the human'.²³ Of all these

²¹ Andrew Smith and William Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 2.

²² Tom J. Hillard, "'Deep Into That Darkness Peering": An Essay on Gothic Nature', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)*, Autumn 2009, Vol. 16, Issue 4: 685-95.

²³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics and Art* (USA: Duke University press, 2011), p. 11.

‘forces’, write Dawn Keetley and Rita Kurtz, ‘it is the plant that has been the most neglected’.²⁴ ‘If animals have been on the margin’, argues Michael Marder, ‘then plants have been on the margin of the margin’.²⁵ Following on from these observations, this work centres on the woodland setting – a landscape comprised of the very tallest of plants – as an extremely important facet of the ecoGothic. The ecoGothic is informed, too, by the field of ‘human geography’, which has provided us with useful terminology with which to discuss our interactions with the environment around us. It divides our understandings of space into that which we find familiar and comforting, and that which we view as unknown and threatening. Spaces falling within this latter category have been termed by the human geographer Yi-fu Tuan as ‘landscapes of fear’²⁶ – and within this, he explicitly includes and examines the forest. Most of all, however, the ecoGothic is informed by ecocritical studies. Indeed, it is defined by Andrew Smith and William Hughes in *Ecogothic* (2013) as a means of ‘exploring the Gothic through theories of ecocriticism’.²⁷ Ecocriticism, in this context, is generally construed in line with its broadest definition, as is usefully summarised by Greg Garrard: ‘ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entails critical analysis of the term “human” itself’.²⁸

Broadly speaking, this is how I, too, interpret the movement, though I discuss it in much more detail in Chapter One, under the heading ‘Theorising Ecophobia: Ecocriticism and the EcoGothic’. Importantly, the ecoGothic exists as an answer to what have been seen as some of the inadequacies of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, within the field of literary studies, has been

²⁴ Dawn Keetley and Rita Kurtz, ‘Plant Horror/The Monstrous Vegetal’, 2014. Accessed 12/12/2014. (<http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/58083>.)

²⁵ Michael Marder, *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 2.

²⁶ Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, p. 1.

²⁷ Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 1.

²⁸ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 5.

criticised for being limited to a ‘Wordsworthian tradition’²⁹ (an exclusive focus on the pastoral and Romantic elements in Nature). It is, as Hillard notes, ‘astonishing’ that ecocriticism has ‘largely ignored’³⁰ our more frightening representations of the wild – of what Stacy Alaimo has termed ‘monstrous natures’³¹. Consequently, those such as Timothy Morton have called for what he terms a ‘dark ecology’: a means of expressing, too, the ‘negativity [...], irony, ugliness and *horror*’³² of ecology (my emphasis). In accordance with this, Estok insists that ‘ecophobia’ (the fear of Nature) ‘needs theorising’.³³ Such theorisation is precisely what the ecoGothic – and this thesis – will achieve.

Finally, I wish to stipulate further this work’s parameters and to make clear my usage of certain terms in this thesis. It is important to emphasise, from the outset, that the structuring focus in this work is thematic and not chronological. This is not a comprehensive history of the Gothic forest in our fictions; instead, it is an illustrative work on the ways in which we construe the forest as a Gothic locale in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The texts examined are exclusively Western: the majority are North American, whilst several are European. Though there are some considerable and nuanced differences in the associations between American and European forests, which are examined, I generally discuss the two collectively in terms of their symbolism. This is in line with the thinking of such critics as Carol Clover, who asserts that the ‘American woods’, when threatening, are akin to ‘the deep forests of central Europe’: ‘the point’, she urges, is that here ‘the rules of civilisation do not obtain’.³⁴ James Bell, writing on ‘haunted landscapes’ in the Gothic, continues: ‘geographical accuracy is of little significance

²⁹ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 3.

³⁰ Hillard, ‘Deep Into That Darkness Peering’, p. 688.

³¹ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures’.

³² Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 16.

³³ Estok, ‘Theorising in a Space’, p. 203.

³⁴ Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 124.

to the Gothic; what is important is the landscape's expressive and symbolic potential'.³⁵ Moreover, it is worth noting that many of the American fears of the woods are historically inherited from European anxieties. Much of the American fixation on the fearsome forest is tied to memories of the overwhelming forests of the New World. Its colonialists, as James H. Merrell argues, brought with them 'the European deep-seated fears of the wilderness'³⁶ into America. It is important to emphasise, too, that when I discuss '*the forest*', I am discussing this environment as a collective and symbolic construct. Due to the fact that this study focuses on fiction, the forests I discuss are literally imagined: my interest is in *figurative* representations of this setting. Such representations, I argue, are all the more pertinent in an age where 'for the first time in human history, no true wilderness any longer exists'.³⁷ This is something I examine in detail in Chapter Four, under the heading 'The Death of Nature: Constructed Wilderness'. Just as I discuss '*the forest*', I also discuss 'Nature' in terms of a collective construct. I capitalise 'Nature' throughout this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, this is to emphasise my treatment of Nature as more entity than setting. Secondly, this is to distinguish clearly between the nonhuman natural world, as assumed in 'Nature', as a symbolic whole, and human '*nature*'.

It is worthy of note that the very discussion of Nature and such movements as ecocriticism are, in one sense, inherently paradoxical. This is because there is an implication that we – humanity – are somehow objective and distinct from the natural world. We must, therefore, as Garrard contends, not lose sight of the fact that 'nature exists as both the object and, albeit distantly, the origin of our discourse'.³⁸ In my discussion of the forest, there are some words I use to describe this setting that are treated synonymously. I alternate between the

³⁵ James Bell, 'Haunted Landscapes', in *Gothic: The Dark Heart of Film* (London: BFI, 2013), p. 116

³⁶ James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999), p. 23.

³⁷ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 257.

³⁸ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 10.

terms ‘the forest’ and ‘the woods’, as whilst technically speaking they denote different dimensions, and originally distinguished between public and private land, they are now frequently seen as interchangeable.³⁹ In addition, I use the word ‘wilderness’ to describe the forest environment. This word in fact describes any ‘wild or uncultivated land’, but I note that in the Western world it is widely synonymous with forested landscapes. Moreover, it is a suitable word because of its emotional as well as geographical resonance. In addition to its denotation of topographical wildness, it implies ‘a region [...] in which one wanders or loses one’s way’.⁴⁰ Each of these terms – ‘the woods’, ‘the forest’, and ‘the wilderness’ – are to be understood as in symbolic contrast to human civilisation. With all this mind, let us now endeavour to shed some light on the Deep Dark Forest.

³⁹ The woods, technically, are categorised as a ‘collection of trees’ that is ‘smaller than a forest’. The forest, in turn, is ‘an *extensive* tract of land covered with trees’ and moreover is traditionally distinguished from the woods by the fact that it is owned by the monarchy. Sourced: “woods, n.”, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2015). Web. 10. July 2015 and “forest, n.”, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2015). Web. 10. July 2015.

⁴⁰ “wilderness, n.”, *OED Online*, (Oxford University Press, June 2015). Web. 10. July 2015.

CHAPTER ONE

THEORISING THE FOREST: APPROACHING A DARK ECOLOGY



Fig. 1.1: Laurent Broussouloux, 'The Eye of the Forest' (2012).

1.1 ‘The Echoing Green’¹

‘Most of the places of human habitation in the West’, argues Robert Pogue Harrison, in his seminal work *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (1992),² ‘were at some time in the past more or less densely forested’.³ Western civilisation, quite literally, began – and continues its existence – as a clearing in the forest. In the modern day this is a difficult notion to comprehend. As the centuries have passed, humans have become increasingly dislocated and disassociated from the forest. We have evolved, as Jay Appleton argues, from ‘forest-dwellers’ to ‘apartment-house-dwellers’.⁴ And yet, according to those such as Richard Hayman, there is nonetheless ‘an echoing green that resounds within and around us’⁵ – a notion to which we have a starkly ambivalent response. Though our forests may be increasingly out of sight, this is not to suggest that they are out of mind. In our everyday language, they continue to feature as customary analogies for a wide range of situations and emotions. When we struggle to see a situation in its entirety, we say ‘we can’t see the wood for the trees’. When we say someone is ‘in a wood’, we mean they are ‘in a difficulty, trouble, or perplexity’.⁶ If someone is temporarily endangered, and then moves into recovery, we will readily say ‘they are out of the woods’. And when we describe ourselves as ‘bewildered’, we are describing the uneasy sensation of being

¹ Richard Hayman, *Trees, Woodland and Civilisation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 1.

² Harrison’s work is an invaluable compendium on the subject of the forest. It is important to highlight, however, that the subject of this thesis is significantly divergent from his study. Harrison’s work is not predominantly concerned with close readings of literary or filmic texts, and does not discuss in any detail the subject of the Gothic. The texts which are examined by Harrison are literary classics, with examples such as Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy*, and William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. This thesis, in contrast, is mainly concerned with the analysis of a multitude of modern texts, in which we encounter depictions of the Gothic forest.

³ Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p. ix.

⁴ Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1996), p. 29.

⁵ Hayman, *Trees, Woodland and Civilisation*, p. 1.

⁶ “in a wood. Phrases and proverbs.” Oxford University Press, June 2015. Web. 10. July 2015.

amidst the wilderness (its etymology deriving from ‘wild-dē-or-ness’⁷). Forests loom all the larger in the cultural imagination precisely *because* they are increasingly destroyed. This growing absence means that this binary setting becomes, simultaneously, all the more idyllic – and all the more terrifying. In the context of contemporary environmental crisis, in which ‘horror is becoming the environmental norm’,⁸ the perilous forest is a fitting subject for our Gothic fictions. It makes sense, then, that in the current climate, Andrew Smith and William Hughes have argued that it is the Gothic that is best situated to capture and express our environmental anxieties.⁹

This chapter provides a methodological context for the recurrent ideas throughout this thesis. I first explore the evocative nature of the forest and the infinite stories and mythologies that it has inspired. I then introduce the ecoGothic and formulate my own use and understanding of this new and evolving field. Thereafter, I discuss the forest under the heading of ‘Mythology’. Here, I discuss the connections between the alleged ‘deaths’ of both myth and Nature, and how each is to an extent undermined within ecoGothic fictions. I introduce, then, some of the provisional and recurrent reasons why we may fear the forest, which include such ideas as its assumed opposition to civilisation, and fears of the woods as a consuming threat. I focus then on what Noël Carroll has called our Western ‘cultural mythologies’¹⁰ of psychoanalysis and Christianity, and the ways in which these have informed our fears of the woods. In doing so, this chapter lays the foundations for addressing exactly why, as a landscape of fear, the forest continues to pervade contemporary culture.

⁷ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 5th edition, p. 1

⁸ Sara L. Crosby, ‘Beyond Ecophilia: Edgar Allan Poe and the American Tradition of Ecohorror’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)* 21, no. 3) (Summer 2014): 513-525, p. 514.

⁹ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Noël Carroll, ‘Afterword’, in Steven Jay Schneider, *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud’s Worst Nightmare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 258.

*

The forest is a thoroughly evocative setting, redolent with meaning and significance. ‘Trees’, as Mircea Eliade writes, ‘conjure a full range [...] of symbolism’:¹¹ celestial and diabolical in equal measure. In appearance, they may seem thoroughly beautiful, or extremely frightening. This is due, in part, to their at times uncannily ‘human’ forms. Of all the inanimate sights in Nature, it is trees that resemble us most aesthetically. With a vertical core that splits into limb-like appendages, it is little wonder they are common stimulants of pareidolia (seeing, for example, faces in inanimate objects)¹² and have commonly been mistaken for figures in the landscape. We will see the horrific potentialities of such a resemblance thoroughly exploited in *Little Otík* in Chapter Two. Indeed, Chapter Two centres on our fears that trees are *alive*. With their seasonal transformations and humble origins in a single seed, we can see why trees, throughout the centuries, have invited allegory and personification. It is fitting, therefore, that we have countless stories and mythologies that are tied to the forest. The more ominous ones are literally as old as extant literature. These examples of fearsome forests in our fictions range from ‘the oldest story in the world’,¹³ *Gilgamesh* (c. 1000-1999 BC),¹⁴ right through to such contemporary texts as J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), which features the Whomping Willow and Forbidden Forest. We have various legends, from throughout the

¹¹ Quoted in Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1969), p. 1026.

¹² Pareidolia is a type of apophenia, and is the psychological phenomenon of the human tendency to see patterns or meaning where it does not exist (for example, seeing animals or faces when looking at clouds and figments of the imagination such as ‘the man in the moon’).

¹³ Stephen Mitchell, ed. and trans., *Gilgamesh* (London: Profile Books, 2004), reverse cover.

¹⁴ *Gilgamesh* tells the story of the eponymous hero, who becomes enraged by the existence of human death, when he sees the corpses of those who die in his city carried away by the river and into the woods. He decides to venture inside the surrounding forest, in order to confront ‘death’ directly. Here, he encounters a forest demon, who he slays, and in addition he fells many of the trees, which he then casts into the river – condemning them to the same fate as the human cadavers that incurred his wrath. Thus, in one of our very earliest examples of culture, we see a fixation on this idea that our fears may be encountered in the forest.

centuries, that warn explicitly against harming the wooded environment. For example, the ancient Samogitians believed that any humans who harmed the forest's trees or animals would quickly find their hands and feet terribly deformed, whilst there are many in Ireland to this day who believe that 'fairy trees' (or '*crann síog*') cannot be disturbed without risk of an injurious curse.¹⁵ It is unsurprising, with so many illustrations of the forest as frightening, that we readily view it in such terms. Therefore, we may assume that there is something of a symbiotic connection between our organic fears of the wood, and these fictional creations. J.W. Williamson argues in relation to our literary and filmic examples of the monstrous natural world that these images 'don't just reflect our fear of Nature; they actively *teach* it'.¹⁶ We are thoroughly schooled in our fictions to recognise the forest as a Gothic locale. Such symbiosis undoubtedly continues – and all the more so now that our tales of 'horror in the woods' have become a 'cliché'.¹⁷ It is certainly not my intention to cover such an extensive and historical wealth of mythologies, but instead to contextualise our fears of the forest in our fictions today. This brings us to the methodology which runs throughout this thesis: the ecoGothic. We must determine, first and foremost, what exactly this is.

1.2 Theorising Ecophobia: Ecocriticism and the EcoGothic

'The contempt and fear we feel for the agency of the natural environment needs theorising'.

— Simon C. Estok¹⁸

¹⁵ As recently as 1999, a motorway between Limerick and Galway was eventually rerouted, so as to avoid the disturbance of one of these 'fairy trees'. For an excellent compendium of myths that pertain to trees and the forest, see Alexander Porteous' *The Forest in Folklore and Mythology* (New York: Macmillan, 2002).

¹⁶ J. W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 151.

¹⁷ McDonald, 'Sacred Violence', p. 4.

¹⁸ Estok, 'Theorising in a Space', p. 203.

Our fears of the forest environment inevitably fall within the wider category of our fears of the natural world: what Estok has termed our ‘ecophobia’.¹⁹ Critics such as Tom J. Hillard and Stacy Alaimo have noted that such fears have been widely ignored in our critical discussions of the natural world,²⁰ which have tended instead to focus on its more ‘favourable’²¹ depictions. Consequently, Estok firmly insists that our more negative relations to the natural world ‘need theorising’, whilst Timothy Morton calls for a shift within these discussions towards a ‘dark ecology’.²² EcoGothic studies, I contend, may be seen to answer such demands. Here, I introduce this nascent movement, and its usage throughout this thesis.

It is important firstly, in our discussion of the ecoGothic, to note that its ideas in themselves – in short, that Nature scares us – are certainly not new. What is new is the terminology and theoretical context with which it provides us. The ‘ecoGothic’ is a still emerging and evolving literary theory – and consequently, there is some uncertainty as to its exact meaning. It is worthwhile, therefore, to start with its foundations. If we look at the word in itself, we see that it is an amalgamation of ‘ecology’ and ‘Gothic’. We are introduced immediately to the idea that Nature is in *itself* Gothic. This is in accordance with Hillard’s discussion of ‘Gothic Nature’.²³ It aligns, too, with Emily Dickinson’s infamous line, ‘Nature is a haunted house’,²⁴ and certainly I would contend that it is just as pregnant with Gothic possibilities.

One of the first issues that must be addressed is the question of if – and how – the ‘ecoGothic’ is in any way distinct from ‘ecohorror’. Certainly we find examples of the two used interchangeably, so we must ask how can the ecoGothic be considered as new, when

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sourced: Hillard, ‘Deep Into the Darkness Peering’, p. 688; and Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures’, p. 279.

²¹ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures’, p. 279.

²² Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 16.

²³ Hillard, ‘Deep Into the Darkness Peering’.

²⁴ Emily Dickinson, in Mary L. Hampson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* (USA: Burton J. Jones, 1960), p. 535

ecohorror is something we've been talking about since films like *Them* and *The Birds* in the 1950s and 60s? To answer this, it is useful to first look at some of the existing definitions of ecohorror. Joseph J. Foy defines it in the following terms:

'Eco-horror' texts are fright flicks in which nature turns against humankind due to environmental degradation, pollution, encroachment, nuclear disaster, or a host of other reasons. As a genre, it attempts to raise mass consciousness about the very real threats that will face humanity if we are not more environmentally cautious.²⁵

Brian Merchant, more concisely, states, 'the premise propelling the genre [of ecohorror] couldn't be simpler or more primal: man tampers with nature – or worse, *ruins* nature – and nature kicks man's ass'²⁶. What we find in common with such definitions is that ecohorror is firstly viewed as a *genre*, and secondly that there is a clear and immediate sense of Nature's *revenge*. These elements are not, automatically, inherent in the ecoGothic. The ecoGothic, I argue, is more of a *framework*, and whilst themes within it of Nature's revenge are certainly common, they are not ubiquitous. Instead, what is essential to the texts examined by ecoGothic criticism is an undeniable sense of Gothic *ambience* to the natural environments which they portray. In this way, we begin to highlight the distinctions between the words 'ecohorror' and 'ecoGothic', as we consider our more traditional associations with the isolated terms 'horror'

²⁵ Joseph J. Foy, 'It Came from Planet Earth: Eco-Horror and the Politics of Postenvironmentalism in *The Happening*', in *Homer Simpson Marches on Washington: Dissent Through Popular Culture*, eds Timothy M. Dale and Joseph J. Foy (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2010), p. 167.

²⁶ Brian Merchant, 'The Evolution of Ecohorror, from *Godzilla* to Global Warming', Nov. 14th, 2012. Accessed 10/08/2012. (<http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/the-evolution-of-eco-horror-from-godzilla-to-global-warming>)

and the 'Gothic'. The word 'ecohorror', in contrast with the word 'ecoGothic', is less evocative of physical surroundings, and so is much less suited to a discussion of the forest environment. This is due to the fact that whilst the words 'horror' and 'Gothic' are often used interchangeably, they nonetheless carry their own connotations – and it is those of the Gothic with which I am here concerned. Hillard argues that 'perhaps moreso than in most literature, *setting* is a central convention of the Gothic'²⁷ (my emphasis).

Indeed, much criticism on the subject has focused, traditionally, on environment: we hear 'Gothic' and think quickly of castles, convents, monasteries, and architecture. In addition, as I will shortly discuss, we may think too of what Lisa Kröger has termed 'the Gothic forest'.²⁸ Now, this is not to suggest that 'ecohorror' and 'ecoGothic' are not closely related, nor to deny that they are at times imbricated. It is instead to draw attention to differences, say, between films like *Frogs* (1972) and *The Long Weekend* (1978), in which Nature explicitly, and very centrally, enacts its revenge on an exploitative humanity, and films like *Antichrist* (2009), in which such ideas are only thematically implicit, and where Nature is a foreboding, ambient, and somewhat 'backgrounded' presence throughout. There are of course many texts that may be viewed as both, as we will see for example in *The Happening* (2008), in which the forest is an ambient and menacing environment, and we are told explicitly of its trees' deliberate revenge. With ecohorror and the ecoGothic, we therefore have two main themes in common: firstly, that Nature is frightening and actively dangerous, and secondly, that we should be employing a more *ecocentric* (and not *anthropocentric*) viewpoint. However, whilst in

²⁷ Tom J. Hillard, 'From Salem Witch to *Blair Witch*: The Puritan Influence on American Gothic Nature', in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 111.

²⁸ Kröger discusses the fact that such infamous Gothic settings as Dracula's abode and The Castle of Otranto are set within expansive forests, and highlights the horrific nature of the 'sublime'. Sourced: Lisa Kröger, 'Panic, paranoia and pathos: ecocriticism in the eighteenth-century Gothic novel', in Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 16.

ecohorror texts, the intention is to make us more ‘environmentally cautious’,²⁹ this is not always the case with the texts we approach through the ecoGothic. Instead, the primary and consistent concern of this movement is with interrogating the Gothic nature of Gothic Nature.

There is, at present, only one edited collection on the subject of the ecoGothic: Andrew Smith and William Hughes’ *Ecogothic* (2013). In their introduction to the movement, Smith and Hughes align clearly with Estok’s assertion that our fears of Nature ‘need theorising’: they highlight the fact that ‘a critical representation of nature in fiction is crucial to an understanding of our relationship to it’,³⁰ and situate the ecoGothic as the best means by which to ‘reposition the ecological beyond a Wordsworthian tradition’.³¹ They highlight, too, the idea that the more that Nature is attacked, the more we fear its environments,³² and contend that such fears are best captured and expressed within our Gothic creations.³³ In the introduction, ‘Defining the Ecogothic’, Smith and Hughes summarise the ecoGothic as a means of ‘exploring the Gothic *through* theories of ecocriticism’³⁴ (my emphasis). They are unambiguous, therefore, in their definition of the movement as a theoretical framework, as opposed to a classification of our fictions. However, the essays that ensue divide when it comes to the ways in which the term ‘ecoGothic’ is used. Some describe the fictions they address as in themselves ‘ecoGothic’, therein treating the term as a title of a genre, whilst the others deem the movement, as I do, a critical means through which to examine Nature in our Gothic fictions. In terms of using ‘theories of ecocriticism’, this is interpreted by the majority in line with its broadest definitions, as an examination of the relationship between human and nonhuman Nature. Few, in fact, engage with some of the more intricate theories within ecocriticism. Whilst my concern, too,

²⁹ Foy, ‘It Came from Planet Earth: Eco-Horror and the Politics of Postenvironmentalism in *The Happening*’, p. 167.

³⁰ Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

is mostly with the wider question of the relations between the human and the nonhuman – and within this, of course, between the human and the forest – I am interested in various facets of ecocritical theory, which are examined below.

The ecoGothic, as I mentioned above, is informed by and crosses over with several surrounding areas of theory. The most relevant, of course, as it provides its definition, is ecocriticism, but I wish first to touch on some of the main ideas within Human Geography. Scott Slovic argues that when discussing such terms as ‘ecophobia’, we should do so ‘within the context of place and space’.³⁵ ‘Place’ and ‘Space’ (which I choose to capitalise, so as to enhance clarity) are terms we have inherited from Human Geography. Fellman et. al. in *Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities* (2008) contend that space can be interpreted in different ways. It can be seen as ‘absolute’³⁶ – that is, as literal, physical space that can be precisely and cartographically recorded – or as ‘relative’,³⁷ meaning that it is interpreted perceptually and as such, refuses to be objectively quantifiable. It is thus divided, respectively, into ‘Place’ and ‘Space’. ‘Place’ is that which is known and familiar; ‘Space’, conversely, is all that lies outside of this. The first, as Yi-fu Tuan has argued, symbolises ‘security’, whilst the second, even though it may signify ‘freedom’,³⁸ is always ‘frightening’ because of its ‘strangeness’.³⁹ These terms create an obvious analogy for the ‘human-nature dualism’⁴⁰ – something that is underlined by the fact that Human Geography has been termed by some the ‘nature-society tradition’.⁴¹ This, in turn, means that we have an obvious analogy for the contentious relationship between civilisation and the wilderness. Indeed, within this binary, the

³⁵ Scott Slovic, ‘Editor’s Note’, *International Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)*, (Summer 2014), 21 (3): 507-50, p. 507.

³⁶ Jerome D. Fellman, Mark D. Bjelland, Arthur Getis, and Judis Getis, *Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), p. 6.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977) p. 3.

³⁹ Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 81.

⁴¹ Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, p. 18.

forest falls categorically under the heading of ‘Space’. Moreover, Tuan defines several settings, which qualify as ‘Space’, as ‘landscapes of fear’,⁴² and includes within this the forest as one of his primary examples. It is, he argues, ‘strange’ and ‘unknown’: it is ‘dark and chaotic’, and consequently, is a site in which ‘one feels utterly lost’.⁴³ What we might call this ‘traditional’ idea of being ‘lost in the woods’ is something we discuss early on under the heading of the next section, ‘Mythologies and the Forest’. In the context of Human Geography, however, it is worthy of note that in many of the texts we will come to discuss, the horror is bound to the transition from ‘Place’ to ‘Space’, and the happy ending (if there is one) relies on a return to the former environment. For example, in Naomi Novik’s *Uprooted* (2015), our heroine leaves the comparative ‘security’⁴⁴ of The Valley (‘Place’) to venture into The Wood (‘Space’), and the novel ends happily only once she returns to civilisation (to ‘Place’ once again). In *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), which demonstrates this structure again, we have students who deliberately immerse themselves in ‘Space’, in the Maryland woods. The ending, here, is precisely so horrifying because those that survive *remain* in this setting. The broad subject of Human Geography will be especially relevant in Chapter Four, as we come to discuss ideas of ‘Constructed Wilderness’. This is due to the fact that within Human Geography, there are many debates as to what William Cronon has called ‘the trouble with wilderness’⁴⁵ – which, essentially, revolves around the idea that we have confused and unrealistic notions of what ‘true wilderness’ really is. We will see this, for example, in M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Village*, where ‘authentic wilderness’ is revealed, in the end, to be a human construction.

⁴² Ibid., p. 1.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁵ William Cronon, ‘The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Kind of Nature’, in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1996), p. 69.

As I said above, the ecoGothic has been defined as a means of ‘exploring the Gothic *through* theories of ecocriticism’,⁴⁶ and so it is essential that ecocriticism be examined. Here, I very broadly outline this field, but focus in the main on the ways in which some of its various elements and themes may be used in the ecoGothic. Ecocriticism, as I mentioned above, has been very broadly defined as ‘the study of the relationship between the human and the non-human throughout human cultural history’.⁴⁷ It is, as Garrard states, a ‘history of ideas’.⁴⁸ As such, it may be seen as a very broad heading under which we find widely diverse research and a multitude of interdisciplinary thought. It is, as Timothy Clark argues, ‘metatextual’.⁴⁹ It has only existed, he continues, as a ‘somewhat definable movement’ for ‘less than two decades’⁵⁰ and has thus sat ‘distinctly on the academic margins’⁵¹ until comparatively recently. It is now, however, a thriving area of criticism and has become a well-known term. Critics such as Laurence Buell have divided the movement into two ‘waves’. The ‘first wave’, he argues, is a ‘celebration’ rather than a ‘querying’ of ‘Nature’.⁵² The ‘second wave’ – in which we currently exist – ‘is too diverse and diffuse to summarise’, but is widely agreed to be ‘more complex and ambivalent’.⁵³ Kate Soper, writing on the subject of this transition, says there has been a marked evolution between these approaches, from what she calls ‘nature-endorsing’ to ‘nature-sceptical’.⁵⁴ With the ecoGothic, we might call this new approach, instead, ‘nature-fearful’.

Ecocriticism has already come under considerable criticism. In part, this is due to the extreme breadth of its subject: ‘concern with the environment’, writes Clark, ‘is necessarily as

⁴⁶ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 248.

⁵² Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 1.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Kate Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Nonhuman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 33-34.

old as human culture'⁵⁵ and 'the environment is, in a sense, everything'.⁵⁶ Thus, as Dana Phillips contends, the movement 'faces unusually intense difficulties of self-definition'.⁵⁷ 'The term "ecocriticism"', he continues, 'is just as troublesome as it is helpful'.⁵⁸ He goes so far as to argue, too, that it is a movement devoid of theory, thus rendering the term 'ecocritical theory' something of an oxymoron. This has been widely defended, however, by those such as Cheryl Glotfelty, who asks 'after all, what is ecocriticism if not an effort to bring environmental considerations into the discourse of literary discourse and theory?'.⁵⁹ Ecocriticism has been accused, too, of being too enmeshed in our ideologies of Nature to view it objectively.⁶⁰ This returns us to the idea that we are essentially in a paradoxical situation when we discuss 'Nature' as though it is distinct from humankind. Interestingly, Lawrence Buell has said that this tendency creates a dichotomy that he describes as 'a myth of mutual constructionism'.⁶¹ What he means by this is that physical, geographical environments inevitably shape the cultures within them, but simultaneously these cultures will constantly change and re-imagine their environmental surroundings. This plays into the idea, as discussed above, that our fictional depictions of the ominous wood not only reflect our fears, but actively teach them. Finally, the most relevant criticism, as I have already outlined, is the idea that ecocriticism has widely 'ignored'⁶² our presentations of fearsome Nature. Nonetheless, I argue, it contains useful elements to be applied within the ecoGothic.

Ecocriticism, in one light, might be viewed in itself as a Gothic subject. We live in an age of environmental crisis and this has led critics such as Sara L. Crosby to assert that 'horror

⁵⁵ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 15.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵⁷ Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 70.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁵⁹ Glotfelty, 'Preface', p. x.

⁶⁰ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 13.

⁶¹ Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U. S. and Beyond* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 6.

⁶² Hillard, 'Deep Into That Darkness Peering', p. 688.

is becoming the environmental norm'.⁶³ Indeed, the very language used in ecocriticism has a tendency, at times, to stray towards the thoroughly portentous. Clark, for example, describes Nature as 'capricious, awesome and easily capable of wiping humanity off the face of the earth',⁶⁴ whilst Morton likens Nature to the figure of the spectre.⁶⁵ Moreover, ecocriticism can often centre on the unnerving themes of entropy⁶⁶ and what Phillips has called 'nature's tendency to chaos'.⁶⁷ We see examples of this in many of the texts, such as *Little Otik* and *Jug Face*, in which the woods are cast as a *consuming* threat to all of humanity – a theme I discuss below, under 'Mythologies'. Such ideas play into another recurrent theme discussed in the following section, which is that of civilisation as 'order', and Nature – and the forest – as contrastive chaos.

Within ecocriticism, there are multiple facets of contradictory thought, several of which bear relevance to this research. 'Reform environmentalism' is the mainstream view that the natural world should be seen 'primarily as a resource', but protected against 'overexploitation'.⁶⁸ This is an idea we see frequently throughout this thesis, as for example in some of Algernon Blackwood's tales in Chapter Two. In 'The Temptation of the Clay' (1912), for instance, we have a man who harmoniously 'lives off the land', until he realises that the clay in the forest is commercially valuable. He 'overexploits' the natural world and is consequently punished. Another element/strand of ecocriticism, 'Deep Ecology', calls for extreme 'ecocentrism'⁶⁹ in place of anthropocentrism, and highlights, at times controversially, the need for a severely smaller human population.⁷⁰ The theme of ecocentrism in general runs

⁶³ Crosby, 'Beyond Ecophilia', p. 514.

⁶⁴ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 202.

⁶⁵ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 13.

⁶⁶ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 260.

⁶⁷ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. viii.

⁶⁸ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Deep ecologist Chris Manes from the American organisation Earth First! made the highly contentious statement that diseases such as AIDS should be welcomed, as they address overpopulation.

throughout this thesis, but in *The Happening* we find a clear illustration specifically of the more extreme ideas in Deep Ecology. In this film, the trees emit a chemical which causes thousands of humans to take their own lives; the human populace is not only decimated but the theme of suicide presents us with a gross literalisation of the idea that by harming Nature, we are only harming ourselves. ‘Social Ecology’ is a movement related to Marxism, which suggests that our destructive anthropocentrism is in fact due to our systems of domination or exploitation of humans by other humans – in other words, it views our class divisions as responsible for a blind sense of hierarchy that extends to an unquestioned superiority of humanity over Nature. Such ideas are demonstrated in texts wherein we find that fears and prejudices about ‘the lower class’, and about the wilderness, are firmly merged: the contention between ‘city’ and ‘wilderness’, for example, is one that is essentially defined by social class. Examples of this can be seen in some of the texts in Chapter Four, which centre on humans living in or beside the woods, and the idea that there is always ‘something wrong’ with the humans who settle in the wilderness. Certainly in films like *Jug Face*, or classic examples such as *Deliverance* (1972), there is a firm connection between fears of the ‘lower classes’ – of ‘hillbillies’, or ‘rednecks’ – and fears of the woods. Yet another manifestation of ecocriticism, ‘Ecofeminism’ is a movement of relevance in several texts throughout this thesis. Its defining claim is that ‘the destruction of nature and the historical oppression of women are deeply linked’.⁷¹ Chapter Two includes a section entitled ‘The She-Devil in the Wilderness: Women in the Wood’, which is devoted entirely to texts in which the forest is made animate *through* its intimacy with women. Here, I discuss texts like *Antichrist* and *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), in which we have women who are firmly bound to ‘monstrous Nature’. Such ideas are relevant again in Chapter Three, via numerous witch texts and examples of female wolves, where any notion of monstrosity is strongly tied to an explicitly female sexuality, including such examples as

⁷¹ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 111.

Michael Dougherty's *Trick 'r Treat* (2011). In Chapter Four, I discuss Lucky McKee's *The Woman* (2011), the plot of which is largely based on this idea of the shared oppression of women and Nature. Finally, there is further theory within ecocriticism that I see as very much related to the ecoGothic. This is something known as 'The Disenchantment Thesis', which is discussed in detail in the following section. In short, however, the main assertion is that 'the natural world has lost its magic'.⁷² This is bound, I argue, to this idea that we are now 'post-enlightenment' and 'would-be rational'⁷³ – and to Harrison's assertion that in the modern world, we have lost the ability to see the forest as 'strange, monstrous, and enchanting'⁷⁴ (my emphasis). I argue, however, that in the examination of our 'Gothic forests', we go some way towards undermining this.

In the realm of literary theory, what we might call 'ecocritical readings' of texts are quite simply analyses in which some of the ideas of ecocriticism are considered with our fictions. Scott Slovic argues that 'there is no single, dominant [...] strategy at work from example to example'⁷⁵, so such readings can be significantly varied. What is established, however, is that these texts are read from an *eco-centred* stance. The environment is brought to the foreground, whilst emphasis is laid on humanity's responsibility towards the natural world. The fictions addressed are ordinarily those in which Nature is prominent, but are not, as Barry contends, 'limited to works self-evidently about nature'.⁷⁶ Nor are they limited to works created with an awareness of environmental crisis: we may now, he argues, read *into* older texts 'a hard-edged, retrospective irony', which arises from 'our own acute sense of environmental crisis and danger'.⁷⁷ Whilst the majority of texts discussed in this thesis are more contemporary,

⁷² Ibid., p. 143.

⁷³ Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, p. 200.

⁷⁴ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 121.

⁷⁵ Scott Slovic, 'Ecocriticism: Containing Multitudes, Practising Doctrine', in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 160.

⁷⁶ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 259.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 268.

this method is employed in relation to the stories of Algernon Blackwood, which seem almost to portend environmental disaster. Ecocritical readings, in essence, are about bringing to the foreground environmental elements of a text that may well have previously been overlooked – the aim is to provide a ‘different perspective’.⁷⁸ EcoGothic readings may essentially be viewed as identical, though the readings here are strictly focused on bringing to the foreground – and bringing into question – our depictions of *Gothic Nature*. These texts focus, explicitly, on our ideas of ‘monstrous nature’,⁷⁹ which, as we have seen, have hitherto been ‘largely ignored’.⁸⁰ In our examination of the Gothic forest in the context of the ecoGothic, then, we may move slowly towards a Dark Ecology.⁸¹ With an understanding, now, of the ecoGothic, we must begin to question why it is that the forest fits so readily within this context. Why, in short, do we view it as an ‘obvious’ example of Gothic Nature? There are, I argue, several predominant reasons for this, each of which have assumed a ‘mythic’ significance – which we now come to examine.

1.3 ‘That Theatre of Superstition’⁸²: Mythologies and the Forest

‘A myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world’.

— Rollo May.⁸³

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 259.

⁷⁹ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures’.

⁸⁰ Hillard, ‘Deep Into That Darkness Peering’, p. 688.

⁸¹ Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 16.

⁸² Porteous, *The Forest in Folklore and Mythology*, p. 170.

⁸³ Rollo May, *The Cry for Myth* (London: Souvenir Press, 1993), p. 15.

‘Our myths wake a little and stir as we venture into the wilderness’.

— Joseph Campbell.⁸⁴

In his book *The Forest in Folklore and Mythology* (2002), Alexander Porteous describes the forest as ‘a theatre of superstition’. His wording, here, is interesting, as it implies that the forest, as a ‘theatre’, is a setting in which our various stories ‘play out’. Indeed, as I have mentioned, we have an infinite number of stories and mythologies that relate to and are set within the forest – and which have endowed it with a weight of symbolic meaning. We return to this idea of a symbiosis between our fears of the woods, and our stories *about* these fears of the woods. The forest, therefore, may be seen in this context as a mythic environment. This section is concerned with examining how our fears of the forest are tied in some ways to our understandings of mythology, and the role of the ecoGothic within these connections. I first address the fact that there has been much discussion on the so-called ‘deaths’ of both mythology and Nature in the modern world, and argue that this coincidence is not casual. Within this, I discuss the connections between myth and horror, and myth and the environment. I contend that texts in which we encounter ‘monstrous natures’ somewhat undermine the alleged ‘deaths’ of such extensive ideas. I then introduce some of the most recurrent explanations for why the forest is frightening – which I term the ‘Seven Theses’ – each of which have assumed something of a mythic status and may be seen, in a sense, to ‘remythologise’ the forest. In short, these highlight the fearsome forest as *against* civilisation, as linked to ideas of the *past*, *trial*, fears of being *lost* or *eaten*, and as a site of the *human unconscious* and as an *antichristian* environment. The

⁸⁴ Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (London: Transworld Publishers, 1989), p. 68.

last two, which have been termed by Noël Carroll as ‘cultural mythologies’, are discussed in more detail and so are given their own subsections.⁸⁵

In the contemporary Western world, many have described both myth and Nature as extinct. Rollo May has coined the term ‘mythoclasm’,⁸⁶ which means ‘the death of myth’, whilst we have a ubiquity of texts concerning the subject of the ‘death’ of Nature.⁸⁷ There are, I argue, significant connections between these two ideas. If we return to Sara Maitland’s assertion that we are now ‘post-enlightenment’ and ‘would-be rational’,⁸⁸ then we can understand, in theory, why many of us may view ourselves as ‘above’ both myth and Nature. Today, the word ‘myth’ is synonymous with ‘lie’, and we talk casually of ‘getting *back* to Nature’, as though it is something behind us. Carl Jung has explicitly equated our distance from (or what we might now call our ‘dualism’ with) Nature with our increasing abandonment of mythology: ‘when man was still linked by myth to the world’, he writes, ‘nature was [...] truly experienced and not merely seen from the outside’.⁸⁹ In line with this, Lawrence Buell has suggested that if we focus on more ecocentric readings of texts, we may come to ‘think ecologically’; we may recover, to an extent, ‘the habits of thought of some era in the past, which predate the “loss of faith”’⁹⁰ that pervades modernity.

When we talk about ‘the death of myth’, it is important to understand what exactly we mean by the word ‘myth’. Karen Armstrong has defined the myth as ‘an event which, in some sense, has happened once’, but in another, ‘happens all the time’.⁹¹ It carries a sense of both antiquity and yet fluid contemporaneity. This delineation makes sense when we think of the

⁸⁵ Carroll, ‘Afterword’, p. 258.

⁸⁶ May, *The Cry for Myth*, p. 25.

⁸⁷ Examples include: Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature* (1980), Bill McKibben’s *The End of Nature* (1989), Matt Butts’ *The Death of Nature* (2011), and Morton’s *Ecology Without Nature* (2007).

⁸⁸ Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, p. 200

⁸⁹ Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (USA: Fontana Press, 1995), pp. 116-17.

⁹⁰ Lawrence Buell discussed in Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. 183.

⁹¹ Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005), p. 7.

forest environment: it is a setting in which we imagine a multitude of myths to have occurred in the past, and yet imagine, now, that we may encounter them still. Such ideas are literalised in Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* (1984), in which infinite versions of our various forest mythologies, throughout the ages, play out simultaneously. In the novel, these myths are actively embodied as living creatures, known as 'mythagos'. They are born of our individual and collective imaginations – and are always met within the forest. The idea of myth is something very relevant to the ecoGothic because it is firmly linked both to Nature and to human anxieties. Campbell contends that 'our myths wake a little and stir'⁹² when we are in the wilderness. Moreover, as our 'earliest forms of science',⁹³ many exist to explain the natural world – and moreover to explain what we fear within it. Indeed, broadly speaking, many are born of our anxieties. 'Myths', as Armstrong writes, 'are the discourse we need in extremity'.⁹⁴ This, I argue, continues to be true. Our modern depictions of 'monstrous natures' may be viewed in this light, when we consider that they are born in an age of environmental anxiety.

Whilst myths may be our 'earliest forms'⁹⁵ of the discipline, they now exist in extreme contrast to what we would today call 'science'. As we are now 'post-enlightenment' and 'would-be rational',⁹⁶ there is a widespread prioritisation of 'logos' (rational and scientific thought) over 'mythos' (superstitious and intuitive thought). 'Modern man', writes Mircea Eliade, 'has desacralised his world'.⁹⁷ Whilst of course there are exceptions, as superstitions and religions for many continue to thrive, there has been an undeniable move towards a more secular and less mythical worldview. In modern times, writes Armstrong, 'the old mythical

⁹² Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, p. 68.

⁹³ Carl Jung, *Analytical Psychology: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1925* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 335.

⁹⁴ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 36.

⁹⁵ Jung, *Analytical Psychology*, p. 335.

⁹⁶ Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, p. 200.

⁹⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion: The Significance of Myth, Symbolism and Ritual within Life and Culture* (USA: Harcourt, 1959), p. 12.

way of thought has crumbled'.⁹⁸ It is thus that May can claim we live in an age of 'mythoclasm',⁹⁹ and that we can see the word 'myth', very tellingly, as equated with falsehood. There has been a simultaneous – and Jung would argue corresponding – 'death' of the natural world. This is understood by the fact that now 'no true wilderness any longer exists'.¹⁰⁰ Now, *everything* on this Earth is affected, in one way or another, by anthropocentric activity, be it directly, or through more widespread phenomena such as global warming. Ideas of humanity's interference with the natural world are themes we encounter in Chapter Four, with texts such as *The Hunger Games* and *The Cabin in the Woods*. As mentioned above, there is a theory in ecocriticism known as 'The Disenchantment Thesis', in which it is claimed that for those of us in the modern world, Nature 'has lost its magic'.¹⁰¹ Its loss of magic may be equated, certainly, with its loss of myth. Without such associations of 'magic' or 'mythos', the natural world becomes, in the words of Matthew Hall, a 'passive resource'.¹⁰² It is, as such, 'disenchanted', making it all the more vulnerable to ecological crisis: if Nature is 'dead' and a mere 'passive resource', then it does not warrant our reverence, let alone our protection. This is a prominent theme in Chapter Two, in which I argue that for many of us, it is in our interest to view Nature in these terms. Texts, therefore, where we encounter the *animate* forest are so frightening precisely because Nature is construed as decidedly *non-passive*. In alignment with these ideas of Nature as a 'passive' and 'disenchanted' object, Harrison discusses the forest environment, proclaiming that we have lost the ability to see it as 'strange, monstrous, and enchanting',¹⁰³ (my emphasis). This wording is significant in the context of the ecoGothic, because he seems

⁹⁸ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 128.

⁹⁹ May, *The Cry for Myth*, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

¹⁰¹ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 143.

¹⁰² Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

¹⁰³ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 121.

to imply that in order for the forest, or Nature, to be seen again as enchanting (to ‘reverse’ this Disenchantment Thesis, if you will), it must also be seen as *monstrous*.

This brings us to one of my central ideas, which is that *through* our depictions of ‘monstrous natures’ in the Gothic, myth and Nature are automatically viewed as very much *alive*. This is based, in large part, on the idea that our horror fictions, in a sense, function as modern-day myths. Indeed, whilst Armstrong claims that since ‘the old mythical way of thought has crumbled [...] nothing new has taken its place’,¹⁰⁴ many have suggested that it is our fictions that have assumed this position. Here, our myths remain very much alive. Rosemary Jackson contends that fantasy has replaced ‘what man has lost on the level of faith’;¹⁰⁵ Julia Kristeva argues that literature now stands as a substitute for ‘the role formerly played by the sacred’;¹⁰⁶ and Campbell suggests that film ‘may be our counterpart to mythological re-enactments’.¹⁰⁷ We are, by our natures, myth-makers. Thus, as Eliade contends, whilst we may have widely ‘desacralised’¹⁰⁸ the world, we may yet ‘never succeed completely in doing away with religious behaviour’.¹⁰⁹ Of all our fictions, I argue that it is horror especially that functions as mythology. This is due, firstly, to the fact that myth, as James Frazer contends, must be ‘dramatised in ritual’¹¹⁰ so as to remain alive – and horror, in a sense, is one of our most ritualistic and participatory of genres. One’s introduction to the genre is often relayed in terms of an initiation, and for those who enjoy the experience, it is a compulsion sought again and again. Indeed, the genre in itself is essentially repetitive: as Carol Clover asserts, we encounter within it ‘a set of fixed tale types that generate an endless stream of what

¹⁰⁴ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁵ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981), p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁸ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹¹⁰ James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Reference, 1993), p. 608.

are in effect variants, sequels, remakes and rip-offs'.¹¹¹ We encounter even further examples of repetition if we return to such ideas as the story of 'horror in the woods' as a 'cliché',¹¹² within it. This means, to an extent, that when we engage with horror fictions with an anticipatory dread, we know roughly what to expect. We are engaging, in a sense, with a form of ritual. This is underlined by the fact that the genre characteristically carries a sense of catharsis, which is inherent, too, in myth. René Girard, who I will discuss in Chapter Four, has written much on the idea of ritual as a central element of our myths. He focuses on the importance of ritualistic sacrifice, as a means of exorcising the human desire for violence, whilst all the while denying it, and therein avoiding its potentially endless cycle.¹¹³ In Chapter Four, I therefore discuss the idea that the horror genre serves as a substitute for human sacrifice. This is especially relevant in texts such as *The Cabin in the Woods*, wherein this idea is consciously examined, as it addresses our desires to witness this violence. The main reason, however, why our Gothic fictions serve in the same way as our myths is because they are grounded in anxiety. Fear, significantly, supplants 'logos' with 'mythos'. This is why 'most of us post-enlightenment and would-be rational adults' continue to be 'terrified by the wild wood'.¹¹⁴ When we are afraid, we imbue our make-believe ideas that are intentionally terrifying with some level of credence. We experience a dark transition between the fantastical 'make-believe' and the nightmarish elements of what will *make* you believe. In these texts wherein the forest is presented as frightening, it is shown indeed as 'strange and monstrous'.¹¹⁵ It becomes a mythic environment that is very much alive (sometimes literally). Such texts, collectively, can change how we view our environments, if we return to this idea of symbiosis between our fears and their fictional expressions. For example, it is likely that one will have a

¹¹¹ C. Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, p. 10.

¹¹² McDonald, 'Sacred Violence', p. 4.

¹¹³ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1977).

¹¹⁴ Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, p. 200.

¹¹⁵ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 121.

very different experience wandering through the woods after having read, say, an enchanting text such as Edith Blyton's *The Magic Faraway Tree* (1943), or, by contrast, having recently seen something so intentionally horrifying as *The Blair Witch Project*. Our myths wake a little, indeed, within the wilderness.¹¹⁶

If we view our horror texts as modern myths, this can be quite illuminating. If we return to May's assertion that 'a myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world',¹¹⁷ this is intriguing in the context of our endless tales of 'monstrous natures'. There is an argument to be made that by construing Nature in our fictions, again and again, as terrifying – and even as evil – we may subconsciously be justifying its 'senseless' mistreatment.¹¹⁸ We are creating myths, therefore, to explain and legitimate environmental crisis. However, just as the forest is simultaneously a site of enchantment and horror, we also may read two very different messages in its constructions as monstrous. If viewed in these terms, then on the one hand we have a reason for its continued subjugation, but on the other we have a consequence of such exploitation. We have been thoroughly schooled in our mythologies – which, as we have now seen, include our horror fictions – to recognise what Lisa Kröger terms 'the Gothic forest'.¹¹⁹ It is in examining these mythologies and discerning the most recurrent of ideas that we are able to begin to ascertain some reasons why the forest continues to be construed as frightening. Below, I introduce such ideas that will run throughout the thesis, and highlight some of the ways in which they will be of key relevance.

¹¹⁶ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, p. 68.

¹¹⁷ May, *The Cry for Myth*, p. 15.

¹¹⁸ We may see this, for example, in *Uprooted*, wherein the 'happy ending' comes with the utter destruction of the monstrous Wood.

¹¹⁹ Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, p. 1.

i. Why We Fear the Forest (Seven Theses)¹²⁰

The first reason we may fear the forest as frightening is because it is traditionally construed as the antithesis to civilisation. We might think, momentarily, of Jacques Derrida's theory of 'différance', and his idea within this that our constructs only have meaning when juxtaposed with their opposites. He cites the examples of 'nature' and 'culture', which 'could not exist as identities apart from their difference from one another'.¹²¹ This plays into the 'human-nature dualism',¹²² as discussed above. Harrison argues that 'civilisation', from the outset, has defined itself not only in contrast to the natural world, but specifically 'as *against* the forests'.¹²³ Civilisation, thus, is construed in terms of *order* and the forests, consequently, in terms of *chaos*. Indeed, the etymology of the word 'wild', from which we get 'wilderness', means something that is '*not under the control of man*'¹²⁴ (my emphasis). These are themes we find throughout this thesis, and which are explicitly acknowledged in *Antichrist* with its infamous tagline: 'chaos reigns'. If the forests are indeed 'against' civilisation, then they are wholly uncivilised: we return to Carol Clover's assertion that here 'the rules of civilisation do not obtain'.¹²⁵ We fear, then, who *we* become within the woods: we fear that the primitive setting creates the primitive human. This is underlined by the fact that in the woods we are severed from wider civilisation. 'We rely on other human beings for a concept of humanity', writes Yi-fu Tuan, and 'people know better who they are and how they ought to behave when the arena is humanly designed, and not at Nature's raw stage'.¹²⁶ This contention, or dualism, between

¹²⁰ The subtitle here is inspired by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's 'Seven Theses' on Monster Theory. Sourced: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹²¹ Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 'Post-structuralism, Deconstruction, Post-modernism', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds Rivkin and Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), p. 258.

¹²² Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 81.

¹²³ Harrison, *Forests*, p.2.

¹²⁴ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, p. 124.

¹²⁶ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 102.

civilisation and the forest brings us to the central question of boundaries. If we are to convince ourselves that humanity and Nature are distinct, then we must necessarily fixate on the creation and maintenance of boundaries. Nature becomes a force that must constantly be fought back, and ‘the forest’, in the words of Francis Spufford, is something that ‘encroaches from without’.¹²⁷ We see such ideas made manifest in texts such as *The Willows* and *Uprooted*, in which the trees literally close in on human settlements. The first thing that settlers do is to construct boundaries: to demarcate territory, to name and map the land, and so to seemingly bring it under control. Much of this sense of order is bound to the division between *inside* and *outside* – which in fact relates to the ideas in Human Geography of ‘Place’ and ‘Space’. Gaston Bachelard has written on our associations with being inside, arguing that we build our houses with the intention of feeling within them ‘enclosed and protected’.¹²⁸ The forest provides a stark contrast to these ideas. Indeed, the Latin word ‘*foris*’ (from which our word ‘forest’ derives) translates literally to mean ‘out-of-doors’,¹²⁹ whilst the verb ‘*foresta*’ means ‘to keep out, to place off-limit, to exclude’.¹³⁰ The forest, then, is something against which we need to divide and protect ourselves.¹³¹ Such themes are certainly extremely relevant in the context of the Gothic, which has been described by Fred Botting as a genre ‘obsessed with boundaries’.¹³²

The second reason that the forest is frightening is because it is bound to primeval antiquity. When within its midst, we have no sense of time: we have no evidence of human evolution, or indication, indeed, that we are ‘post-enlightenment’.¹³³ We return again to this idea of ‘getting *back* to Nature’ and this subtle implication that it is something we view as now

¹²⁷ Spufford, *The Child that Books Built*, p. 13.

¹²⁸ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1958) p. 7.

¹²⁹ Hayman, *Trees, Woodland and Civilisation*, p. 22.

¹³⁰ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 69.

¹³¹ Interestingly, forests in themselves sometimes serve as geographical boundaries. It is fitting, then, that the forest is often viewed as a liminal setting, in line with the inherent liminality of boundaries.

¹³² Fred Botting, *Gothic: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 12.

¹³³ Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, p. 200.

behind us. There are fears, then, in this setting of regression: if the environment is primitive, is this true, too, of those within it? ‘The forests’, writes Harrison, ‘since the beginning [...] have appeared as antecedent to the human world’.¹³⁴ As mentioned above, it is known that ‘most of the places of human habitation in the West were at some time in the past more or less densely forested’.¹³⁵ This becomes significant when we consider the argument made by Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd-Smith that the Gothic is primarily concerned with our fears of ‘the return of the past’.¹³⁶ In this light, the forest symbolises a time without humankind. Consequently, this threat of a ‘return of the past’ is embodied in the forest’s encroachment and the implicit threat of our own extinction. In addition to this, this idea of ‘the return of the past’ may be linked to what Sally J. Morgan has termed ‘heritage noir’.¹³⁷ In short, this is the idea that a common device in our horror fictions is to thematically evoke our more bloody histories, which themselves come to haunt us. (An obvious example of this would be something like the trope of the Indian burial ground, which is revealed as the source of all horror, in texts like *The Shining* (1980)). The most prominent example in Western history of humanity’s violent destruction of the forest is the colonisation of the New World. It is significant that Native Americans continue, to this day, to be symbolically associated with Nature: the crimes of this period against the ‘Indians’ and against the wilderness have to an extent been merged in the cultural memory. We will see evocations of the early eras of settlement in the New World in many of the texts throughout this thesis. This is especially true of the texts discussed in Chapter Four, which centre on the subject of humans in the wilderness, as for example in *We Are What We Are*, *Jug Face*, and *The Village*, which explicitly evoke the colonial era in American history.

¹³⁴ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 1.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

¹³⁶ Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd-Smith eds, *Modern Gothic: A Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 94.

¹³⁷ Sally J. Morgan, ‘Heritage Noire: Truth, History and Colonial Anxiety in *The Blair Witch Project*’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 7 no. 2 (2001), p. 137.

The third reason we fear the forest is because it is a setting of trial. It is an environment in which we expect to be sorely tested. This is fitting in the context of the horror genre, which Clover has described as ‘obsessed with the trials of the everyperson’¹³⁸. The forest is a setting that challenges one’s skills in both internal and external survival: in isolation, one must strive to maintain sanity, whilst simultaneously staying alive in the wild. Francis Spufford summarises the inherent challenge of the woods: ‘You are alone, in a dark wood. Now cope’.¹³⁹ There is the sense that the forest *itself* is somehow the task at hand. Richard Hayman supports such an idea by asserting that ‘the role of the forest is to act as the ultimate moral arbiter’.¹⁴⁰ There is a German aphorism, ‘der wald hat augen’,¹⁴¹ which means ‘the forest has eyes’, and in this context there is the sense indeed that we are being judged. The forest is an environment in which – if we survive it – we learn valuable lessons of strength and resilience.¹⁴² We might think, for example, of the Grimm fairy tale of ‘Hansel and Gretel’. Here, the eponymous siblings are abandoned in the wilderness and imprisoned by its witch, but ultimately outwit this monster and so return to the security of the family home. Indeed, many of our ideas in the West of the forest as a setting of trial can be seen as stemming from our cultural familiarity with woodland fairy tales. ‘The forest in these stories’, writes David Blamires, ‘represents a multiplicity of aspects’¹⁴³ – and he goes on to highlight that in many of these tales the forest is foreboding. Very frequently, the task at hand for those amidst fairy-tale woods is essentially to stay alive just long enough so as to be able to escape this environment (‘Hansel and Gretel’, ‘Brother and Sister’, ‘The Robber Bridegroom’, and so on). In ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, we are presented with the infamous task in the woods of not straying from the path – a task which

¹³⁸ Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, p. 17.

¹³⁹ Spufford, *The Child that Books Built*, p. 63.

¹⁴⁰ Hayman, *Trees, Woodland and Civilisation*, p. 106.

¹⁴¹ Porteous, *The Forest in Folklore and Mythology*, p. 12.

¹⁴² This idea of the woods as instilling education is literalised in such texts as *The Woods* and *Innocence*, in which we encounter schools in the forest.

¹⁴³ David Blamires, ‘The Forest in the Grimms’ Fairy Tales’, in ‘The Children’s Books History Society’, Issue 109, July 2014.

the heroine, of course, just as infamously fails, resulting in a direct confrontation with a monster. With such themes, it is little wonder that many have written on the imbrications between fairy tales and the horror genre. ‘Horror fictions’, writes Clover, highlighting the repetitive nature of each genre, ‘look like nothing so much as fairy tales’.¹⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Sue Short argues that ‘contemporary horror can best be understood as a means of revisiting, and at times refuting, many of the assumptions contained in fairy tales’.¹⁴⁵ In several of the forests encountered in the texts throughout this thesis, we encounter remnants or allusions to fairy tale forests, which frequently haunt the forests of our horror fictions. We will see, for example, in *The Guardian* and *The Blair Witch Project*, strong echoes of ‘Hansel and Gretel’, and recurrent elements of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ in the wolf-related texts discussed here. These elements of the fairy tale serve in each case to underline the themes of trial.

The fourth reason the forest is frightening is because it embodies our fears of being *lost*. Indeed, when considered as a setting of trial, one of the biggest tasks at hand is finding one’s way out of this environment. In keeping with this idea that the forest is essentially a binary, or dualistic symbol, it is a setting associated simultaneously with both finding and losing our selves.¹⁴⁶ In the former category, we have such classic texts as Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854) and such recent examples as Jean-Marc Vallée’s *Wild* (2015) – each of which centre on humanity’s redemption through wilderness. On the other hand, however, we have a multitude of texts that centre on what we might think of as the traditional fear of being lost in the woods, and the vulnerability inherent in such a situation. René Descartes once said that in order to escape the forest, one need only to continue to walk in a straight line.¹⁴⁷ And yet, the very

¹⁴⁴ Clover quoted in Sue Short, *Misfit Sisters: Screen Horror and Female Rites of Passage* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2006) p. 8.

¹⁴⁵ Sue Short, *Misfit Sisters: Screen Horror and Female Rites of Passage* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2006), p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, in German there is the word ‘*waldeinsamkeit*’, which describes the sensation of being alone in the woods, and carries connotations of both blissful solitude and fearful disorientation.

¹⁴⁷ René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, trans. John Veitch (New York: Cosimo Inc., 2008), p. 25.

nature of the forest is to disorient; the multitude of trees makes it near impossible to follow a straight path, whilst studies have shown that we are inclined, against our will, to quite literally walk in circles when in the woods.¹⁴⁸ There are few visual markers to find one's way and in the densest forests, the light is occluded. Moreover, no matter how physically small a forest may be, it is ostensibly infinite to one in its midst. I have mentioned already that the source for our emotive word 'bewildered', stems etymologically from 'wild-dē-or-ness',¹⁴⁹ meaning wilderness. Thus, one of our very words that describes the sensation of being lost is bound to and defined by our reactions to the wilderness. In reality, people continue to get lost in the woods, despite the claim made by one of the protagonists in *The Blair Witch Project* that 'it's very hard to get lost [...] these days – and it's even harder to stay lost'. In the news, we still hear at times of people going missing in the woods¹⁵⁰ – and this is the central subject of Stephen King's *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* (1999), which is discussed in Chapter Three. We hear in the news, too, of the forest used as a common site for dumping bodies, which creates its own mythologies.¹⁵¹ In addition to being physically lost, we fear in the woods that we will lose our selves – that we ourselves will become primitive in this primitive setting. This is a central theme

¹⁴⁸ Reginald G. Golledge, 'Human Wayfinding and Cognitive Maps', in *Colonisation of Unfamiliar Landscapes: Archaeology of Adaptation*, eds Marcy Rockman and James Steele (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 48.

¹⁴⁹ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Lyle and Marie McCann, for example, went missing in the Canadian woods in the 2010, and were never found. Much more recently, in August of this year, a British man named Geoff Keys took a wrong turn in the Australian wilderness, and was only found after he left a message in the sand, which led rescuers to him, but two days after his disappearance. Sourced: Raziye Akkok, 'British Adventurer Lost for Two Days in the Australian Outback after Taking a Wrong Turn', 23.08.2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/11819133/British-adventurer-lost-for-two-days-in-the-Australian-outback-after-taking-wrong-turn.html> (Accessed: 12.09.2015).

¹⁵¹ For example, in the recent podcast *Serial* (2014), which follows the true story of the unsolved murder of a teenage girl, we are told that her body was found in some woods named Leakin Park. These woods are infamous as a site for concealing cadavers, to such an extent that one local, who is interviewed about them, remarks 'if you're digging in Leakin Park to bury your body, you're gonna find someone else's – that's Leakin Park'. Sourced: *Serial*, Episode 3, 'Leakin Park', 2014 (www.serialpodcast.com). Another example of this can be found in the 2009 film *Cropsey*, which is a documentary that examines the mystery 'bogeyman' figure 'Cropsey', who allegedly lives in the woods of Staten Island and murders local children.

in texts like Jack Ketchum's *Off Season* (1980) and Richard Laymon's *The Woods Are Dark* (1981), each of which are discussed in the final chapter.

The fifth reason the forest is a fearsome locale is because it is a voracious and consuming threat. Ideas already discussed, such as the forest as a threat that 'encroaches from without'¹⁵² and Nature as a force that must be constantly fought back, are suggestive already of its consuming nature. Significantly, when we discuss the contention between humans and Nature, it is often discussed in both our factual and fictional writings in terms of *appetite*. We tend to imply that both civilisation *and* Nature are each in danger of consuming – and being consumed – by the other. Peter Barry, writing on the subject of ecocriticism, argues that there is a common 'gut feeling that nature is being *gobbled* by culture'¹⁵³ (my emphasis). It is then a fitting pun that the modern human is often described in terms of the *consumer*, as we have what Ganz has called a 'monstrous greed'¹⁵⁴ and what Jonathan Bate has described as an 'insatiable desire to consume the products of the earth'.¹⁵⁵ We are, according to Peter Benchley (who tellingly enough is the author of *Jaws* (1974)¹⁵⁶), as a species 'the single most careless, voracious, and omnivorous destroyer of life on earth'.¹⁵⁷ And yet, as Stacy Alaimo has argued, 'despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary', we continue to find in our horror fictions that it is *humans* that are cast as the 'endangered species',¹⁵⁸ and *Nature* that is cast as the edacious monster. This is something we find literalised in *Little Otik*, in which the eponymous creature is an insatiably carnivorous tree, and in 'The Transfer', wherein the very ground of the forest

¹⁵² Spufford, *The Child that Books Built*, p. 13.

¹⁵³ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 263.

¹⁵⁴ Shoshanna Ganz, 'Margaret Atwood's Monsters in the Canadian EcoGothic', in Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁵ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 56.

¹⁵⁶ Benchley has since denounced his vilification of Nature, saying that in light of the monstrosity of humankind, 'demonising a fish suddenly seems insane'. Sourced: 'Swimming with Sharks', *Audubon*, 100.3 (1998), p. 56.

¹⁵⁷ Peter Benchley, 'Swimming with Sharks', *Audubon*, 100.3 (1998), p. 56.

¹⁵⁸ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p. 279.

is said to ‘gulp’¹⁵⁹ as it ingests its victims. The forest, traditionally, is a setting in which we fear being eaten: be it by literal predators such as wolves and bears, or by the many monsters that we imagine within it, from the Big Bad Wolf to the modern-day Slender Man. In Chapter Three, where we examine various forest monsters, we see recurrent threats of being eaten in the woods by these creatures which I argue serve in themselves as extensions of the surrounding environment. Such fears undermine the anthropocentric assumption that Nature exists to feed and nourish humankind. This idea is violently contradicted in many of our Gothic fictions that are set in the woods. Here, in J.W. Williamson’s words, we are presented with ‘the subverting thought that nature could easily have *us* for supper’¹⁶⁰ (my emphasis). Our fears of being lost to the woods are confused with fears of being consumed *by* the woods. The idea of disappearing into this environment is one evocative of being *swallowed*. It is little wonder, then, that there is the sense in several of these texts of the forest as a *hungry* and voracious ‘mouth’, which threatens to consume those who wander within it, if not all of humanity.

ii. ‘Landscapes of our Minds’¹⁶¹: Psychoanalysis and the Forest

“‘Landscape’ is a construct of the mind as much as it is a physical and measurable entity.

“‘Landscapes of fear’ refers to both psychological states and to tangible environments’.

— Yi-fu Tuan.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Algernon Blackwood, ‘The Transfer’, in *Pan’s Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), p. 356.

¹⁶⁰ Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, p. 151.

¹⁶¹ David Melbye, *Landscape Allegory in Cinema: From Wilderness to Wasteland* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), p. 2.

¹⁶² Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, p. 5.

‘Nobody likes it when you mention the unconscious, and nowadays, hardly anybody likes it when you mention the environment’.

— Timothy Morton.¹⁶³

The sixth reason the forest is frightening is because it is a setting that we associate with the human unconscious. Time and again, it serves, symbolically, as an extension of the very darkest elements within our psyches. As a ‘landscape of fear’, it is, as Tuan asserts above, as much a ‘construct of the mind’ and ‘psychological state’, as it is a geographical environment. Because the focus throughout this thesis is on *figurative* forests and our relations to this environment in the collective Western imagination, it is essential to address some of the themes within psychoanalysis in the context of the ecoGothic. My intention here is not to interrogate the limits of this field, nor to provide a précis of its foundations, but instead to highlight its relevance in the ecoGothic – and specifically in regard to the Gothic forest.

The word ‘psychoanalysis’ is now something of a household term. It has become, as Noël Carroll argues, ‘a common idiom of thought in Western culture’, as ‘its concepts, scenarios and metaphors have seeped into everyday language’.¹⁶⁴ It is best understood, he continues, as a widely pervasive ‘cultural myth’.¹⁶⁵ Psychoanalytic theory, as Steven Jay Schneider notes, has widely come under considerable criticism, as ‘the cogency of its reasoning as well as the soundness of its premises’¹⁶⁶ have been severely questioned. Consequently, it has been suggested by those such as Hans Eysenck that whilst we should continue to see it as

¹⁶³ Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁴ Carroll, ‘Afterword’, p. 258.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Schneider, *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*, p. iii.

a creation of ‘genius’, we should categorise it alongside such works as the Brothers Grimm.¹⁶⁷ Schneider continues that it may still be used as an ‘interpretive tool’ when it comes to our fictions, as its application within literary theory is frequently ‘fruitful and provocative’.¹⁶⁸ We may treat our texts, writes Joseph Campbell, as ‘public dreams’,¹⁶⁹ and therein determine recurrent elements within the cultural unconscious. This approach, I argue, is of great significance with our textual portrayals of Gothic Nature, most especially in an age of environmental uncertainty.

If we return to this idea that the ‘ecoGothic’ is essentially an amalgamation of ‘eco’ and ‘Gothic’, we can quickly see that psychoanalysis is of considerable relevance to each of these elements. If we begin with the connections between psychoanalysis and the Gothic, we must note, as many have, that psychoanalysis is greatly indebted to the Gothic tradition. Sigmund Freud, who is widely accredited with the origination of psychoanalytic thought, drew on examples within Gothic literature to illustrate his theories,¹⁷⁰ thereby demonstrating from the outset the connections between the two. ‘Psychoanalysis and the Gothic’, writes William Patrick Day, should be considered as ‘cousins’.¹⁷¹ Each is concerned, essentially, with the subjects that frighten, and that many of us might rather deny. Barbara Creed notes, for example, the fact that if we examine the subjects of Freud’s case histories (‘castration, sexual abuse, hysteria, perversity, excrement, bestiality’, and so on), we see that they read ‘like horror movies’¹⁷² in themselves. When it comes to the connections between psychoanalysis and Nature, an obvious place to start is with our extensive history of pathetic fallacy – of endowing

¹⁶⁷ Hans Eysenck, quoted in Stephen Frosh, *A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (New York: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2012), p. 30.

¹⁶⁸ Schneider, *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*, p. iii.

¹⁶⁹ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, p. 48.

¹⁷⁰ For example, in his famous 1919 essay ‘The Uncanny’, Freud provides an extensive psychoanalytic analysis of the short story ‘The Sandman’ by E. T. A. Hoffman (1816).

¹⁷¹ William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 179.

¹⁷² Barbara Creed, ‘Dining With Hannibal Lecter’, in Schneider, *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*, p. 188.

the natural world with human emotion. In accordance with this, David Melbye suggests that when we envisage Nature in our various art forms, we are revealing what he terms ‘landscapes of our *minds*’¹⁷³ (my emphasis). We project onto these imagined topographies our own inner states. It is fitting, then, that it is into the environments we view already as ‘landscapes of fear’¹⁷⁴ that we instil our deepest anxieties. It is these spaces that we fill with our monsters. We may find further connections between Nature and psychoanalysis if we look to compare ecocriticism with psychoanalytic theory. We may do this by highlighting the fact that each of these movements is concerned with the theoretical distinctions between human and nonhuman N/nature. Ecocriticism, if we return to Greg Garrard’s definition, includes a questioning of ‘the term “human” itself’ within its discussion of ‘the relationship between the human and the nonhuman’.¹⁷⁵ It seeks, increasingly, to examine critically this idea of the ‘human-nature dualism’.¹⁷⁶ Psychoanalysis, meanwhile, famously grounds the human psyche in base and *animalistic* desires. This idea of a neat and distinct ‘dualism’ between humanity and Nature may be compared to the idea of the human mind as an entirely unified whole, distinct from the animals, which is so famously challenged by psychoanalysis.¹⁷⁷ We may, then, compare further this idea of civilisation as defined ‘against the forests’¹⁷⁸ with a central idea in psychoanalysis, which is that we tend to define our humanity as against the animal.¹⁷⁹ The idea of the ‘id’, however, undermines such distinctions: it suggests that humans, fundamentally, are ‘chained to blind nature and uncontrollable instincts’¹⁸⁰. This ‘dark, inaccessible part of our

¹⁷³ Melbye, *Landscape Allegory in Cinema*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 5.

¹⁷⁶ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 81.

¹⁷⁷ Freud divided the human mind into the conscious ‘ego’ and ‘super-ego’, and the unconscious ‘id’. The ‘ego’ is the conscious, thinking self, governed in part by the ‘super-ego’, which is the critical and moralising element. However, the ‘ego’ is governed, too, by the unconscious ‘id’, which is bound to our base and amoral instincts and desires.

¹⁷⁸ Harrison, *Forests*, p.2.

¹⁷⁹ Schneider, *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis*, p. 192.

¹⁸⁰ Rivkin and Ryan, *Literary Theory*, p. 389.

personality’,¹⁸¹ which is likened to ‘chaos’¹⁸² can be aligned with the wildness of the natural world. If we return to the etymology of ‘wild’, meaning something that is ‘not under the control of man’,¹⁸³ then we see that both the ‘id’ and the wilderness conform to this definition.

It is maybe unsurprising, then, that the forest has been seen as an icon of the human unconscious. With this in mind, we might reconsider the title of Robert Pogue Harrison’s work – *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* – in light of Carl Jung’s ‘Shadow’,¹⁸⁴ which is essentially a wholly negative equivalent to the Freudian ‘id’¹⁸⁵. This only reinforces the analogy between civilisation and the ‘ego’, and the forested wilderness and the ‘id’. ‘Contemporary psychoanalysts’, write Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, ‘regard the darkness of the forest and the deep roots of its trees as symbolising the unconscious’¹⁸⁶. ‘The terrors of the forest’, they continue, ‘are inspired [...] by fears of what the unconscious may reveal’.¹⁸⁷ The wording here is significant. It is not the forest environment generally that is likened to the unconscious, but specifically the version of the forest that is tied to ‘darkness’ and ‘terrors’. The landscape that is evoked is unambiguously that of the *Gothic* forest. We have a firm connection, therefore, between fears of the human unconscious and our ecophobic dread of the woods: a dark instance of pathetic fallacy indeed. This idea that ‘the terrors of the forest’ are ‘inspired’ by what we fear ‘the unconscious may reveal’ serves as something of an explanation of why we encounter so many monsters within this setting. This is examined in Chapter Three, where I argue that our forest monsters are precisely so frightening because they serve as unnerving mixtures of the human with the forest environment. They undermine the ‘dualisms’ between ‘ego’ and ‘id’ and ‘human’ and ‘Nature’, whilst the forest is implicitly the *cause* of such disintegration. The

¹⁸¹ Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin Freud Library, 1933), p. 105

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ Thomas T. Lawson, *Carl Jung: Darwin of the Mind* (London: Karnac Books, 2008), p. 115.

¹⁸⁵ Anthony Stevens, *On Jung* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 43.

¹⁸⁶ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 401.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

idea of the forest functioning in this way is illustrated by ‘The Wood of No Names’ in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass, and what Alice Found There* (1871). In this sequel to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), the titular heroine finds that she has wandered into a large and lonely forest in which signifiers are obsolete. Here ‘things have no names’¹⁸⁸ and furthermore no concept of identification. In this wood she meets a fawn, but of course neither has any idea as to what each of them *are*. It is only when they leave the forest that each recalls their own and the other’s identity and the fawn exclaims in alarm “‘I’m a fawn [...] and you’re a human child!’”¹⁸⁹ It is only outside of the forest that the deer knows to be afraid, and here that any binary is drawn, as ‘animal’ and ‘human’ are made distinct. This forest firmly underlines the ‘constructedness’ of our division from Nature. The Wood of No Names is symbolic, too, of Julia Kristeva’s ‘*khora*’ (or ‘*chora*’), which is in some ways ties in to this idea of the woods as a site of the unconscious: the *khora* is kind of ‘placeless place’ that embodies a ‘dreamlike unconsciousness’,¹⁹⁰ which is, much like Carroll’s ‘Wood of No Names’, the place ‘where meaning collapses’.¹⁹¹ The Wood of No Names is a useful analogy because it highlights the fact that this setting can have a profound psychological effect on those in its midst: it demonstrates the psychological, as well as physical, implications of being lost in the woods.

A further central concept in psychoanalysis that bears relevance to the forest and the ecoGothic is that of the ‘uncanny’. The uncanny, as Nicholas Royle asserts, is a term now so pervasive that it has become in itself ‘a kind of ghost story or fairy tale’.¹⁹² In its original German, the word is ‘*unheimlich*’ (‘unhomely’), which is born of the word ‘*heimlich*’

¹⁸⁸ Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass: And What Alice Found There* (PDFFreeBooks.org), p. 23

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁰ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 193.

¹⁹¹ Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, p. 2.

¹⁹² Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 29.

(‘homely’). In discussing the word ‘heimlich’, Freud notes that ‘among its different shades of meaning’ is ‘one which is identical with its opposite’.¹⁹³ It is thus that the uncanny means something that is simultaneously familiar and yet unknown. This, in one light, is true of our current relationship to the natural world. Val Plumwood argues that by creating a ‘human-nature dualism’, by insisting that we are distinct from the Nature that surrounds us, we thus cast Nature as ‘radically [...] *Other*’.¹⁹⁴ Continuing these ideas, Allan Gardner Lloyd-Smith cites the wilderness as ‘a source of the uncanny’.¹⁹⁵ Certainly the forest plays into such ideas. It is, simultaneously, an environment that is at once familiar and yet foreign. Michael Marder in *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (2013) discusses the ways in which trees are continually ‘overlooked’ so that they become to us ‘the inconspicuous backdrop of our lives’.¹⁹⁶ The effect of this, he argues, is that they are simultaneously entirely normal and yet wholly strange: they are ‘uncanny’.¹⁹⁷ This is capitalised on in *The Happening*, in which the fact that we are – somewhat obliviously¹⁹⁸ – surrounded by plants is cast as terrifying. Smith argues that the uncanny is frequently ‘something beautiful, which is at the same time quite frightening’;¹⁹⁹ the ‘heimlich’, he continues, has a tendency to ‘turn so unnervingly into its opposite’.²⁰⁰ So, too, it is with the dualistic setting of the forest, which appears at one moment benign and enchanting, and at the next thoroughly perilous. Most significantly, in Freud’s original essay on the subject (1919), the exemplary image of the uncanny that he provides is that of being *lost in a forest*: ‘When one is lost in the forest [...] every endeavour to find the marked or familiar path ends again and again in a return to one and the same spot, recognisable

¹⁹³ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1919, 2003), p. 16.

¹⁹⁴ Val Plumwood, discussed in Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 1

¹⁹⁵ Allan Lloyd Smith, *Uncanny American Fiction: Medusa’s Face* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), p. 151.

¹⁹⁶ Marder, *Plant Thinking*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4 .

¹⁹⁸ Indeed, according to J. H. Wandersee and E. E. Schlusser, our anthropocentrism has reached such a degree that we are now afflicted with what they term ‘plant blindness’. Sourced: ‘Toward a Theory of Plant Blindness’, *Plant Science Bulletin*, no. 47.1 (2001), p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ Gardner Lloyd Smith, *Uncanny American Fiction*, p. 5.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

by some particular landmark'.²⁰¹ As Morton contends, the symbol of the forest is 'a quintessential image'²⁰² throughout this text. Freud interestingly highlights Friedrich Schelling's description of the uncanny as something 'that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'.²⁰³ Such a description resonates with our depictions of the Gothic forest, as is often presented as an environment that is not intended for human discovery. In many Gothic texts that centre on the theme of 'horror in the woods',²⁰⁴ there is an admonition that goes unheeded. In *Evil Dead* (1981), there is a bridge that must be crossed in order to enter the woods, which is accompanied by a literal sign that reads: "DANGEROUS BRIDGE TRAVEL AT OWN RISK". In *The Cabin in the Woods*, the character that warns of the dangers of entering the forest is literally named 'the harbinger', in a conscious allusion to this trope. He is described as 'practically wearing a sign that says "YOU WILL DIE"', yet is continually ignored. Incidentally, in *The Wizard of Oz* (1940), there is the memorable scene with 'The Haunted Forest', in which Dorothy and her friends, upon entering the forest, quickly encounter a sign that reads: 'I'd turn back if I was you!' The 2010 horror-comedy film *Don't Go into the Woods* lifts its title from such admonitions, which have by now become a cliché. As demonstrated by the aptly named 'Forbidden Forest' in the *Harry Potter* series, there is the sense that the woods are out of bounds. The forest, then, is something indeed that 'ought to have remained secret and hidden', but has 'come to light' as it is trespassed into unwisely.

The final element of psychoanalysis that I wish to highlight in the context of the ecoGothic is the theory of repression. In short, this is the idea that our most extreme fears and desires, as harboured by the 'id', are repressed and disowned by the conscious 'ego'. Repression is bound to the idea of the uncanny, as any reminder of these fears and desires

²⁰¹ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, ed. Benjamin Nelson (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 144.

²⁰² Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p. 178.

²⁰³ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 130.

²⁰⁴ McDonald, 'Sacred Violence', p. 4.

evokes a strong sense of the uncanny. The horror genre famously deals with subjects and images that are widely repressed, with the explicit intention of frightening its audience. If we treat its texts, indeed, as ‘public dreams’²⁰⁵ (or nightmares), then we return to Katherine A. Wagner’s theory that its recurrent themes ‘resonate with wider cultural fears’.²⁰⁶ With our texts that may be read in the context of the ecoGothic, such ideas are of great importance. David Ingram argues that the pervasion of psychoanalysis within literary theory has influenced the ways in which we now view our fictions, as we are aware, indeed, of its ‘concepts, scenarios and metaphors’.²⁰⁷ He argues, specifically, that such an awareness has ‘strongly affected how we see the eco-film’.²⁰⁸ We now *look* for evidence of the cultural unconscious and what within it has been widely repressed. When we encounter ‘monstrous natures’, then, we may argue that there is automatically a sense of the uncanny, as such depictions may serve as evidence of repressed environmental fears. Sharae Deckard argues that even when they are not explicitly monstrous, we find images of some landscapes immediately uncanny, due to the fact that we know they are being increasingly destroyed. We live in an age, indeed, where ‘most people are aware that human beings are harming nature’,²⁰⁹ yet many of us deny – or repress – our individual roles in the destruction of wilderness. Consequently, Deckard suggests that when we then encounter such wilderness within our fictions, we can experience the uncanny sensation of a ‘return of the repressed’.²¹⁰ Patrick Gonder interestingly describes the *approach* of the ecoGothic, rather than the texts that it examines, within these terms. ‘The ecoGothic’, he argues, is something that ‘haunts us an eerie doppelgänger’²¹¹, reflecting and troubling the state

²⁰⁵ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, p. 48.

²⁰⁶ Wagner, ‘Haven't We Been Here Before?’, p. 21.

²⁰⁷ Carroll, ‘Afterword’, p. 258.

²⁰⁸ David Ingram, ‘Rethinking Eco-film Studies’, *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, p. 460.

²⁰⁹ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 1.

²¹⁰ Sharae Deckard, “‘Uncanny States’: Global EcoGothic and the World Ecology in Rana Dasgupta’s *Tokyo Cancelled*”, in *EcoGothic*, p. 177.

²¹¹ The ‘doppelgänger’ is the ‘double’, and is a classic example of something that evokes the uncanny.

of fear and *denial* concerning our environmental crisis'²¹² (my emphasis). The implication, then, is that the ecoGothic reading addresses themes of the uncanny, as it forces an invasive questioning of the source of ecophobic anxieties.

iii. Hallowed Be Thy Horror: Christianity and the Forest

‘The Bible contains all you need to know in order to hate the wilderness’.

— Roderick Frazier Nash.²¹³

‘Nature is Satan’s church’.

— *Antichrist* (2009).²¹⁴

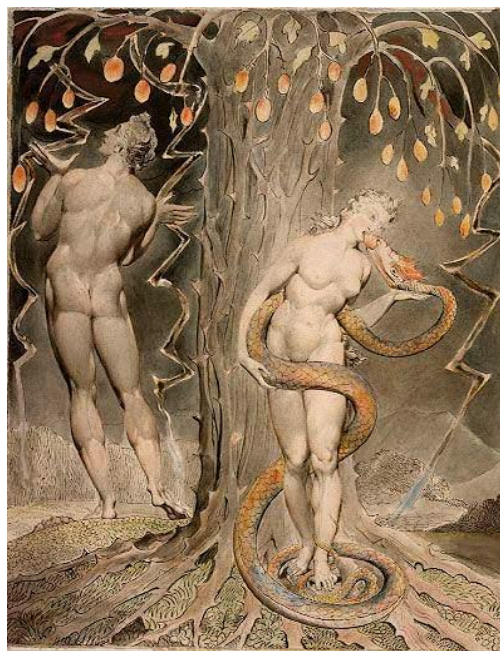


Figure 1.2: William Blake, *The Temptation and Fall of Eve* (1808).

²¹² Patrick Gonder, ‘Book Review’ of *EcoGothic*, eds Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)*, (Summer 2014), 21 (3): 716-717, p. 717.

²¹³ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 133.

²¹⁴ *Antichrist*. Dir. Lars von Trier. Denmark. Nordisk Film Distribution, 2009. Film.

The seventh and final reason I wish to introduce in this chapter as to why we fear the forest is the idea that it is an *antichristian* space. As well as psychoanalysis, Noël Carroll describes Christianity, too, as a ‘cultural myth’.²¹⁵ Many of its ideas and stories, he argues, extend well beyond its religious adherents and so widely pervade Western thought. My interest within this hugely expansive subject is limited to the ways it has informed our views – and *fears* – of the forest environment. Indeed, as Richard Hayman insists, ‘Christianity has strongly influenced how we see the forest’.²¹⁶ In this section, I examine this claim that Christianity has taught us to ‘hate’²¹⁷ the wilderness, and therein the potential connections between Christian doctrine and contemporary ecophobia. I argue that one of the main reasons that we see the forest as frightening is because we view it, specifically, as an *antichristian* environment.

It is significant, in regard to the forest, that Christianity is often highlighted as existing in stark opposition to the older tradition of paganism. Christianity and paganism, argues William Hughes, have ‘distinctly different conceptions of both nature and the relative place of humanity in nature’²¹⁸. While, as Matthew Hall writes, we have a very ‘fragmented’ history of paganism, one thing that is widely agreed on is that those beyond the Judeo-Christian tradition believed in ‘a substantial kinship between all beings in the biosphere’²¹⁹. In short, they are associated with a much more *ecocentric* view of the world, whilst Christianity, as we will see, is traditionally aligned with more anthropocentric attitudes. Lynn White argues that paganism views Nature as essentially ‘sacred’, whilst Christianity objectifies the natural world, viewing it instead in terms of ‘material gain’.²²⁰ More than this, however, when it comes to the wilderness, Christianity has actively *maligned* the natural world. In Christianity the wilderness

²¹⁵ Carroll, ‘Afterword’, p. 258.

²¹⁶ Hayman, *Trees, Woodland and Civilisation*, p. 39.

²¹⁷ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 133.

²¹⁸ William Hughes, “‘A Strange Kind of Evil’: Superficial Paganism and False Ecology in *The Wicker Man*”, in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 60.

²¹⁹ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 11.

²²⁰ Lynn White, discussed in Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 119.

is cast, as Nash suggests, as something to be ‘hated’ – and moreover, as something to be deeply *feared*.

In theology, there has been much discussion on the connections between religious faith and human anxiety. Rudolf Otto famously asserted that ‘human religion finds its genesis in fear’.²²¹ “‘Daemons’ and ‘gods’ alike’, he argues, ‘all spring from the same root’.²²² They are born of our fears that all that exists is an unexplained and meaningless chaos. In his discussion of such ideas, Douglas E. Cowan argues that ‘whilst it might be overstating the case to argue that all religion is rooted in fear of [...] the myriad of terrors that threaten from the *forest’s edge*’, there are nonetheless ‘certainly significant cross-cultural references in which this is the case’²²³ (my emphasis). His analogy, here, is certainly significant, as while it is possibly casual, it nonetheless aligns the forest with threatening chaos and implies that we have many examples in which religion is born of a *fear of the woods*. With this in mind, William James’ broad definition of religion as an ‘unseen *order*’²²⁴ (my emphasis) becomes extremely useful. Religion is presented as the *opposite* of chaos. This is relevant in the context of the forest and the ecoGothic because the wilderness, as we have already seen, is frequently associated with chaos. We have already noted the etymology of ‘wild’, meaning something that is ‘not under the control of man’.²²⁵ In addition, we have discussed this idea of civilisation as order, and the forest as chaos – associations which are thoroughly emphasised within Christianity. ‘Religion’, according to Mircea Eliade, is essentially ‘cosmogonic’²²⁶ (world-creative): ‘it is about creating and maintaining a sacred cosmic *order* against *chaos*’ (my emphasis)²²⁷. Timothy K. Beal has

²²¹ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. JW Harvey (New York: OUP, 1923; second edition, 1950), p. 14.

²²² Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, pp. 14-15.

²²³ Douglas E. Cowan, *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008), p. 51.

²²⁴ William James, ‘Lecture III: The Reality of the Unseen’, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (USA: Penguin Classics, 1985), p. 53.

²²⁵ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 1.

²²⁶ Douglas Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 197.

²²⁷ Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and its Monsters* (New York, Routledge, 2002), p. 8.

interestingly introduced the term ‘chaogony’²²⁸ as cosmogony’s opposite, meaning instead something that is ‘world-destructive’ and brings about ‘a return to chaos’. This idea links, certainly, to the Gothic forest. It may be seen in the ideas expressed above of the forest and our fears of a return to the past, to a time antecedent to human existence, and to the forest as an all-consuming threat. Eliade discusses, too, the subject of religion and *space*. He argues that religion, essentially, divides space into that which is ordered and sacred, or disordered and profane. Religion, he asserts, creates a ‘centre’ amidst the ‘infinite expanse’ of chaos.²²⁹ He describes the chaotic space as thoroughly ‘amorphous’ and as a setting in which ‘no orientation is possible’.²³⁰ Its disorienting nature might be compared with the sense of ‘lostness’ which, as we have seen, is bound to the forest. Eliade argues that human *settlement* aligns with ideas of cosmogony.²³¹ With the act of settlement, he argues, we ‘imitate the gods’, who ‘organised chaos by giving it structure, form and norms’.²³² If settlements, then, are ‘godly’, then we can only assume that environments such as the forest, which are necessarily defined by a lack of widespread settlement, are implicitly ‘*ungodly*’. In this context, the destruction and subjugation of the wilderness – the ‘organisation’ or this ‘chaos’ – is an emulation of the divine.

When discussing the ways in which Christianity has influenced how we view the wilderness, one of the most essential subjects is the infamous story of Eden. This tale of idyllic Nature, which is then corrupted and lost by humanity, is a predictably prevalent symbol within ecocriticism. Stephen Budiansky argues that ‘ecologists, just like the rest of us, have been charmed by the idea of an Edenic natural world’.²³³ In our idealisations of Wordsworthian Nature, we frequently liken any ‘untouched’ wilderness to a divine paradise. The existence of

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

²²⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 21.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 31.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Stephen Budiansky, *Nature’s Keepers: The New Science of Nature Management* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 5.

environmental crisis, therefore, is often likened to the loss of Eden. With environmental crisis, we are actively and consciously destroying this ‘Eden’. We find such themes again and again when we encounter the Gothic forest – which is, as we will see, regularly presented as a deliberate perversion of its Edenic antithesis.

The story of Eden has much to answer for when it comes to its portrayal of the interactions between humans and Nature. It is important, firstly, to note that the story revolves around the *Garden* of Eden: we are presented with an explicitly *cultivated* paradise. Moreover, the divine instructions decreed to man are to maintain its cultivation: Adam is to ‘dress’ and ‘keep’ (Genesis: 2.15) the land. In addition, he is told to name each of its creatures, which exist under his dominion. We may see, then, what Peter Barry means when he argues that ‘whilst our anthropocentric attitudes are both religious *and* humanist’, many can be traced to the teachings of the Bible.²³⁴ What Timothy Clark has termed our ‘dangerous fantasies of human overlordship’²³⁵ are, as Hall contends, ‘justified’ by such teachings.²³⁶ Moreover, the story of Eden may be read as a creation myth not only for humankind, but for the wilderness. The transgression of humankind is punished by their expulsion from this cultivated paradise *into* the wilderness. Thorns and [...] thistles’ (Genesis: 3.18) are introduced into the land, which is henceforth ‘cursed’ (Genesis: 3.17).²³⁷ We see, in William Blake’s painting (*figure 1.2*) for example, the violence of this transition into wilderness. The environment is quite literally breaking apart, as Adam and Eve will be torn from the garden and into the wilderness, which here is presented as nothing but blackness, as ‘amorphous’²³⁸ indeed. The painting highlights, too, the fact that at the centre of this tale is a forbidden *tree* (which so infamously bears the forbidden fruit): The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It serves, arguably, as a

²³⁴ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, 262.

²³⁵ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 57.

²³⁶ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 1.

²³⁷ *Holy Bible: Quatercentenary Edition: King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 9.

²³⁸ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 21.

portentous metonym of the Gothic woodland. The fact that it is forbidden – it is the one dangerous element that exists in Eden – can be related to this recurrent idea of the forest as a setting that is out of bounds. It is significantly at this tree that the Devil is met – a fact which may, to an extent, have influenced our many texts in which the Devil is met in the woods.²³⁹ In the story of Eden, the Devil's purpose is to tempt humanity into transgression, and consequently, into the wilderness. The fact that he is successful means that the wilderness, in one light, is born of human sin. It becomes, then, in Christian mythology (and its various pervasions) a symbol of lost paradise and human transgression.

The wilderness, however, continues for many as a symbol of idealised and redemptive Nature: it is the closest thing on Earth that we have to Eden. The fact that this is coupled with its associations as a symbol of human transgression and squandered paradise, means we can begin to understand why it is frequently presented as *both* heavenly *and* hellish. One of the most infamous examples in Western history of the wilderness being seen by Christians in such simultaneous, yet contradictory terms is found in the Puritan settlements of the New World. As noted above, much of the Western fixation on fearsome forests is indebted to memories of the forests in these times. The Puritans saw these forests, simultaneously, as a 'virtual Eden',²⁴⁰ and as a monstrous wilderness. It was a setting in which they would become 'new Adams', and yet, as Smith and Hughes note, for many 'entering the wilderness was tantamount to confronting the nightmarish landscape of Original Sin'.²⁴¹

²³⁹ We have various tales of the Devil in the woods. In Scandinavian mythology, for example, it is said that when Lucifer and his followers were expelled from Heaven, those that landed in the forest chose to remain in this setting. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown' (1835), the eponymous character encounters his own likeness in the form of the Devil as he enters into the depths of the woods. We will see this again in Anthony Schmitz's *Darkest Desire: The Wolf's Own Tale* (2012).

²⁴⁰ Dennis B. Blanton, "'The Weather is Fine, Wish You Were Here, Because I'm the Last One Alive': "Learning" the Environment in the English New World Colonies', in *The Colonisation of Unfamiliar Landscapes*, eds. Rockman, Steele and Blust, p. 190.

²⁴¹ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 9.

Obsessed with biblical analogy, the Puritans were convinced that in subjugating the expansive wilderness they were doing God's work; they saw themselves, indeed, as imitating the divine²⁴². We will see a dark reflection of such thinking in *The Woman*, wherein a man takes it upon himself to 'civilise' a wild woman that he captures in the forest. This woman, symbolically, is firmly merged with the wilderness, and the man views himself as vindicated in his task of subjugation. In the New World, the wilderness served, at best, as a *tabula rasa*: as an 'antidote' to what the Puritans saw as the evils of the Old World. In Chapter Four, we examine this idea of the wilderness as a desirable alternative to the 'evils' of modernity. We will find that in several texts where this is a theme, there are firm allusions to the Puritans of the New World. For example, in *The Village*, we have a community that distinctly recalls the colonial era in America and which is set in the midst of the Pennsylvanian woods. It transpires, in the end, that the motivations for its establishment were precisely to escape the 'sins' of the modern world. Tom J. Hillard has noted the fact that Puritan doctrine is 'particularly interesting in the context of ecocritical studies of fear and nature'²⁴³ – and certainly I would contend that it is a contributing source of contemporary ecophobia. The wilderness, for these early settlers, was in many ways foreboding. There were instances of settlements in the woods vanishing, with no explanation – a terrifying prospect which is recreated, as we will see, in *YellowBrickRoad* in Chapter Three. Moreover, the Puritans feared that the woods were filled with wolves and Indians, which served as its 'monsters'. In such texts as *Twin Peaks* and *The Village*, we encounter obvious substitutes of 'monstrous' Indians, and in Chapter Three I discuss our associations with wolves in detail. Most interestingly, as Charles Berryman argues, the New-World Puritans were obsessed with divining 'signs'²⁴⁴ from God in their natural surroundings. If the wilderness, then, was in any way perilous, this was evidence of God's

²⁴² Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 31.

²⁴³ Hillard, 'From Salem', p. 106.

²⁴⁴ Charles Berryman, *From Wilderness to Wasteland: The Trial of the Puritan God in the American Imagination* (Port Washington: Kennikat, 2009), p. 3.

displeasure or wrath with humanity. We will see such ideas evoked interestingly in *Jug Face*, wherein this idea is thoroughly literalised. The woodland community in this film, discussed in Chapter Four, serves a ‘god’ in the form of a pit in the forest. When pleased with its followers, The Pit heals and protects the members of the community, in return for the occasional sacrifice. When displeased, it kills without restraint, leaving bloody ‘signs’ indeed of its discontent. This film serves as an excellent example of how such ‘dated’ fears of the forest may be readily translated into the modern horror film.

In *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (2003), Carolyn Merchant argues that there is a tenacious obsession in the Western world with regaining biblical paradise²⁴⁵. However, we live in a postlapsarian world, and so such desires are at best futile, and at worst, as Paul W. Rea suggests, may lead instead ‘toward a Hell on earth’²⁴⁶. Following on from this, Kevin Corstorphine argues that the appeal to a more ‘mythical nature’ with the ‘recreation’ of Eden ‘will always be a flawed model’.²⁴⁷ It is a model, however, as he continues, ‘that is ripe with Gothic possibilities’.²⁴⁸ Certainly we find this in several of our fictions, and most especially in those wherein the wilderness is imagined as a recreational idyll, but is ultimately revealed as a vengeful nightmare. We encounter such transitions in films such as *Evil Dead*, where it is imagined that the setting will be an idyllic retreat, but in fact is permeated by an unknown evil that seeks to possess those who encounter it. The Gothic forest is, to an extent, reliant on its Edenic antithesis. Indeed, we find again and again that it serves as what I call a ‘perverse Eden’. The essential elements of the story (the man, the woman, the fruit, the snake, the transgression, and the punishment) are often found in our depictions of the Gothic

²⁴⁵ Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

²⁴⁶ Paul W. Rea, ‘Book Review: “Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Civilisation” by Carolyn Merchant’, *International Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)* (Summer 2004), 11 (2): 296-7, p. 296.

²⁴⁷ Kevin Corstorphine, ““The Blank Darkness Outside”: Ambrose Bierce and Wilderness Gothic at the End of the Frontier”, in *EcoGothic*, eds Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 125.

²⁴⁸ Corstorphine, ““The Blank Darkness Outside”, in *EcoGothic*, p. 125.

wood, but are distorted. They are, as David Bell contends, made ‘poisonous’.²⁴⁹ For example, in *Snow White and the Huntsman*, the forbidden fruit becomes the literally poisoned apple, and The Dark Forest is filled with arboreal, yet serpentine imagery. In an age of environmental crisis, there is the strong sense that we have *already* transgressed, and so it is in some sense fitting that our idyllic Natures are revealed as distorted. What we imagine as Eden may indeed be closer to ‘Hell on earth’.²⁵⁰ This is demonstrated, for example, in *Evil Dead* and *Antichrist*, where the imagined idylls are revealed as hellish: in the former, a red light is glimpsed beneath the woods, visually suggesting that Hell, quite literally, lies beneath; in *Antichrist*, the woodland retreat is in fact named ‘Eden’, but we are told, in the end, that it is Satan’s church.

The recurrent imagery of twisted Edens in the context of the ecoGothic is extremely significant. If the ecoGothic, indeed, is to move us beyond a ‘Wordsworthian tradition’,²⁵¹ then much must be made of this recurrent symbol. If our Gothic fictions, as Hillard claims, are to ‘steer ecocriticism away from an uncritical idealisation of nature’,²⁵² then we may view the prevalence of this image as evidence of exactly this. In perverting or twisting our ideas of an Edenic natural world, we deconstruct and even destroy this image. Idyllic, untouched, and Edenic Nature is revealed, in the end, as a myth in itself.

1.4 Conclusion

In examining fictional portrayals of the Gothic forest, there is much to consider as we endeavour to determine just *why* it is that we find the forest so frightening, and why these

²⁴⁹ David Bell, ‘Anti-idyll Rural Horror’, in *Contested Countryside Cultures: Otherness, Marginalisation and Rurality*, eds Paul Cloke and Jo Little (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 104.

²⁵⁰ Paul W. Rea, ‘Book Review: “Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Civilisation” by Carolyn Merchant’, *International Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)* (Summer 2004), 11 (2): 296-7, p. 296.

²⁵¹ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 3.

²⁵² Discussed in Corstophine, “‘The Blank Darkness Outside’”, in *EcoGothic*, p. 131.

stories continue to endure. In this chapter, I have provided an introduction to the more theoretical ideas that will be relevant throughout the analysis of the texts in this thesis. I have introduced the ecoGothic and formulated my own understanding and use of this still emerging field. I have discussed the fact that the ecoGothic, whilst a part of ecocriticism, is born of its arguable inadequacies. Primarily, it exists in answer to Simon C. Estok's claim that our *fear* of Nature – our 'ecophobia' – 'needs theorising'.²⁵³ This is, I have argued, especially crucial in an age where environmental crisis is 'the most pressing issue of our time'.²⁵⁴ Our texts, therefore, which depict the 'monstrous natures'²⁵⁵ that have been 'widely ignored',²⁵⁶ are of considerable significance. They may reflect and shape contemporary responses to environmentalism²⁵⁷ and so may serve in themselves as 'ecological forces'.²⁵⁸ I have outlined, too, some of the predominant and recurring reasons that we may find the forest frightening: it is the antithesis to civilisation, it is equated with primeval antiquity; it is a site of trial we associate with fears from our fairy tales; it is a setting in which we expect to be lost; and it is a setting in which we fear we will be eaten. I have examined in more detail the ideas that we fear the forest as extension of the human unconscious, and that we fear it because it is an antichristian environment.

By analysing our depictions of the Gothic forest through the lens of the ecoGothic, we can preliminarily begin in 'theorising'²⁵⁹ ecophobia, and repositioning the ecological 'beyond a Wordsworthian tradition'.²⁶⁰ We can provide a 'different perspective',²⁶¹ as we address those

²⁵³ Estok, 'Theorising in a Space', p. 203.

²⁵⁴ Cheryl Glotfelty, 'Preface', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. xii.

²⁵⁵ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures'.

²⁵⁶ Hillard, 'Deep Into That Darkness Peering', p. 688.

²⁵⁷ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p. 280.

²⁵⁸ Quoted in Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 118.

²⁵⁹ Estok, 'Theorising in a Space', p. 203.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

texts that been largely ‘ignored’²⁶² in the ecocritical tradition and examine, specifically, the ‘monstrous natures’²⁶³ in our fictions. Moreover, we can challenge this idea that we live in an age where myth and Nature are theoretically extinct. We can examine textual evidence that firmly contradicts this idea that we’ve lost the ability to see the forest as ‘strange, monstrous and enchanting’²⁶⁴ and see, at the very least, that it continues in the collective Western imagination as a monstrous environment and that we ourselves continue, indeed, to be ‘terrified by the wild wood’.²⁶⁵ In each of these texts, as this thesis illustrates, myth and Nature are thoroughly brought to life. Though this is true throughout this thesis, we find such ideas most explicitly literalised in those texts where the forest itself is an animate and living threat. It is thus that we begin with an examination into our fears of the animate forest.

²⁶² Hillard, ‘Deep Into That Darkness Peering’, p. 688.

²⁶³ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures’.

²⁶⁴ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 121.

²⁶⁵ Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, p. 200.

CHAPTER TWO

‘WHAT IF IT’S THE TREES?’: THE ANIMATED FOREST



Fig. 2.1. Film poster for *Otesánek* (2000)

‘This tree and forest business is so vague and horrible’.

—Sophia Bittacy, ‘The Man Whom the Trees Loved’ (1912).¹

Ash: What’s the matter with you? Did something in the woods do this to you?

Cheryl: No, *it was the woods themselves!* They’re alive, Ashley! The trees! They’re alive!

—*The Evil Dead* (1981).²

In *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (2001), Stacy Alaimo argues that ‘landscapes, unlike monsters, are devoid of agency; they neither chase nor devour us’³. This is not, however, always strictly true. In this chapter, I set out to examine several texts in which the forest *itself* is cast as animate and actively threatening and seems, in one sense or another, to be *alive*. If we return to the central question of this thesis – ‘Why is the forest frightening?’ – then an obvious place to start is with those instances in which the very environment seems consciously, and even maliciously, dangerous. In the context of my work, when I discuss the forest as being ostensibly ‘alive’, I mean that it is both animate and sentient. By ‘animate’, I mean that it demonstrates physical movement, which causes (or at least threatens) harm to the human. By ‘sentient’, I mean that there is evidence of conscious thought and intention. My objective here is to examine why the animate, seemingly ‘living’ forest is something we see again and again – and why it is so effectively disquieting.

¹ Algernon Blackwood, *Pan’s Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), p. 40.

² *The Evil Dead*. Dir. Sam Raimi. Renaissance Pictures: 1981. Film.

³ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films’, p. 283.

In order to answer these questions, I begin with an account of some of the more general reasons we may fear animate Nature, and then discuss in more detail such anxieties in the context of environmental concerns. Thereafter, I examine a variety of Gothic texts, which each present the forest as threateningly animate. I have divided these into four thematic sections, which each examine some of the various ways in which we see the forest as animate, and some of the motivations behind this. In the first, “‘The Willows Were Against Us’: Blackwood’s Forests’, I look at several of the stories of Algernon Blackwood (1869-1951) which centre on themes of forest as threateningly animate. I begin with these tales because although they predate environmental crisis, as we know it today, they nonetheless provide a valuable introduction to our fears of the animated forest. In Section Two, ‘The Forest’s Revenge: When Nature Gets Nasty’, I introduce the idea that the main reason we fear the animated forest is because we fear Nature’s warranted *revenge*. Here, I look at Jan Švankmajer’s *Otesánek* (2000) and M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Happening* (2008), as two texts in which we have animate trees that symbolise Nature’s revenge on modern humanity. This theme of revenge continues throughout the chapter. In Section Three, ‘Angry Molesting Trees: The Rape of Nature’, I expound on the motivations behind this revenge, highlighting what Carolyn Merchant has called ‘the rape of Nature’.⁴ Here I discuss the animate forest as a *reversal* of such violence, focusing on Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead* franchise (1981-). This serves as an introduction to my fourth and final section, ‘Monstrous Mother Natures: The She-Devil in the Wilderness’. I argue here that there is an undeniable connection between identifications with ‘passive’ women and ‘passive’ Nature. Whilst in Section Three we see women victimised by the forest, in Section Four we see instead women *aligned* with the forest. Here I discuss texts in which the forest is animated through what Jack Zipes has called ‘female nature out of control’.⁵ I examine our

⁴ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, p. 91.

⁵Zipes, here, is specifically writing about Nature in the films of Walt Disney, but his argument can be seen as more generally applicable. Sourced: Jack Zipes, quoted in David Whitley, *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), p. 24.

associations with gender when it comes to the woods, with the main focus on ecofeminism. Within this context, I analyse William Friedkin's *The Guardian* (1990), Rupert Sanders' *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012), Naomi Novik's *Uprooted* (2015) and Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009).

*

First and foremost, we might consider the animate wood so unsettling because it is simply uncanny. The uncanny, amongst its many delineations, has been defined as anything that 'should' be alive, but seems not to be, or anything that 'should' be inanimate, but seems to be living. The natural environment, though literally comprised of a multitude of living organisms, is widely construed in terms of an 'object';⁶ at the very least, its way of 'living' is seen as very different from our own. Thus, if the forest is shown to be consciously alive, then it is frequently shown to be immediately uncanny. Arthur Machen, in an oft-quoted passage from *The White People* (1904), famously describes animate Nature in these terms: he suggests that should we encounter an animal that spoke in 'human accents', or 'roses in the garden' that 'sang a weird song', we would very quickly be 'overwhelmed with horror'.⁷ There is, he suggests, something inherently unsettling about animate Nature.

The unease that we feel when it comes to these ideas is certainly significant in the context of the ecoGothic. It undoubtedly plays into Simon C. Estok's 'ecophobia', which we recall is defined as 'the contempt and fear we feel for the *agency* of the natural environment'⁸

⁶ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 57 .

⁷ Arthur Machen, 'The White People', in *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural*, (Leyburn: Tartarus Press, 2006), p. 115.

⁸ Estok, 'Theorising in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', p. 203.

[my emphasis]. Much of Estok's focus is on the essential *intangibility* of these fears and therefore it is significant to note that when we then cast the environment as tangibly animate and monstrous, these 'vague and horrible'⁹ anxieties are suddenly given a more concrete origin: we may indeed, as Cheryl insists above, fear 'the woods themselves'. This plays, too, into the vagueness of our anxieties when it comes to environmental destruction, in which, as Timothy Clark has noted, 'there is no easily identifiable or clear-cut antagonist'.¹⁰ In many of the texts in this chapter, however, we *do* have 'easily identifiable' human offenders – and a thoroughly vengeful, tangible, and enraged Mother Nature. Matthew Hall contends that 'most people are aware that human beings are harming nature'¹¹ – and I would add to this that such people are aware, too, that this will have seriously adverse consequences. Texts wherein we encounter animate and monstrous Natures are arguably expressions of fears such as these. Most significantly, in the context of this chapter, it is necessary to highlight the fact that in the Western world, as Matthew Hall asserts, we tend to view Nature in terms of a '*passive resource*'¹² [my emphasis]. Certainly, in light of our extensive forestry, the same could be said of our woods, even in spite of scientific evidence which suggests that trees are 'autonomous, perceptive and intelligent'¹³ organisms. It is, at least ostensibly, in our interest to view Nature in passive terms. James Rachels, writing on the subject of animals, has argued that 'humans have reasons to resist thinking of them as intelligent or sentient', as to do so would not be compatible 'with the atrocious ways that we treat them';¹⁴ the same could be said, surely, for our treatment of forests. Environmental criticism, however, as Clark argues, 'is increasingly acknowledging Nature as an agent in its own right': 'as capricious, awesome' and 'easily

⁹ Algernon Blackwood, *Pan's Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), p. 40.

¹⁰ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 11.

¹¹ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁴ James Rachels, *Created from Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1991), p. 129.

capable’ of destroying humanity¹⁵. Such ideas are reminiscent of ‘The Gaia Theory’,¹⁶ as introduced by James Lovelock towards the end of the twentieth century. In short, this theory suggested that the Earth should be considered a composite organism that is in some sense *alive*. Crispen Tickell, summarising the theory, describes the Earth as a ‘single, self-regulating system’ that is ‘aware’¹⁷ of our presence – and the damage that we wreak.¹⁸ Whilst many who subscribe to the theory have stated that the Earth is *not* to be considered as literally sentient, it is nonetheless described in terms that can seem to contradict this. Lovelock’s title, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back* is certainly in this sense misleading. We have discussed already the portentous tendency in ecocritical writing to suggest, implicitly, Nature’s vengeance. Titles such as *Plant Thinking* (2013) and *Plants as People* (2001) play, too, with ideas of vegetable sentience. Moreover, we find this in our fictions wherein Nature is actively monstrous. If we construe the forest as threateningly *animate*, then we force the idea of *passive* Nature firmly into question. To imagine Nature as animate and sentient – as consciously ‘aware’ of human action – is truly frightening. If we envisage the forest as a witness to environmental destruction, then we can only imagine that we have made an enemy. ‘The few things we do know about the Earth’s *knowledge* of our presence’, claims Lovelock, ‘are deeply disturbing’¹⁹ [my emphasis].

Many of these ideas are to be found in the texts throughout this chapter. I begin, however, with some of the writings of Algernon Blackwood, in which we find an enlightening introduction to some of these themes.

¹⁵ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 202.

¹⁶ James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back – And How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Penguin, 1972, 2006).

¹⁷ Sir Crispen Tickell, ‘Foreword’, in Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, p. xiv.

¹⁸ Humanity is described in terms of a ‘fever’ afflicting the Earth, thus tying in with some of the more extremist notions of deep ecology, as discussed in Chapter One. Sourced: Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, p. 2.

¹⁹ Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, p. 8.

2.1 'The Willows Were Against Us': Blackwood's Forests.

Though his work was very popular during his lifetime, comparatively little has been written on Algernon Blackwood. Nonetheless, he is generally revered for his work in horror, the weird, and the supernatural.²⁰ Much of his work is centred on the relationship between humanity and Nature, and so lends itself with ease to the themes of ecocriticism. Indeed, this has been



Fig 2.2. Illustration from *Pan's Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* (1912).

noted by David Punter, who contends that whilst it would be wrong to see Blackwood in directly ecological terms (for his work predates ecocriticism and environmental crisis, as we understand it today), it is nonetheless enlightening to consider his work in an ecocritical context.²¹ I argue, furthermore, that his work lends itself to an ecoGothic analysis, as the relationship he presents between humanity and Nature – and specifically between humanity and the forest – is usually extremely unnerving. It is worthy of note that Blackwood was a

²⁰ One notable accolade is from H. P. Lovecraft, who deemed Blackwood 'one of the best writers of ghost stories and supernatural fictions. Sourced: David Punter, 'Pity: Reflections of Algernon Blackwood's Gothic', *English Language Notes*, Spring/Summer 2010, 48 (1), p. 129.

²¹ David Punter, discussed in Andrew Smith and William Hughes, 'Introduction', in Smith and Hughes, ed., *Ecogothic* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 7. We are reminded, too, of Peter Barry's argument that certain older texts may be fruitfully examined in an ecocritical context.

member of the Golden Dawn²² and so believed that divine transcendence could be achieved through a union, or ‘theurgy’, with the natural world. This conviction, as Punter attests, is discernible in his stories and lends to them a ‘curious textuality’.²³ Moreover, it may be seen indeed as an interrogation of ‘the relationship of the human and the non-human [...] and the critical analysis of the term “human” itself’,²⁴ and as an answer to demands from ecocritics such as Stacey Alaimo to ‘collapse the boundaries between humans and nature’.²⁵ In this section, I look at Blackwood’s classic tale of arboreal menace, ‘The Willows’ (1907), before examining some of the tales from his volume of *Nature Stories* (1912), including ‘The Man Whom the Trees Loved’. In each of these, we find forests that are frightening precisely *because* they are sentient and in some way animated. Ideas of Nature as ‘passive’ and ‘inanimate’ are firmly undermined, as we are encouraged towards a more ecocentred viewpoint.

‘The Willows’, which is Blackwood’s most famous tale (or at least his most anthologised), is arguably *the* classic example in literature of animated arboreal menace. The trees in this story are presented as thoroughly sentient, animate, and foreboding. Moreover, in this tale, it is explicitly the idea that the forest is animate that here renders it so frightening. Mike Ashley, though he does not elaborate on his assertion, contends that ‘The Willows’ aligns itself with modern ‘ecological beliefs’.²⁶ This makes sense in accordance with Jack Sullivan’s argument that Blackwood wrote the tale as ‘a reaction against Victorian scientism and technology’,²⁷ which he saw as destroying the natural world and our relationship with it. Certainly, this is a text that warns, thoroughly, against the mistreatment of Nature. The tale

²² The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (or the Golden Dawn) was an organisation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries devoted to the study of the occult, metaphysics and paranormal activity.

²³ David Punter, ‘Algernon Blackwood: Nature and Spirit’, *Ecogothic*, eds Smith and Hughes (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 45.

²⁴ We recall that this is Greg Garrard’s broad definition of the foundations of ecocriticism. Sourced: Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 5.

²⁵ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures’, p. 280.

²⁶ Mike Ashley, *Starlight Man: The Extraordinary Life of Algernon Blackwood* (London: Constable, 2001), p. 340.

²⁷ Jack Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), p. 114.

follows the story of the journey taken by two men who travel in a canoe down the river Danube. Soon enough, they happen upon a deserted island that is densely forested by an abundance of willow trees. Initially, the island seems a paradise. However, it soon turns frightening, as the men quickly realise that its forest is against them.²⁸

The island is entirely devoid of human presence and is an example of ‘true wilderness’.²⁹ It is, as Punter argues, ‘pure’ and ‘uncontaminated’:³⁰ it is an unstained idyll. The men, initially, view it in such terms. They assume, indeed, that it is an inanimate resource. They immediately regard this untouched Nature in terms of ownership and human gain: it is ‘our island’ [my emphasis], one of them claims, and it exists to serve as their ‘hotel’.³¹ We are met with what Clark has described as the ‘dangerous fantasies of human overlordship’³² when it comes to the natural world. Such fantasies, however, are soon brought into question. As the men stay longer amidst the trees, they are slowly overtaken by a ‘creeping and curious feeling of disquietude, almost of alarm’.³³ We have similes that liken these formerly ‘backgrounded’³⁴ organisms to living and animate entities: they ‘move of their own will, as if alive’,³⁵ and seem to be ‘a herd of monstrous antediluvian creatures’.³⁶ One of the men quickly imbues the trees with agency, as he ominously declares: ‘*the willows are against us*’.³⁷ Man and forest are cast as adversaries and we are reminded of Robert Pogue Harrison’s assertion that ‘civilisation’ is

²⁸ Interestingly, the story is said to be based on a trip that Blackwood took down the Danube with a friend. The two stayed on a secluded island, where they were unfortunate enough to discover a corpse, and indeed a corpse is found towards the end of ‘The Willows’. What is so interesting here, however, is that Blackwood, implicitly, attributes its death to the trees, making his tale one of the terrors of Nature. Sourced: Ashley, *Starlight Man*, p. 108.

²⁹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

³⁰ Punter, ‘Algernon Blackwood’, p. 50.

³¹ Algernon Blackwood, *The Willows* (USA: Wildside Press, 1907, 2005), p. 17.

³² Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 57.

³³ Blackwood, *The Willows*, p. 18.

³⁴ Michael Marder, *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 3.

³⁵ Blackwood, *The Willows*, p. 29.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

defined ‘*against* the forests’³⁸ [my emphasis]. Soon enough, the men’s fears become a reality, as the forest becomes discernibly animate. They begin to see ‘fluid shapes’ and ‘monstrous outlines’ amidst the foliage.³⁹ The island is filled with a maddening sound, which we learn is ‘the willows themselves humming’.⁴⁰ Most disturbingly, however, they awaken each morning to find that the clearing in which they set their tent has considerably decreased in size: the trees, quite literally, are closing in around them. This uncanny image may be seen as an analogy for the idea that all of civilisation is but a clearing in the forest, which will eventually be reclaimed by surrounding Nature. As the clearing – potentially with the men within it – disappears *into* the forest, we have an image of the forest as a *consuming* threat. The landscape is shown to be quickly, and impossibly, changing: its implicit animation is precisely what is so frightening.

The men, in the end, are not consumed by the forest. Though it seems they will be driven to suicide by the will of the woods, the environment very suddenly grows calm.⁴¹ Initially, they do not understand why the willows have become, once again, seemingly inanimate. However, they soon discover the body of a stranger on the island, who has recently been killed. We are told that ‘everything has stopped’ because ‘*they*’ – and this pronoun refers to the trees – ‘found another victim’.⁴² The use of the word ‘victim’ to describe the humans of this tale implicitly casts the trees, consequently, as the ‘monsters’ of our story. The final image we are left with is a detailed description of the corpse. It is punctured, all over, with small holes – which we are told symbolise ‘the awful mark’ of the woods.⁴³ The image suggests, indeed, that the trees have *fed*. The two men are suddenly able to leave the island, which is now still, because its trees are momentarily sated. Never again, we imagine, will they view untouched

³⁸ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 2.

³⁹ Blackwood, *The Willows*, p.35.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85 .

⁴² Blackwood, *The Willows*, p. 86.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

wilderness as an inanimate environment to be enjoyed by the human. Indeed, this is a thoroughly ecocentric tale, in which humankind, as Sullivan concludes, are ‘profoundly irrelevant’.⁴⁴

‘The Willows’ is frequently cited as something of a textbook example of the subgenre of ‘the fantastic’. This genre is based in Tzvetan Todorov’s coining of the term, meaning an event or moment in fiction when it is uncertain as to whether something seemingly inexplicable is due to an unlikely, but rational explanation, or to something wholly supernatural.⁴⁵ When reading the tale, we may fully invest with the men’s accounts of the terrors of this living wilderness – or, we may conclude they are victims of isolation and their own imaginations. Significantly, the renowned uncertainty of this classic tale hangs on the unsettling and *haunting* notion of a forest that is truly, and monstrously, animate.

The collection *Pan’s Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* contains several tales in which we encounter the forest as a sentient and animate threat to humanity. The volume’s title, ‘Pan’s Garden’, could be construed as something of a contradiction in terms. For Pan, who is really quite a menacing figure,⁴⁶ is generally shown as a wild and chaotic god of the wilderness. His domain, by definition, is untamed: it is categorically *not* a garden. The wording, therefore, may be seen to actively contrast the idea of *God’s* garden and underline the role of the woods in symbolising our exclusion from paradise. This is a theme that resounds throughout the stories. However, it is not explicitly Eden that is sought to be regained, but instead an intimacy

⁴⁴ Sullivan, *Elegant Nightmares*, p. 123.

⁴⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Cornell, 1975).

⁴⁶ ‘The Great God Pan’, as he has been famously termed by Arthur Machen (1890), is a multifarious figure to say the least. His associations are so divergent that he has been read as both a Christ-like savior and as the Devil himself. Whilst several construe him as a ‘Romantic and nostalgic’ figure, the ‘more orthodox vision’, according to Richard Stomer, is ‘the goat-god as a dangerously primitive and hedonistic throw-back to Paganism’ – what Patricia Merivale in her comprehensive work on this subject has called ‘Gothic Pan’. Sourced: Richard Stomer, ‘An Odd Sort of God for the British: Exploring the Appearance of Pan in Late Victorian and Edwardian Literature’, www.soulmyths.com/oddgod.pdf. Accessed 27/02/14. Patricia Merivale, *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times* [Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969], p. 220.

with *Nature*. Blackwood believed in ‘Nature mysticism’,⁴⁷ which in short is the conviction that a direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality could be attained through a ‘theurgy’ with the natural world. The collection, as Ashley contends, was considered by Blackwood as a ‘unified whole’ that interrogated in detail the ‘closeness’ that exists (or can exist) between humankind and Nature.⁴⁸ To Blackwood, such ‘closeness’ would have been sacred and desired, but to a modern-day reader especially, it can seem quite terrifying. Indeed, as Punter notes, ‘this ascent to ecstasy of union with nature is fraught with pitfalls and complexities; the main one is death’.⁴⁹ In the context of this work, this theme of ‘theurgy’ is so interesting because not only is it a source of horror as the ‘human-nature dualism’⁵⁰ is firmly undermined, but it is a *means* by which the forest is animated.

In ‘The Temptation of the Clay’, Blackwood provides us with what may be easily read as a cautionary tale against human greed and a warning against our mistreatment of Nature. Its title immediately brings to mind the story of Adam and Eve, as the ‘clay’ is the substance from which Adam was allegedly made, whilst the ‘temptation’, we assume, is the Fall of humankind. The story follows a man who lives on the edge of the woods in Sussex, in a cottage that is named, quite simply, ‘The Place’.⁵¹ One day, he inherits his 14-year-old niece, Mánya, who comes to live with him. Each of them are enamoured of the surrounding woodland and view it ‘as a *living* entity’.⁵² The two seem intent on courting a ‘theurgy’ with these woods: he fills his bed, each night, with earth from the forest, whilst she trains her voice to imitate its various

⁴⁷ Richard Dalby, *Dracula’s Brood: Neglected Vampire Classics by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, M. R. James, Algernon Blackwood and Others*, (Northamptonshire: Equation, 1987), p. 268.

⁴⁸ Ashley, *Starlight Man*, p. 168.

⁴⁹ Punter, ‘Algernon Blackwood’, p. 45.

⁵⁰ This term is from the ecocritic Val Plumwood, and is discussed in Chapter One. She argues, in short, that ‘prevailing Western culture’ has created this ‘dualism’ in which humankind and Nature are cast as thoroughly distinct and wholly antithetical.

⁵¹ This is a more than fitting title, if we return to the Human Geography terms of ‘Space’ and ‘Place’ as discussed in Chapter One. Here, indeed, the human-made structure, the cottage, is the symbol of ‘Place’ amidst the surrounding ‘Space’ of the forest.

⁵² Algernon Blackwood, ‘The Temptation of the Clay’, *Pan’s Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1924), p. 433.

sounds. In line with these ideas of ‘theurgy’, Ashley describes the tale as a ‘contemplation of how an individual’s soul can be absorbed by nature’.⁵³ Ultimately, however, it is the only the girl who achieves this union. The man discovers valuable clay in the forest, which he decides to sell. It is in this moment in which he commercialises Nature – in which he views it, indeed, as a ‘passive resource’⁵⁴ – that he creates a division (or ‘dualism’) not only between himself and the surrounding woodland, but with Mányá too. The title then becomes a *double entendre* as the ‘clay’ now refers as well to the substance in the ground. Significantly, therefore, the implication is that the ‘temptation’ of the title – and of humanity’s disgrace – is our proclivity to greed when it comes to the natural world. Moreover, the idea of the forest as living or animate is one that is only threatening to the man *after* he has transgressed. He comes to fear the wooded surroundings, along with his niece. She, it seems, is quite literally ‘one’ with Nature. Her voice becomes indistinguishable from the sounds of this setting. Moreover, we are told vaguely but ominously, ‘other things come into her sometimes’.⁵⁵ The ‘living entity’ of the forest, at times, assumes her form: animate in flesh as it desires. The story ends with the man afraid and endangered, and the ecological moral is clear: the animate forest is only made frightening to those who mistreat and exploit it.

‘The Transfer’ is another text in which we find the forest is threateningly animate. Here, in a similar set up to the Gothic classic *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), we follow the story of a young governess, Miss Gould, and her eerily mysterious ward named Jamie. The grounds of the house in which they reside come to an end at the forest’s edge. Here, there is a space that the child names ‘The Forbidden Corner’: a small patch of earth on which nothing will grow. Significantly, this ‘corner’ lies exactly at the boundary between the forest and cultivated land and serves as something of a metonym for the forest’s dangers. It endeavours to swallow and

⁵³ Ashley, *Starlight Man*, p. 174.

⁵⁴ Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Blackwood, ‘The Temptation of the Clay’, p. 483.

consume all in its reach and so it can be seen to symbolise the voracious *mouth* at the edge of the ‘body’ of the forest.⁵⁶ As this forest threatens to consume that which lies beyond its boundaries, our ‘gut feeling that nature is being *gobbled* by culture’⁵⁷ [my emphasis] is uncannily reversed, as it becomes instead a threat to humanity. We suspect from early on that this ‘bald sore place’⁵⁸ at the edge of the forest is in some sense *alive*. Jamie is initially frightened, proclaiming it simply as ‘*bad*’,⁵⁹ but soon is brought under its influence. It is animated with an ‘earthy voice’,⁶⁰ with which it demands the child bring it small, dead creatures. It is animate, then, specifically to *feed*. These animals, however, are not sufficient: Jamie tells Miss Gould that this ‘mouth’ is ‘dying because it can’t get the food that it wants’.⁶¹ It is ‘hungry’,⁶² we learn, for human flesh and blood. Consequently, Jamie brings to it his uncle: a man driven by avarice and who is described, figuratively, as a ‘human vampire’.⁶³ Just as the ‘mouth’ of the woods stands for the consuming threats of Nature, the uncle, who ‘feeds’⁶⁴ on the energy of others, stands for the consuming threats of humankind. The metonymic symbolism of the two is underlined when they meet, and they are described as ‘the emissaries of the two kingdoms, human and vegetable’.⁶⁵ The man is at first unaware that there is any threat as he strolls, recreationally, through what he deems ‘passive’⁶⁶ Nature indeed. He becomes aware, suddenly, that there is something inexplicably frightening, and points, accusatively, to the edge of the forest, crying ‘What’s that horrid place?’⁶⁷ He peers into The

⁵⁶ We will encounter a somewhat similar premise in Chad Crawford Kinkle’s film *Jug Face* (2013), which is discussed in Chapter Four. Here, in place of The Forbidden Corner, there is ‘The Pit’, which similarly serves as the ‘mouth’ to the woods, which feeds on human sacrifices

⁵⁷ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 263.

⁵⁸ Algernon Blackwood, ‘The Transfer’, *Pan’s Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), p. 413.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Blackwood, ‘The Transfer’, p. 347.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

⁶⁶ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

⁶⁷ Blackwood, ‘The Transfer’, p. 354.

Forbidden Corner, which he sees is ‘intensely *active*’ [my emphasis].⁶⁸ There is evidence at this stage that the forest, in part, is animated through its use of Jamie. We are told that the boy laughs hysterically as he sees his uncle afraid, and Miss Gould observes: ‘I heard that laughter, but could have sworn it did not come from him. The empty, yawning patch gave out that sound’.⁶⁹ We have, it seems, a monstrous ‘theurgy’. There is little ambiguity to the fact that whilst his body remains, the uncle has been devoured. There is a sound that simultaneously comes ‘from Jamie’ and yet from ‘deep in the earth’, which is described as a ‘*gulp*’ [my emphasis].⁷⁰ Once The Forbidden Corner has eaten, plants and trees quickly cover its surface, and the perimeters of the forest expand. Just as the barren edge of the woods signifies its ‘dying’,⁷¹ the verdant forest is a symbol for the ‘destruction’⁷² of humankind. We are left with a disturbing – and ecophobic – message that the forest is a living, edacious threat that will thrive on human bloodshed. We see, too, that if there is to be a battle between the consuming threats of humanity and the consuming threats of the ‘vaster kingdom’ of the forest, then it will be a ‘soft and easy victory’ for Nature.⁷³

‘The Man Whom the Trees Loved’ is the most explicitly environmental tale within the collection. It follows the story of a husband and wife, David and Sophia Bittacy, who live on the edge of an expansive forest. From the outset, the two are cast in opposition: he is aligned with the wildness of the forest and reveres this setting, whilst she devoutly follows the Bible, which, as Roderick Frazier Nash asserts, ‘contains all you need to know [...] to hate the wilderness’.⁷⁴ Early on, David meets a man named Sanderson, who strongly encourages his intimacy with Nature. David, consequently, is drawn increasingly to the forest’s ‘world of

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 355.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 356.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 347.

⁷² Ibid., p. 357.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 133

living’,⁷⁵ until he is lost to it entirely. It transpires that its trees ‘love’ this man and wish to ‘amalgamate’ with him.⁷⁶ Eventually, this wish is granted and he merges with the surrounding environment, therein providing it with a means of animation. Thus, we have a tale that centres on themes of ‘theurgy’, and moreover one in which the forest is increasingly animate in accordance with the stages of this union.

From the outset of the story, we are alerted to the idea of the forest as a sentient and living ‘Entity’.⁷⁷ We join David in his early question: ‘I wonder [...] whether a tree – er – in any lawful meaning of the term, can be alive’.⁷⁸ It is quickly evident that the answer is ‘yes’. Indeed, the tale is explicitly centred on the questioning of what it terms ‘so-called *inanimate* nature’ [my emphasis].⁷⁹ Thus, the tale overall may be seen as firmly ecocentric. Early on, we are given a description of humankind from the *viewpoint of the forest*. ‘Man’, we are told, ‘devastates’ and ‘attacks’⁸⁰ the natural world without reason and it is this very destruction that awakens the forest into an animate threat: ‘decay’, we are told, ‘breeds sentiency’,⁸¹ whilst ‘those who take the lives of trees are a race of haunted men’.⁸² The reader, as the narrative progresses, has little choice but to thoroughly dismiss the idea of a ‘passive’⁸³ Nature. Such thinking is reflected in the subtle, but deliberate choice to move from descriptions of the ‘forest’ to evocations of the ‘Forest’, therein construing this landscape in terms of the Divine, capitalised in accordance with the Christian ‘God’.

⁷⁵ Algernon Blackwood, ‘The Man Whom the Trees Loved’, *Pan’s Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), p. 27.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁸³ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

It is through the character of Sanderson that David begins truly to see the woods as alive and is drawn to desire a 'theurgy' with them. Indeed, Sanderson serves as the forest's procurer in what might be seen as its seduction of Mr Bittacy. Sanderson insists, in no uncertain terms, that the woods are thoroughly 'living'⁸⁴ – and his very conviction seems to underline, emphasise, and even awaken this fact. Early on, as he speaks to the couple of 'forest life',⁸⁵ Mrs Bittacy sees from her cottage a vague outline in the woods that begins '*moving* towards them across the lawn' [my emphasis].⁸⁶ Later on, she describes this vague threat as 'The Personality of the Forest', which she concludes is inherently 'menacing'.⁸⁷ Hysterically, she accuses Sanderson: '*It's* come at last! And it's *you* that brought it!'.⁸⁸ Indeed, his presence and influence seems quite literally to animate 'something' in the woods, which is then able to journey towards the Bittacy's cottage. Sophia knows, instinctively, that this 'something awful', which 'comes creeping out of the surrounding woods', is coming for her husband.⁸⁹ Initially, this vague threat is unable to traverse the full length of the lawn, as there is an isolated and 'civilised' cedar tree that exists to 'protect' them.⁹⁰ However, the cedar tree is ultimately destroyed and the 'terrible' and 'hostile' woods win out.⁹¹ It is uncertain throughout as to whether Sanderson is in fact entirely human. He is described as 'wild'⁹² and as smelling always of earth,⁹³ and there is even a vague intimation that he has 'carnal' knowledge of the woodland.⁹⁴ It is he who tells David that the woods 'love' and wish to 'amalgamate' with him.⁹⁵

⁸⁴ Blackwood, 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved', p.27.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 70.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 34. My emphasis.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 79.

⁹² Ibid., p. 46.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁴ When speaking in front of Sophia, Mr. Sanderson embarrassedly uses what seems to be a euphemism: "I never *know* a tree", he said, and bowed here slightly towards the lady as though to apologise for something he felt she would not understand or like, "until I've seen it in the night". Sourced: Blackwood, 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved', p. 20.

⁹⁵ Blackwood, 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved', p. 26.

This, he explains, involves a willing subjugation of sorts, as one is then entirely ‘taken over’ by the forest.⁹⁶ To the men (and maybe even to Blackwood), this invitation to ‘theurgy’ is viewed in positive and spiritual terms. To Mrs Bittacy, however, (and very likely the reader), it is viewed as monstrous. Sarah L. Crosby, in *ISLE*,⁹⁷ has written interestingly on our associations with what she terms the ‘good love’ and ‘bad love’⁹⁸ between humans and Nature. Here, as David must surrender his essence to be consumed by the forest, it falls into the latter definition. As mentioned above, Punter has noted that these unions with Nature in Blackwood’s stories ordinarily require one’s ‘death’⁹⁹ – and certainly, in a sense, David is killed.

In the end, when David finally ‘amalgamates’ with the woods, he becomes a frightening and alien presence in the home. He is merely an ‘empty shell’: ‘little better than a corpse’.¹⁰⁰ He is fully possessed by the forest, which now is fully animate: using his body as a vessel, it is able to traverse the environment and even the home. He comes to materially resemble the woodland, as Sophia describes ‘the figure of her husband moving among the trees – a man, *like a tree*, walking’.¹⁰¹ This figure, in the guise of David, endeavours to persuade her to submit to the woods. She musters some resistance by evoking the Bible, proclaiming aloud: ‘Resist the Devil and he will flee from you!’¹⁰² Thus, the forest is presented – at least by Mrs Bittacy – as explicitly antichristian and is implicitly aligned with the forces of Hell. Despite the woman’s struggles, the home is overtaken by the wilderness and we are told that ‘the morbid growth possessed her life and held her there’.¹⁰³ In the final image, we see that the cedar tree is utterly destroyed and it is described as ‘a mere remnant of some friendly, splendid vessel that once

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

⁹⁷ Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment. This is the leading journal in contemporary ecocriticism.

⁹⁸ Sara L. Crosby, ‘Beyond Ecophilia: Edgar Allan Poe and the American Tradition of Ecohorror’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)*, Summer 2014, 21 (3), p. 514

⁹⁹ Punter, ‘Algernon Blackwood’, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ Blackwood, ‘The Man Whom the Trees Loved’, p. 89.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 96.

sheltered man'.¹⁰⁴ In this horrifying ending, the one symbol of 'good' or 'friendly' Nature is destroyed, and with its ruin is rendered truly 'passive';¹⁰⁵ meanwhile, the 'menacing [...] Personality of the Forest'¹⁰⁶ is truly, and hideously animate.

These tales from Blackwood each present the forest as sentient, animate, and foreboding. In each, the forest is thoroughly *aware* of human existence and is shown to either seek to destroy it, or to unnervingly merge with it. We are left uncertain as to whether it is more frightening to be divided from Nature and considered its enemy (*The Willows*, 'The Temptation of the Clay'), or to be desired by it, and even 'loved' ('The Transfer', 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved'). The forest's animation in these texts enables it to become a threat to humanity: to consume, in one way or another, those within it. It is resolutely *not* a 'passive resource',¹⁰⁷ but is instead a monstrous, living, and deadly entity.

Blackwood's tales serve as an introduction to some of the themes we encounter when the forest is hideously animate in our fictions. Primarily, they demonstrate the fact that when the forest is shown as frighteningly animate, any ideas of Nature as a 'passive resource'¹⁰⁸ are violently undermined. They illustrate, too, that as 'passive' Nature becomes literally 'animate', we are forced away from an anthropocentric perspective – and towards one that is more *ecocentric*. His stories touch on such themes as Nature's revenge on exploitative humanity, which we examine in both 'The Forest's Revenge: When Nature Gets Nasty' and 'Angry Molesting Trees: The Rape of Nature', whilst themes of a monstrous 'theurgy', or imbrication with Nature, are found in 'Monstrous Mother Natures: The She-Devil in the Wilderness'. I

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁰⁵ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Blackwood, 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved', p. 36.

¹⁰⁷ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

deal, first, with the most ‘obviously’ environmental texts when it comes to the animated wood: those that explicitly illustrate Nature’s revenge.

2.2 The Forest’s Revenge: When Nature Gets Nasty

I examine, here, texts in which animate trees may be seen as embodiments of Nature’s revenge on modern humanity. In these examples we find a reversal of assumed power structures, as it is the environment that now subjugates civilisation – and humanity that exists at Nature’s mercy. The two texts that I have chosen to examine are Jan Švankmajer’s *Otesánek* (‘Little Otík’, or ‘Greedy Guts’) and M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Happening*. I argue that *Otesánek* may be read as a symbolic tale of the forest’s revenge on a negligent humanity. Moreover, I highlight the forest’s animation as a *consuming* threat and the fact that this notion that ‘nature is being gobbled by culture’¹⁰⁹ is here startlingly reversed. Meanwhile, in *The Happening*, we find our most explicitly environmental text of this thesis – so much so that it was originally entitled *The Green Effect*. The film engages so consciously and effectively with ecocritical themes that it is an essential illustration of the argument by Andrew Smith and William Hughes that it is the Gothic that is best situated to capture and express our environmental anxieties.¹¹⁰

Jan Švankmajer’s *Otesánek* enjoys, as Cathryn Vasseleu argues, a ‘cult status’¹¹¹ in the Gothic, whilst Švankmajer’s work more generally has been described by those such as Polona Petek as ‘an exciting discovery’ for the ‘academic imagination’.¹¹² It emerges from a history of Czech surrealism, which dates back to the seventeenth century.¹¹³ In addition, however, with

¹⁰⁹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 263.

¹¹⁰ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 5.

¹¹¹ Cathryn Vasseleu, ‘Tactile Animation: Haptic Devices and the Švankmajer Touch’, *Senses and Society*, Winter 2009, 4 (2), p. 144.

¹¹² Polona Petek, ‘The Death and Rebirth of Surrealism in Bohemia: Local Inflections and Cosmopolitan Aspirations in the Cinema of Jan Švankmajer’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, April 2009, 17 (1), p. 75.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

its dark explorations of humanity and Nature, it may interestingly be read in the context of the ecoGothic. This is a film, I suggest, in which humans have not only exploited and consumed the products of the natural world, but they have usurped the roles of God and Mother Nature – and thus incur Nature’s revenge.

The story is based on the Czech fairy tale ‘Otesánek’, in which a barren couple wish desperately for a child. Their wish is strangely granted, as they soon come across the stump of a tree, which becomes animated to seem like a living child.¹¹⁴ Initially, they are delighted with their find, but soon enough their ward turns monstrous and the tale becomes one of violence and tragedy. In the film, the couple are named Bozena (Veronika Zilková) and Karel (Jan Hartl) – and their deciduous progeny is Little Otík.¹¹⁵ In caring for this unusual infant, they quickly discover its insatiable needs. What it truly craves is human flesh and it grows exponentially after each and every gluttonous feed. Eventually, it devours even its ‘mother’ and ‘father’, until, in the end, it is finally destroyed.

From the very beginning of the film, we are presented with disturbingly animate mixtures of humans and Nature. Karel, obsessed with he and his wife’s inability to conceive – to create and ‘animate’ life – imagines babies all around him. As he surveys a market scene, he sees new-born children at various stalls. We see, for example, a fishmonger angling children from the water, who are then wrapped for sale. Exactly *where* these children are seen is significant. Firstly, by imagining infants *inside* these products of Nature, Karel – and the viewer – is forced to see something *living* within them. Moreover, as these children are imagined in place of the fruits and meats that we take from Nature and commonly consume. They are shown, therefore, as interchangeable with Nature’s bounty. This forces us, from the outset,

¹¹⁴ In the film’s production, ‘Otík’ was quite literally various stumps of trees, which were ‘brought to life’ through the medium of stop animation, so ‘Nature’, in a sense, was quite literally animated.

¹¹⁵ Otík is brought to life through a combination of puppetry and stop-animation, with thoroughly uncanny results.

towards a more ecocentric stance, as we question the idea that Nature exists to feed the human. Instead, as we see human children sold as flesh, we realise that we could be just as easily eaten. We are forewarned, therefore, that in this tale, humans exist to feed Nature's voracity.

It is key to examine the origins of the text's arboreal child. Otík is, quite literally, *wished* into existence – he is *animated* by human desires. When first discovered, 'he' is merely an inanimate object. We are told, '*it's just a piece of wood*'. However, as the couple wish so desperately for a child, he is gradually brought to life. We see the transformation from the mere remnants of Nature that has been used as a 'passive resource'¹¹⁶ (the tree stump signifies that a tree has been felled by a human) into an animate and living entity. His 'mother' and 'father' imagine that they have created him themselves – each assuming, respectively, the roles of 'God' and 'Mother Nature'. Karel finds Otík not amidst the untamed wilderness, but buried beneath the suburban garden. He prises Otík from a suggestively yonic hole in the ground in an image that is symbolically reminiscent of birth. As life is brought forth in this garden, we have an analogy for the creation of humanity in The Garden of Eden. This is underlined by the fact that just as Otík is born from the ground, Adam was made from the earth. This image, then, is one in which man is presented as God, and Nature as mankind's creation: existing, wholly, under his dominion. Meanwhile, Božena, too, imagines Otík is her own creation. She simulates a pregnancy so that it will seem that this 'child' is naturally her own. Her simulation is merely one of a multitude of images in the film of unnatural motherhood. In its first few minutes, we see a young girl with a ball beneath her shirt, who seems to be with-child, and an elderly crone with an exaggerated hunchback, which resembles an inverted pregnancy: one is far too young and the other far too old to naturally bear children. We encounter again these 'unnatural mothers' in the characters of Alžbetka (Kristina Adamcová) and Pani Spravcova (Dagmar Stríbrná). Alžbetka is a young girl who lives in the same building as Otík and his 'family' and

¹¹⁶Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

eventually becomes his maternal guardian. Pani, in contrast, is the elderly caretaker of the building. Though she seems to be close to death, she is symbolically linked to Nature and birth. She is always in her garden, planting bulbous cabbages that in themselves recall human gestation. These images of forced and unnatural motherhood are significant because they are reflections of the unnatural usurpation of Mother Nature's role. Indeed, what is in fact seemingly 'created' by Karel and Bozena, as they assume these roles, is significantly monstrous. Though he is born of the garden and of human desires – from cultivated Nature and anthropocentric need – he does not serve, but destroys humanity, and is a symbol of Nature's chaos.



Fig. 2.3, sketch design of Little Otík (2000).

In appearance, Otík is quite clearly a tree stump, yet in his movements and sounds he resembles the human child (*figures 2.1 and 2.3*). He is animated, therefore, through anthropomorphism. It is greatly significant that this metonym of the woods is simultaneously a vulnerable 'child' and yet a monstrous, threatening, and voracious entity. This is indicative of the dualistic nature

of the forest and moreover our complex and contradictory relations to Nature. Seen as a child, he stands for the vulnerability of the natural world and draws attention to *our* duty of care to the surrounding environment. As monster, however, he is the very embodiment of ecophobic dread. The forest is thus shown as both something to be feared and revered, and yet due our protection. And such protection, of course, is from none other than *ourselves*: from humanity's wilful and negligent destruction of Nature. Consequently, Otík may be seen as symbol of vindicated *environmental revenge*. We see this first in the fact that he is animated as result of the couple being *barren* – a word that is as equally associated with sterile land, as it is with human infertility. In a world where 'no true wilderness any longer exists',¹¹⁷ we can read Otík as a symbol of the wildness that we have lost. Our over-sentimentalisation of the natural world can be seen in the fact that the couple imagine Otík will bring them only joy, but instead they are met only with tragedy. In the contemporary climate, it is too late to wish for Nature as paradise: we can only expect Nature's revenge. Moreover, the fact that Otík is a tree stump further underlines his environmental significance, as such an object is visual evidence of humanity's violence to the forest. It is, quite literally, a *severed* tree that has, in a sense, been 'murdered' by civilisation. In one light, then, it is a 'corpse' of the forest that has been frighteningly reanimated. It is significant that in Otík's one orifice – the voracious mouth that devours all – we see, at times, a single *eye*.¹¹⁸ This is strongly suggestive of the fact that his destruction is neither blind nor random: it is in consequence to what he has *seen* – to what *the forest* has seen of humanity's treatment of Nature. His animation and violence, therefore, can

¹¹⁷ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

¹¹⁸ This interestingly also recalls the German aphorism 'Der Wald hat Augen' ('The Wood has Eyes'). In addition, it is interesting to note that Otík's more 'human' parts – his eye, his teeth, his tongue – were actually parts of dead animals, placed inside the puppet and used for stop-animation. The animation of dead meat is not only repulsive, but arguably indicative of one of our greatest causes of environmental crisis, which is the meat industry. Here, as we literally have the mouth of an animal consuming humanity, it is easy to read into this a poetic revenge.

certainly be read in terms of the forest's revenge and so he stands as an environmental *warning*. He is an example, indeed, Smith and Hughes' 'dystopian ecological vision'.¹¹⁹

The characteristic of Otík that most obviously signifies our fears of the forest is his unrestrained voracity. As already discussed, when the forest is viewed as a Gothic setting, it is frequently feared as a *consuming* threat. Otík, with his monstrous appetite, is the very embodiment of such anxieties.¹²⁰ The subject of gluttonous eating is not confined in the film to our eponymous monster. Rather, his edacious habits are juxtaposed throughout with vulgar scenes of human ingestion. We are encouraged, therefore, to visually link Otík's dangerous hunger with *human* greed. He is a projection and reflection of our capitalistic and consuming desires, which have led us into environmental crisis. Those in the film that are eaten by Otík are described by the police as 'missing persons'. As far as society is concerned, they have simply disappeared. Otík's voracity, therefore, may also stand for our fears of being *lost* in the forest. Indeed, as his victims vanish from sight and into his belly, this is horribly literalised. With each meal, Otík becomes increasingly enormous. Instead of the usual equation of expanding civilisation with declining forests, this is here symbolically reversed. As civilisation gradually declines, as Otík consumes its members one by one, this gluttonous symbol of the avenging forest only expands. He is, undoubtedly, a figure of 'chaogony'.¹²¹ This is interesting to consider in light of Peter Barry's argument that 'the ecocentred reading will often focus on themes of entropy'.¹²² Certainly, as an all-consuming and monstrous Nature, Otík epitomises such ideas.

In the end, Otík kills and consumes each of his 'parents'. These two humans, who have each assumed the roles of 'God' and 'Mother Nature', are severely punished. They are

¹¹⁹ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 4.

¹²⁰ It is worthy of note that in one of the English language titles of the film, it is named *Greedy Guts*.

¹²¹ Beal, *Religion and its Monsters*, p. 41.

¹²² Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 260.

consumed by an embodiment of Nature which, contrary to their imaginings, they have neither created nor controlled. Otík, then, in the final moments of the film, is left in the care of the young Alzbetka. The girl warns him to eat only the food that she brings him – and to avoid, under any circumstances, the cabbages in Pani’s garden. Inevitably, once alone, he succumbs to his temptation, and is killed by the crone for his transgression. This is an intriguing end, as in a sense it recalls the story of Eden. In place of the infamous forbidden fruit that led to humanity’s disgrace, we have here instead the ‘forbidden vegetable’ that leads to Otík’s demise. His offence, therefore, firmly recalls *human* transgression. In spite of the chaos and violence that he has caused, his death is nonetheless presented as something of a tragedy. Untamed Nature is certainly slain and order is restored – but we do not have the sense that this is truly a ‘happy ending’. With his death, the denouement is seemingly quite conservative and his role as an ecological warning can seem undermined. However, I would here draw on some of the writings of Stacey Alaimo on the subject of our fictions of ecological revenge. She contends that in many horror texts that depict what she calls ‘monstrous natures’,¹²³ the chaos and dangers of the natural environment are eventually subdued. Yet this does not, she insists, ultimately detract from the films’ environmental themes. The impact of what she calls the ‘muddled middles’,¹²⁴ wherein we see Nature as vengeful and frightening, continues to haunt us. The sudden ‘happy endings’ imposed on these stories of Nature’s revenge are unlikely to be convincing. In an age of anthropogenic ecological crisis, we know that our own environmental monsters inevitably await us.

M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Happening* is another text that plays extensively with our fears of the animated forest’s revenge. Of all the texts examined in this thesis, this is the most

¹²³Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p. 279.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 294.

explicitly and self-consciously environmental. Originally entitled *The Green Effect*,¹²⁵ it actively seeks to be seen as an ‘ecological force’¹²⁶ indeed. It serves as an example, as Susan J. Tyburski argues, of how ‘Gothic tropes have changed to include ecocritical concerns’¹²⁷ and is an important example in popular culture of the forest as animate evil. It is the only environmental apocalypse narrative that I examine in detail, the reason for this being that such texts comprise a sizeable subgenre in themselves and are rarely centred on the forest specifically. Here, however, we have a text in which it is quite literally the trees that turn against humanity. The story, in essence, is one in which humankind’s destruction of the environment is avenged by the trees. They target first the Americans, killing them in their thousands, in what is revealed as an extreme environmental warning. This warning, however, is ultimately unheeded and so the film ends with the implication that the trees will continue to harm human civilisation, so long as humans continue to engage in environmental destruction. Shyamalan has stated that he was drawn to what he has called ‘this forest theme’ because it underlines the fact that ‘fear is based in the unknown’ and is greatly ‘exacerbated’ when we are placed in environments that we find disorienting.¹²⁸ He has also commented on the fact that the film deliberately and unashamedly undermines Western anthropocentrism: ‘I am not telling the people the story they want to hear’, he says, which is ‘that the human is master over all, that humans are divine, always correct, and always right’.¹²⁹ Instead, he presents us with a firmly ecocentric tale in which we have no choice but to acknowledge that we are an injurious threat to the natural world – which is thoroughly *alive*.

¹²⁵ The name was changed so that the audience would be less likely to suspect early on an environmental cause for the terror that unfolds.

¹²⁶ Hubert Zapf, discussed in Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 118.

¹²⁷ Susan J. Tyburski, ‘A Gothic Apocalypse: Encountering the Monstrous in American Cinema’, *EcoGothic*, eds Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 147.

¹²⁸ Special features. *The Happening*. Dir. M. Night Shyamalan. 20th Century Fox, 2008.

¹²⁹ M. Night Shyamalan, quoted in Antonio Sánchez-Escalonilla, ‘Hollywood and the Rhetoric of Panic: The Popular Genres of Action and Fantasy in the Wake of the 9/11 Attacks’, *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 2010, 8 (1), p. 19.

Vera Norwood describes Deep Ecology – one of the more extreme areas in ecocriticism, discussed in Chapter One – as a ‘philosophical movement relying on ecology to argue for an extension of moral consideration to the whole biotic community’.¹³⁰ It is deeply critical, she continues, of Western anthropocentrism.¹³¹ Certainly, *The Happening* can be seen to align with such philosophy. As Nature is cast as a global threat, sentient and aware of its destruction of humanity, the film might as well be named *Gaia: The Horror Movie*. Indeed, as Tyburski contends, it is ‘a manifestation of eco-anxiety of epic proportions’.¹³² As Nature turns on humankind, murdering so many of them, it is shown as in accordance with the extremist ‘demands’ of Deep Ecology, as it provides the necessary but severe ‘mass reduction in the human population’.¹³³

The opening credits of the film are played over the sounds of the wind and images of the sky, which is filled with tempestuous clouds: all that we see and hear is entirely natural, and yet ominous in tone. In the first scene, which begins in Central Park in New York, we see dozens of humans, at first acting quite normally, until suddenly they each proceed to take their own lives. We are given no explanation, and are shown only lingering shots of the trees in the park – the city’s pale imitation of the perilous forest. It transpires that across America the trees have turned on humankind, controlling those in close proximity and forcing them into suicide. The trees, therefore, become an animate threat by animating *the human*. The humans its targets become mere puppets to be controlled by the will of the trees, as *they* are the ones now rendered ‘passive’.¹³⁴ The fact that the humans are killed by seeming acts of suicide is greatly significant within an ecocritical context. We have a striking and violent literalisation of the fact that by

¹³⁰ Vera Norwood, *Made from this Earth: American Women and Nature* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), p. 268.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Tyburski, ‘A Gothic Apocalypse’, p. 148.

¹³³ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 24.

¹³⁴ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

harming our environment, we are only harming ourselves. This is accordance with Val Plumwood's contention that the continued 'dominance of "rational" man' leads us 'ultimately to produce the most irrational of results: the extinction of our species along with many others'.¹³⁵ This plays in, too, with the paradox of our idealisation of Nature as defined by human absence. As Cronon argues, 'if we take to the logical extreme the paradox that was built into wilderness from the beginning', that 'nature dies because we enter it, then the only way to save nature is to kill ourselves'.¹³⁶ 'The absurdity of this proposition', he continues, 'flows from the underlying dualism that it expresses'.¹³⁷ In addition, these images of mass suicide can be read as an extremist reflection of 'the numbing despair, the creeping mental paralysis, and the sense of impotence and rage'¹³⁸ that arguably accompany an age of so-called mythoclasm and diminished Nature.¹³⁹

The opening scene of violence is quickly juxtaposed with one of a classroom: the subtle implication is that we have just witnessed a *lesson*. The teacher, a man named Elliot (Mark Wahlberg), is the film's protagonist. A devoted teacher of natural science, he is a symbol of rationality and order amidst Nature's seeming chaos that comes to surround him. In the lesson we witness, Elliot discusses with his students various environmental issues. He asks them to deliberate over the possible reasons behind the gradual disappearance of the common bee, and in the background we see a quote from Albert Einstein: 'if the bee dropped off the surface of the Earth, then man would have only four years of life left'. In addition to being suitably portentous, this idea firmly undermines human autonomy and instead underscores our essential status as ecologically and biologically dependent organisms. The students in the class are in

¹³⁵ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 7.

¹³⁶ Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, p. 83.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 128.

¹³⁹ Suicide in reality is a frighteningly common occurrence. In 2009, it was estimated that 800,000 to a million people commit suicide each year, making it the 10th leading cause of death worldwide. Sourced: 'Suicide in the World', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 3 (9), pp.760-771.

the main disinterested, focusing instead on their own personal vanities, thus illustrating much of Western culture's attitudes towards environmental crisis. 'You *must* have a respectful awe', Elliot warns his class, 'for the laws of Nature': we are told from the outset this film's ecocritical moral.

The suicides increase grotesquely across the country, and we are presented with gruesome images of the many victims. One that is particularly striking is dozens of men who have hanged themselves from the very trees that have killed them. Interestingly, Murray Pomerance describes them as hanging from the trees like 'evil fruit';¹⁴⁰ perhaps this is our instance of a perverted Eden, as humankind *itself* becomes what is forbidden – we are shown, as Antonio Sánchez-Escalonilla contends, as 'the most dangerous species'¹⁴¹ to the planet. With the multitude of deaths, it is initially assumed that America is in the midst of a terrorist attack,¹⁴² before it is gradually realised, as Sánchez-Escalonilla asserts, that the terror reaches 'such bioecocritical proportions as to be beyond political considerations'.¹⁴³ The crisis is initially discussed only in elusive terms – 'there appears to be an event happening' – therein underlining the vagueness of environmental dread. It takes some time before we have the quiet suggestion from a horticulturalist, 'what if it's the trees?' He argues the existence of vegetable sentience,¹⁴⁴ insisting that 'plants target specific threats'. We return to ideas from those such as William G. Mosely, who argue that humans are essentially a 'disease' that has 'infected'¹⁴⁵ the Earth. We are led to the question asked explicitly in the environmental film *The Last Winter*

¹⁴⁰ Murray Pomerance, 'Whatever is Happening to M. Night Shyamalan: meditation on the "Infection" Film', *Critical Approaches to the Films of M. Night Shyamalan: Spoiler Warnings*, ed. in Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (New York: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2010), p. 217.

¹⁴¹ Sánchez-Escalonilla, 'Hollywood and the Rhetoric of Panic', p. 19.

¹⁴² Indeed, the majority of criticism that has been written on this film highlights it as post 9-11 text. See for example Sánchez-Escalonilla, 'Hollywood and the Rhetoric of Panic', 2010.

¹⁴³ Sánchez-Escalonilla, 'Hollywood and the Rhetoric of Panic', p. 19.

¹⁴⁴ This is based, to a degree, within scientific fact, as some studies have shown plants as 'autonomous, perceptive' and 'intelligent'. Sourced: Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ William G. Mosely, David A. Lanegran, and Kavita Pundit, eds, *The Introductory Reader in Human Geography: Contemporary Debates and Classic Writings*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p. 167.

(2006): ‘Why wouldn’t the wilderness fight us, like any organism would fend off a virus?’¹⁴⁶ Such ideas are first met with widespread and even slightly amused incredulity. These reactions demonstrate our tendency to view trees as ‘background’¹⁴⁷ and our propensity towards ‘plant-blindness’,¹⁴⁸ as the humans here are unable to see the threats that surround them. Those that *do* survive in the film quickly assume an intense ecophobia: they learn, as Tyburski argues, ‘to fear every green thing’¹⁴⁹ within their sights. In short, they learn to view Nature *not* as a ‘passive resource’,¹⁵⁰ but as an animate threat.

Those who survive the initial attacks flee from the city and towards the wilderness. They assume it will provide a sanctuary, but of course it is shown as more dangerous still. There is the sense, as crowds of humans ‘escape’ the cities, that they are in fact being *herded* towards the forest – and this is only emphasised as all transport breaks down at the edge of the woods. With humans herded like prey, the perspective is necessarily more ecocentric, as humans are cast in the role that we more ordinarily reserve for the animals.¹⁵¹ Most are killed and we are left with the film’s three protagonists: Elliot, his wife Alma (Zooey Deschanel), and a little girl named Jess (Ashlyn Sanchez). They wander the woods until they find a small cottage – and here there is an interesting shift in tone. Now inside the woods, the trees’ dangers become all the more elaborate. Here, they are entwined with fears of the *fairy tale* forest, as the cottage is owned by an elderly woman who evokes the witch from ‘Hansel and Gretel’. Much like the witch, the crone initially provides her guests with food and shelter, but soon turns ugly and tries to kill them. After sharing a meal, the young girl reaches for seconds and is suddenly

¹⁴⁶ *The Last Winter*. Dir. Larry Fessenden. IFC Films, 2007.

¹⁴⁷ Marder, *Plant Thinking*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁸ J. H. Wandersee and E. E. Schlusser, ‘Toward a Theory of Plant Blindness’, *Plant Science Bulletin*, 2001, 47 (1), p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ Tyburski, ‘A Gothic Apocalypse’, p. 148

¹⁵⁰ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ We might think, for example, of the herding of animals in abattoirs towards their deaths: a monstrous practice that so many of us financially endorse.

struck by the crone, who rebukes her with the words ‘Don’t touch things that don’t belong to you!’ The admonition draws attention to the fact that ‘Hansel and Gretel’ is, amongst other things, a cautionary tale against the dangers of greed. The siblings do not question to whom the cottage belongs, but gorge themselves happily on its very foundations. It is significant that several critical readings of the story have seen the cottage as an analogy for the ‘good’ mother (whilst the witch is the ‘bad’) consumed greedily by her voracious children. A parallel, then, can be drawn with the idea of Mother Nature, who is greedily exploited by her human ‘children’. In the film, Nature collectively has turned vengeful on humanity, and so it is fitting that ‘she’ is associated with the ‘bad’ and threatening mother, in the figure of the witch. Indeed, the crone can be read as a sort of temporary embodiment of the furious landscape. Though she may seem simplistically ‘mad’, her ravings are significant. She complains bitterly that ‘gardens don’t grow the way they should’, commenting perhaps on our ‘unnatural’ cultivation of the natural world and our destruction of Eden. Convinced that society intends her harm, she proclaims: ‘The world don’t care about me; I don’t care about it’. ‘Mother Nature’, it seems, is washing her hands of her ungrateful children. Unlike everyone else that we witness, the crone is not possessed to inflict self-harm, but is animated by the woods precisely in order to harm others: a choice that only makes sense if we see her as in league with the environment. When she is outside, the protagonists trap themselves deliberately within the walls of the cottage, trusting that ‘place’ will protect them from ‘space’. However, the crone soon returns and attacks the cottage, smashing its windows and destroying the boundaries between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. Interestingly, the original fairy tale is here somewhat reversed, as the protagonists are those within the cottage, whilst the ‘witch’ is placed in the role of the children: she is outside, destroying the home. The cottage in the woods is the symbol of society’s existence in Nature and here we are shown just how fragile it really is.

In the end, the protagonists manage to outlast the danger. The trees, all of a sudden, relinquish their hold on humanity and we are shown society returning to some form of ‘normality’ – though, in accordance with the extremist ideals of Deep Ecology, the population is significantly reduced. In a televised interview, we see a scientist being questioned about the events we have witnessed. He declares that humanity has experienced a deliberate attack from a sentient and moreover *reactive* Nature. The violence was merely a ‘prelude’, he says, a ‘warning’ that he insists we must heed. In accordance with Hall’s contention that ‘most people aware that human beings are harming nature’,¹⁵² the scientist declares: ‘We have become a threat to this planet – and I don’t think anyone will argue with that’. Nonetheless, the scientist is met with some scepticism. The interviewer suggests that these theories cannot be credited, as the disaster is too isolated: if it occurred, he says, ‘in even one other place, then we could all believe’. It is evident, then, that even following an attack by the trees, Nature is still construed in *passive* terms. Most humans, we are here told, cannot ‘believe’ that the trees themselves were consciously instigating and animating human destruction. In the end, however, we have a strong intimation that the scientist’s theory will gain its credence. We see, in the final scene, a park in Paris: its trees begin to rustle ominously in the wind and the audience knows that it is ‘*happening*’ again. It is no accident that the two places of attack are America and Europe, in accordance with the criticisms of deep ecology that it is the anthropocentrism of the Western world that is largely to blame for environmental issues.¹⁵³ This ‘twist’ of the denouement, which deprives us of our ‘happy ending’, is significant as it goes against David Ingram’s observation that Hollywood’s more ‘environmental’ films tend to be guilty of what he terms ‘greenwashing’:¹⁵⁴ oversimplifying the causes and solutions of environmental crisis. Whilst in Shyamalan’s vision these may still remain quite vague, we are left with no sense of a naïve, or

¹⁵² Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 1.

¹⁵³ Norwood, *Made from this Earth*, p. 268.

¹⁵⁴ David Ingram, *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 14.

simplistic solution. Moreover, it is important, too, that we have no real ‘monsters’ and that it is the environment as a whole that is the predominant threat in this text. As Greg Myers has argued, when we create clear ‘monsters’ to stand for environmental crisis, then ‘environmental wrongdoing is removed from everyday actions’: ‘our complicity in environmental degradation is conveniently denied’.¹⁵⁵ This is certainly not the case here and this is underlined by the pointed title of the film. Placing us firmly in the present tense, we are forced to acknowledge the fact that environmental degradation is *happening* right now. We are forced to contemplate the fact that we have already been issued a multitude of warnings surrounding its dangers – which, at our own peril, we continue to ignore.

In these two Gothic texts, we see illustrations indeed of ‘environmental anxieties’.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, in each, the forest is rendered as frightening because it is an animate and consuming entity. It threatens to destroy humankind and to overtake and reclaim the areas ‘belonging’ to human civilisation. Thus, in accordance with Barry’s understanding of many texts that are suitable for ecocritical analyses, both *Otesánek* and *The Happening* engage with themes of entropy.¹⁵⁷ Whilst Little Otík is ultimately subdued, the text is nonetheless disquieting. We suspect, as is made explicit in *The Happening*, that humans deserve Nature’s retribution. It is for this reason that these animate forests are so unnerving.

In the following section, I expound on the motivations behind Nature’s revenge against humankind. I discuss specifically what Carolyn Merchant has termed humanity’s ‘rape of nature’. I discuss here the animate forest as a *reversal* of such violence, which transposes it instead onto human victims. This serves as an introduction to the final section, which examines

¹⁵⁵ Greg Myers, “‘The Power is Yours’: Agency and Plot in *Captain Planet*”, in *In Front of the Children: Entertainment and Young Audiences*, eds Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), p. 73.

¹⁵⁶ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 260.

texts in which the exploitation of women and Nature are firmly aligned and the two become monstrous allies.

2.3 ‘Angry Molesting Trees’: The Rape of Nature

‘We’re gonna rape this goddamned landscape, we’re gonna rape it’.

— *Deliverance* (1972).¹⁵⁸

In Chapter Four we will come to examine Drew Goddard’s film *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012), a text that has been described by Rick McDonald as a conscious examination of ‘the traditional story of “horror in the woods”’.¹⁵⁹ I mention it here because it provides a list of Gothic monsters and tropes that have entered into popular culture, and significantly includes what it terms the ‘Angry Molesting Tree’. I will borrow this title in order to discuss this construct. The adjectives use are important: ‘angry’ suggests the motivation of revenge, whilst ‘molesting’ brings us to the idea of *sexual* exploitation. This is significant within an ecocritical context, as humankind’s exploitation of the natural world has been viewed, on many occasions, in these terms. Annette Kolodny argues that we have a history of seeing the wilderness as an ‘*object* for the projection of Euro-American fantasies of erotic discovery or *rape*’ [my emphasis].¹⁶⁰ Those such as Carolyn Merchant have explicitly termed our depredation of the natural world ‘the rape of nature’.¹⁶¹ This analogy is quite common. We have those such as Phillip Sherrard, who have deemed ‘the rape of nature’ a synonym for ‘ecological crisis’, whilst in mainstream cinema we have lines such as this one from *Jurassic Park* (1993): ‘what you

¹⁵⁸ *Deliverance*. Dir. John Boorman. USA. Warner Brothers: 1972. Film.

¹⁵⁹ Rick McDonald, ‘Sacred Violence and *The Cabin in the Woods*’, in *Slayage: The Journal of the Joss Whedon Studies Association*, Fall 2013, 10 (2), p. 4.

¹⁶⁰ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontier, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 8.

¹⁶¹ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, p. 96.

call discovery, I call the rape of the natural world'.¹⁶² It is important, in the context of this chapter, to note that when we talk about the 'rape' of Nature, we (consciously or unconsciously) imply that it is *alive*. In the legal definition of rape, it is stated that the victim is always 'a member of the human species', and so by casting Nature in this role of victim, we come to view it, to an extent, in human, or at least 'living' terms.¹⁶³ Consequently, it becomes something that is unwillingly *passive*: it is *forced* into its role as a 'passive resource'.¹⁶⁴ There is then the assumption, on one hand, that it 'cannot' fight back; yet, simultaneously, this narrative is suggestive of a merited revenge – and this brings us to this construct of the 'Angry Molesting Tree'.

This 'figure' of the 'Angry Molesting Tree' is decidedly and threateningly *animate*. It strongly contests Alaimo's assertion that 'landscapes, unlike monsters [...] neither chase nor devour us'.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, as it preys on human victims, it is humankind that is now forced into a position of *passive* vulnerability. The idea of trees as molesting threats is one that is suggested in texts such as Walt Disney's *Snow White* (1937). Here, the notion that when traversing the forest it can seem like we are caught in its 'clutches' is memorably and horribly literalised. The image of the woman, Snow White, so vulnerable amidst this violently tactile setting is suggestive of molestation (*figures 2.4 and 2.5*). In the Gothic, the forest is an environment we associate already with sexual violence: Tom J. Hillard contends that it is a setting in which we fear 'violence or rape', whilst Harrison insists that here 'love' gives way to 'violence'.¹⁶⁶ Whilst several texts play with such ideas of the rapacious forest, there is one that is undoubtedly the

¹⁶² Phillip Sherrard, 'The Rape of Nature', <http://www.stpaulsirvine.org/The%20Rape%20of%20Nature.pdf>. Accessed 20/08/15; *Jurassic Park*. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal Pictures: 1993.

¹⁶³ Sourced: <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/rape>.

¹⁶⁴ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p. 283.

¹⁶⁶ Hillard, 'From Salem witch to *Blair Witch*: the Puritan influence on American Gothic nature', p. 110; Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation*, p. 89.

most infamous.¹⁶⁷ The classic example of the ‘Angry Molesting Tree’ (and no doubt Goddard’s inspiration) is to be found in Sam Raimi’s *Evil Dead* franchise (1981-) and consequently is here my focus.



Fig. 2.4 and 2.5. The Haunted Forest in Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937).

The cult franchise of the *Evil Dead* currently includes three films (1981, 1987 and 1993), a stage musical (2003), various video games (1984-2005), a recent cinematic remake (2013), and now an upcoming television series (2015-). The original film from 1981 has been heralded a classic example of “‘horror in the woods’”.¹⁶⁸ Erik Piepenburg argues that it is ‘a

¹⁶⁷ When discussing the rape of, or by, the wilderness in our horror fictions, it is likely that John Boorman’s *Deliverance* (1972) is called to mind. Early on in the film one of the lead characters discusses humankind’s treatment of Nature in explicitly sexual terms: ‘we’re gonna rape this goddamned landscape, we’re gonna rape it’. The film follows a group of men from the city who embark on a journey by boat through the backwoods of America. They are overwhelmed by the wilderness and towards the end of the text one of the men is raped by a local ‘mountain man’. It has been noted by David Ingram that the film brings firmly into question humankind’s assumed dominion over Nature and that ‘Nature’s revenge’ is made manifest ‘through the mountain men’. It is not explicitly the wilderness, therefore, but such themes are certainly symbolically manifest. A film in which we encounter a literal ‘Angry Molesting Tree’ is in Freddie Francis’ *Tales That Witness Madness* (1973). In this portmanteau horror film, there is one tale which centres on such arboreal menace. It follows the story of a young couple soon after the husband (Michael Jayston) decides to bring a hewn tree into the family home. The tree is distinctly anthropomorphic and is quickly viewed by the woman (Joan Collins) as a sexual rival. The woman describes the tree as ‘dirty’ and ‘unnatural’ and strikes it until it *bleeds*. Though it is initially inanimate, the image of blood is indicative of it as a living and human-like form. The tree then becomes fully animate and enacts its vengeance through its sexual violation of the woman. Though this ‘Angry Molesting Tree’ is not in the forest and in fact is taken from a country lane, it is nonetheless thematically evocative of the forest as a sexually threatening space. Sourced: *Deliverance*; David Ingram, *Green Screen*, p. 36; *Tales That Witness Madness*. Dir. Freddie Francis. UK. Paramount: 1973. Film.

¹⁶⁸ McDonald, ‘Sacred Violence and *The Cabin in the Woods*’, p. 4.

prototype of the supernatural backwoods horror film'.¹⁶⁹ 'In the years since its release', writes Chris Nasawaty, this 'cabin-in-the-woods cheapie [...] has been elevated to the realm of myth'.¹⁷⁰ In terms of its depiction of the monstrous forest, its resounding legacy is what *The Hollywood Reporter* has termed 'that infamous tree rape' [original emphasis].¹⁷¹ Indeed, it might be seen as *the* classic reversal in horror of 'the rape of nature'. Consequently, these themes within it are my main focus. I concentrate predominantly on 'that infamous tree rape' from Raimi's 1981 film and compare it to the revision of this scene in Fede Alvarez's 2013 remake.

The essential premise of *The Evil Dead* (1981) remains in *Evil Dead* (2013). In each, a group of young adults head into the woods, in order to stay in an isolated cabin.¹⁷² The motivations for this visit, however, are different in each film. In the first, the cabin is desired as a recreational paradise, whilst in the second it is used as a site of isolation to aid a woman in her recovery from a heroin addiction. Whether it is as a space of leisure or a site of healing, the forest is expected in both films to serve some 'special function' for humankind.¹⁷³ In the original and the remake, the adults find a cursed grimoire hidden in the cabin. They read from it aloud and in doing so they accidentally awaken 'something' in the forest which is a force of malevolence. One by one, they are overtaken by its mysterious influence, becoming monstrous creatures that are known as 'Deadites'. In each film, only one character ultimately survives. In the original, this is Ash (Bruce Campbell), who is now synonymous with the series. In the remake, we have – in what Kim Newman has called the 'twist' of the film – a female

¹⁶⁹ Erik Piepenburg, 'New Ugliness in a Little Cabin of Horrors', in *The New York Times*, 27.03.2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/31/movies/the-evil-dead-is-reimagined.html?_r=0. Accessed 01.11.13

¹⁷⁰ Chris Nasawaty, 'Evil Dead', *Entertainment Weekly*, 4.12.2013, Issue 1254, p. 52. Accessed 02.02.2014.

¹⁷¹ J. D., 'Evil Dead: Film 2013', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 3.22.2013, Issue 11, p. 85. Accessed 02.02.14.

¹⁷² The motivations, however, are very different in each. In the first film, the stay is purely recreational, whilst in the remake its purpose is to aid one of the adults in a recovery from a heroin addiction. Nonetheless, whether it is used as a site of leisure or healing, in both the forest is expected, in line with Barry's view of our treatment of the wilderness, to serve a 'special function'. Sourced: Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257

¹⁷³ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

protagonist named Mia (Jane Levy).¹⁷⁴ In both films, the malevolence in the woods manifests not only in the possessed Deadites, but in ‘*the woods themselves*’: the very environment becomes hideously, and sexually animated.¹⁷⁵

In each of the films, the forest is foregrounded from the very outset. The original film begins with a magnified image of the floor of the forest – what may be seen as a visual invitation to look more closely at this environment. We see bubbling swamps and trees stirring in the wind which are suggestive, in hindsight, of the forest awakening as its intruders draw near. The remake begins, instead, *in medias res*, with a young woman being chased through the woods. Here, the setting is explicitly and immediately announced as a site of terror. In each of the films, the forest is cast as a distinctly Gothic space and aligns with the ‘Seven Theses’, as outlined in Chapter One. The idea that civilisation is defined as *against* the woods is embodied in the now stereotypical image of the cabin in the woods. The cabin serves as a metonym for civilisation and its isolation is indicative of its vulnerability amidst the natural world. Indeed, in both films we see the classic overhead shots which reveal the seemingly infinite expanses of the forest and the comparable insignificance of the manmade structures within it.¹⁷⁶ Fears of a ‘return of the *past*’ are embodied in the fact that the cursed and ancient grimoire awakens something *primeval* in the woods, which must then be survived as the setting becomes one of *trial* [my emphasis].¹⁷⁷ The idea of being *lost* in the woods is announced in the very first line of the original film: ‘where are we?’.¹⁷⁸ The theme of consumption in the woods is symbolically

¹⁷⁴ Kim Newman, ‘Evil Dead’, *Sight and Sound*, May 2013, 23 (5), p. 91.

¹⁷⁵ *The Evil Dead*. Dir. Sam Raimi. USA. New Line Cinema, 1981. Film.

¹⁷⁶ John Urry has argued that such overhead views of Nature embody what he calls ‘the tourist gaze’. This gaze, according to David Ingram, promotes a ‘detachment’ from and ‘commodification’ of Nature. I would suggest, however, that in the context of the Gothic this view does not underline our dominion over Nature, but our vulnerability within it. Sourced: John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1992), p. 98; David Ingram, *Greenscreen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), p. 26.

¹⁷⁷ Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith, eds., *Modern Gothic: A Reader*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 94.

¹⁷⁸ *The Evil Dead*.

manifest in the women's violation: they are used and exploited by the forest's frightening sexual appetite. Themes of psychoanalysis may be found in the conversion of humans into Deadites, as the setting quite literally *changes* those within it, awakening the darkest and basest instincts in humanity. In addition, the forest is shown as an antichristian space: in the original, we see red light beneath the surface of the woods, visually indicative of Hell, and in the remake such ideas are made much more explicit. The 'something' that is awoken is overtly satanic, underlining the idea we will see again and again that the wilderness is the Devil's domain.

Though the inherent vagueness of ecophobia is firmly expressed in the films – '*it's coming*', '*there's something out there*', etc. – the scenes of molestation present us with two of the crudest examples in popular culture of the perilous forest.¹⁷⁹ In each, we see women sexually violated by the woods in harrowing scenes that force the viewer to witness 'the rape of nature' strikingly reversed. In the first film, the victim is named Cheryl (Ellen Sandweiss) and is a subsidiary character; in the remake, the victim is our protagonist, Mia. In these scenes, the *forest* is in the role of the molester and the *human* is in the role of passive victim. The viewpoint is literally ecocentric: the camera forces us to see from the perspective of this forest malevolence, as it hunts its victims. It thoroughly defies Alaimo's statement, as here the landscape certainly has 'agency' and is able to 'chase' humans.¹⁸⁰ It lures the women in each of the films from the comparative safety of the cabin (of 'Place') and into the wilderness (into 'Space'). Cheryl and Mia are each called by name by the forest: its malevolence is able, quite literally, to speak to the women. In the subsequent section, which expounds on these themes, we will examine in detail the connections between women and the animate forest. Suzanne L. Roberts has interestingly argued (in an idea we will return to shortly) that even being 'outside and alone as a woman' is in itself 'downright Gothic'.¹⁸¹ Moreover, she suggests that when

¹⁷⁹ Sourced: *The Evil Dead; Evil Dead*. Dir. Fede Alvarez. USA. TriStar Pictures: 2013. Film.

¹⁸⁰ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films', p. 283.

¹⁸¹ Roberts, *The ecoGothic*, p. 6.

women share what she calls a ‘moment’ with Gothic Nature, they will quickly be met with their own demise.¹⁸² Whilst this is true in the original film, this is not the case in the remake. Indeed, there are several very deliberate changes in the recent revision of this infamous scene. These changes, I argue, may be seen to reflect the environmental context of the modern film – that is to say, thirty years beyond the original film, we are more acutely aware of our widespread role in humankind’s ‘rape of nature’.

In the first film’s ‘infamous tree rape’, Cheryl wanders alone into the woods at night. Suddenly, she is chased by something unseen, until she is caught and bound by the animate and snake-light branches of the trees themselves. She is held fast and then penetrated by one of the trees’ appendages. We do not see what she sees, as we are limited, as stated, to the ecocentric viewpoint of the woods. When she returns to the cabin, the friends demand an explanation. She insists that she has been harmed by ‘*the woods themselves!*’, adding ‘The trees! They’re alive!’¹⁸³ We are told explicitly, therefore, of the forest’s animation. Soon after, she becomes one of the infamous Deadites, and is ultimately killed – in line with Roberts’ warning of the woman’s dangerous ‘moment’ with Nature.

Though Cheryl’s violent scene is only a few minutes in length, it has infamously ensured, as Christopher Brown asserts, the film’s reputation as a ‘video nasty’.¹⁸⁴ It was a subject of great controversy, then, as to whether Alvarez would recreate this scene in the remake, but its inclusion was ultimately deemed essential to the story.¹⁸⁵ In his version, the

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ *The Evil Dead*.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Video nasties’, in short, are films on video considered to gratuitously violent or pornographic. Sourced: Christopher A. Brown, *The Video Nasties Moment: Examining the Films behind the Scare* (www.lulu.com, 2014), p. 129.

¹⁸⁵ When it was announced that the scene would be featured in the new film, fans were described as ‘rabid’ in their enthusiastic response. Sourced: Kelsea Stahler discusses the reaction of fans at the 2012 New York Comic Con in ‘*Evil Dead* Remake Softens Tree Rape Scene, but does that Make it Okay?’, <http://www.hollywood.com/news/movies/55006938/evil-dead-tree-rape-scene-remake-vs-original?page=all>. Accessed 12.09.13.

victim is Mia, who unlike Cheryl survives her ordeal and is made the 'Final Girl'.¹⁸⁶ The violence, consequently, is rendered less gratuitous. Once again, we see the woman chased through the woods *by* the woods and are forced by the camera to assume the viewpoint of the ecocentric malice. However, one Mia is caught and bound by the branches, the viewpoint shifts and we now see objectively. Here, we encounter the remake's most significant addition: 'The Abomination'. The Abomination (as it is termed in the script) is a Deadite version, or double of Mia, which threatens throughout the film. It is one of the primary means by which the forest is animated. Here, The Abomination is Mia's assailant. It is intricately bound to the forest environment, as the arboreal phallus stems, quite literally, from its form. This striking and violent imagery of The Abomination inflicting the sexual violence is extremely significant. Firstly, the addition of 'The Abomination' brings with it more explicit intimations that this attack is one by *Mother Nature*. The monstrous appendage which links the two women serves as a symbolic and hellish umbilical cord. This is emphasised by the fact that the molestation occurs in a small and *womblike* enclosure of thorns.¹⁸⁷ She is forced into this space through a tight tunnel of these thorns: we have, visually, a sort of backwards 'birth' through the *vagina dentata*, thus underlining ideas of monstrous maternity.¹⁸⁸ Secondly, it is extremely important that Mia's adversary is not simply 'the woods themselves', but the woods *merged* with her own human image. We have strong themes of the forest as the site of the human unconscious, as she is faced with her darker *self*. This is underlined by the fact that the two 'women' are clothed, contrastingly, in black and white. Most significantly, however, the addition of The

¹⁸⁶ This term was famously coined by Carol J. Clover to denote the archetype of the woman in horror who is the last to survive and ultimately outwits her monstrous adversary. Sourced: Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹⁸⁷ Interestingly, the enclosure of thorns recalls the fairy tale of 'Sleeping Beauty'. In this well-known tale, the eponymous heroine sleeps for many years within an enclosure of thorns until her prince awakens her. When she does awake, it is with-child, suggesting that much more has taken place than 'true love's kiss'. In this light, then, the walls of thorns that surround Mia in this scene are evocative of the fairy tale forest and the dangers it holds of sexual molestation.

¹⁸⁸ The 'toothed' vagina.

Abomination means that the human, *along with the woods*, is cast as monstrous. We see more than ‘the woods themselves’: we see Mia’s own mirror image. Thus, it is not only Mother Nature that inflicts this violence, but it is seemingly Mia too. There is an implicit awareness, therefore, that it is *we* that create the ‘monstrous’ forest: by harming Nature, we only harm ourselves. In this context, we see a similar theme as found in the above analysis of *The Happening*. True to the original, Alvarez gives us an unforgettable image in which humankind’s ‘rape of nature’ is horrifyingly reversed. However, he subtly suggests the monstrosity of modernity: we are now our own despoilers.



Fig. 2.6. The reversed ‘rape of nature’ in *Evil Dead* (2013).

The endings to the two films are significantly different. In each, our hero or heroine is the sole survivor in this classic tale of “‘horror in the woods’”. In *The Evil Dead*, Ash ostensibly defeats the evil of the woods. However, in the very final scene, we see again the viewpoint of the forest malevolence. It rushes violently and suddenly towards Ash, revealing that it has not in fact been destroyed. It ends, therefore, with him still in the woods and very much endangered. The remake’s ending is even more sensational. There is a final showdown between Mia and The Abomination, which results eventually in The Abomination’s demise, as she is sent ‘back

to hell'.¹⁸⁹ In this scene, the sky rains blood as the very elements of Nature are infected with monstrosity. When The Abomination is overcome, the blood rain ceases and the cabin is swallowed into the earth. The forest is shown as a consuming threat indeed. As Mia makes her way out of the woods, the forest is shown suddenly to be quiet and idyllic. It is harmless, it seems, when there are no humans within it. More importantly, it is shown as *inanimate*. We have our 'happy ending' only because the forest *seems* to be passive once again.

The construct of the 'Angry Molesting Tree' reveals the forest as threateningly animate. It reverses humankind's 'rape of nature', as the *human* is forced into the role of passive victim. Consequently, we are forced into an ecocentric viewpoint which reflects back to us our *own* violence towards the natural world. The 'rape of nature' becomes all the more vivid and horrifying when we see it transposed onto human victims. It is impossible, with this construct of the 'Angry Molesting Tree', to view Nature as in any sense 'backgrounded', or to see it merely in terms of a 'passive resource'.¹⁹⁰ Instead, the forest is a thoroughly animate threat that may seek its increasingly warranted revenge.

We have seen in this section that the victims of molestation have been exclusively female. This is in line with Carol Clover's assertion that the victims of sexual violence are *usually* female in our fictions because they are, in her words, 'more naturally enterable'.¹⁹¹ Roberts argues that there is a history of viewing women in terms of mere *objects*.¹⁹² In this way, their treatment may be compared with that of the natural world as a 'passive resource'. This brings us to the subject of ecofeminism, which sets out, as Clark argues, to undermine 'the old reductive identifications of women' with 'idyllic' and 'passive "nature"' [my

¹⁸⁹ *Evil Dead*.

¹⁹⁰ Marder, *Plant Thinking*, p. 3.

¹⁹¹ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, p. 80.

¹⁹² Roberts, p. 197. The critic emphasises here the fact that the woman in the wilderness is rarely historically there as anything more than an object, and mere 'helpmeet' to her husband.

emphasis].¹⁹³ If we return to Roberts' argument that women's experience when alone in the wilderness is 'downright Gothic', this may transition us neatly from this section to the next. In this section, the 'Gothic' experience of the women we have seen has been their victimisation by animate Nature. In the following section, however, we see that the forest *allies* itself, in dark sympathy, with human women. In these texts, the forest *becomes* animate through this connection. We see continuing themes of this idea of the 'rape of nature', as in these following texts we have tales of ecofeminist revenge: women and the woods deliver retribution to an exploitative *mankind*.

2.4 Monstrous Mother Natures: The She-Devil in the Wilderness

He: If you can't tell me *what* you're afraid of, maybe it would be easier for you to tell me *where* you're afraid? Where would you feel most exposed? What would be the worst place...?

She: *The woods.*

He: The woods?

She: The woods, yes.

He: What scares you about the woods? What frightens you... there?

She: *Everything.*

– *Antichrist* (2009).

¹⁹³ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 117.

There are ‘dominant and ancient traditions’, writes Val Plumwood, of ‘connecting men with culture and women with nature’.¹⁹⁴ She terms this binary ‘the reason/nature story’, and insists it is ‘the master story of western culture’¹⁹⁵. Men are aligned with civilisation and order, whilst women are aligned with Nature and chaos. It is little wonder, then, that in our texts that portray the forest as animate, we find several examples in which its animation is firmly bound to a *woman* – and in which such women are literally, and horribly, ‘at one with Nature’. In these texts, we find illustrations of Jack Zipes’ assertion that when we see ‘evil nature’, it is ‘often associated with *female* nature out of control’¹⁹⁶ [my emphasis]. There is a confusion, then, between ecophobic and gynophobic anxieties: something we certainly see when the animate woods are bound to these women. In this section, I examine some of the connections between women and the threateningly animate forest. I begin with a discussion of some of our associations between women and Nature and how these are of relevance in the context of the ecoGothic. I then examine four texts in which the frighteningly animate forest is firmly linked to monstrous women. I look first at William Friedkin’s *The Guardian*, then at Rupert Sanders’ *Snow White and the Huntsman* and Naomi Novik’s *Uprooted*, and finally to Lars von Trier’s *Antichrist*.

‘We have the curious practice’, writes Virginia J. Scharff, ‘of knowing nature through the categories by which we know ourselves’.¹⁹⁷ ‘Humans know nature’, she continues, ‘at least in part, through gender’.¹⁹⁸ In the Western world, if considered in these terms, Nature is typically construed as *female*. ‘Historically’, writes Annette Kolodny, the land ‘carries female connotations’,¹⁹⁹ whilst Plumwood highlights ‘women’s ancient identity as nature’.²⁰⁰ We have

¹⁹⁴ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 11.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 196.

¹⁹⁶ Zipes, quoted in Whitley, *The Idea of Nature*, p. 24.

¹⁹⁷ Virginia J. Scharff, *Seeing Nature through Gender* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), p. xiii.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Annette Kolodny, quoted in Roberts, *The ecoGothic*, p. 12.

²⁰⁰ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 36.

the common construct of *Mother Nature*, which is usually construed as a benevolent, heavenly, and nurturing guardian. However, this image holds its own antithesis, which is frequently encountered in texts where Nature is Gothic. In the words of Alana F. Bondar, when we find ‘unwelcoming’, or ‘evil’ Nature in our horror fictions, it is cast explicitly as ‘the *non-nurturing mother*’²⁰¹ [my emphasis]. In each of the texts below, the women bound to the forests are *themselves* ‘non-nurturing mothers’, therein underlining this connection. When considering the fact that there is such an established cultural connection between women and Nature, it is little wonder that ecocriticism has an entire areas devoted to this subject. This, of course, is ecofeminism. The movement’s defining claim is that ‘the destruction of nature and the historical oppression of women is deeply linked’.²⁰² There are ‘disturbing connections’, writes Vera Norwood, ‘between the domination of women and the domination of nature’, which arguably explain ‘the violent attitudes toward both nature and women in prevailing Western culture’.²⁰³ Timothy Clark, discussing the movement, says that ecofeminism (in accordance with much modern feminism) is concerned with undermining ‘the old reductive identifications of women’ with ‘idyllic’ and ‘*passive “nature”*’²⁰⁴ [my emphasis]. In the texts discussed below, we have women explicitly aligned with *monstrous* and *animate* Natures. Just as the ecoGothic more generally situates the ecological ‘beyond a Wordsworthian tradition’,²⁰⁵ these texts situate women and the forest beyond ideas of their submissive N/natures.

When it comes to our most negative associations between women and Nature, an excellent place to begin is with the story of Eden. This is especially relevant within the context

²⁰¹ Alana F. Bondar, ‘Bodies on earth: exploring sites of the Canadian ecoGothic’, in *EcoGothic*, eds Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 72.

²⁰² Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 111. It is important to note that this association is discussed in a specifically Western context. Writers such as Carol P. McCormack and Marilyn Strathern have written about contrasting views on gender and Nature, citing for example New Guinea, where women are ‘aligned with the cultivated sphere’ and men with the forest and with wildland’. (Sourced: Carol P. McCormack and Marilyn Strathern, ed., *Nature, Culture and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 10).

²⁰³ Norwood, *Made from this Earth*, p. 261.

²⁰⁴ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 117.

²⁰⁵ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 3.

of this work, as the wilderness, as I have argued, is traditionally associated with our expulsion from paradise – and this, after all, is habitually blamed on *woman*. The biblical story presents us with a legacy in which man, as Merchant contends, is a ‘symbol of order’ as the ‘restorer of the garden’, whilst woman ‘is the nature that must be tamed into submission’²⁰⁶ [my emphasis]. It is thus that critics such as Suzanne L. Roberts have asserted that if we are to view Nature in gendered terms, we tend to see ordered Nature as ‘male’ and disordered, or chaotic Nature as ‘female’.²⁰⁷ In accordance with this, Stacey Alaimo argues that in many of our horror texts, we see Nature cast as ‘unruly’ and ‘feminine’, and a ‘masculine’ order restored only once it is ‘slain’.²⁰⁸ Indeed, in each of the varyingly ‘happy’ endings of the texts below, the women who are linked to the animate forests, are killed. Significantly, Eve’s transgression in *The Garden of Eden* is bound to what Roberts has called a ‘moment’²⁰⁹ with Nature (which here takes the forms of the tree, the fruit, and the serpent). Because this ‘moment’ had such famously devastating consequences, Roberts suggests that women have been encouraged to *fear* any intimacy with Nature as ‘improper’, or even ‘dangerous’.²¹⁰ It is fitting, therefore, she continues, that within the Gothic we find again and again that women who share such intimacy with Nature are quickly killed.²¹¹ Carolyn Merchant provides an intriguing analysis of Eve, whom she insists is ‘inherently associated with nature’,²¹² dividing her into two starkly divergent categories. Firstly, we have ‘Virgin Eve’, or ‘Mother Eve’,²¹³ who is linked to the pastoral and the idyllic: in short, to *prelapsarian* Nature. She may be seen to correspond with what Plumwood – parodying the seminal work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979)²¹⁴ –

²⁰⁶ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, pp. 20-21.

²⁰⁷ Roberts, *The ecoGothic*, p. 12.

²⁰⁸ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures’, p. 281.

²⁰⁹ Roberts, *The ecoGothic*, p. 6.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, p. 20.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ Here, Gilbert and Gubar argue that in nineteenth century writing, female characters were presented as either wholly ‘good’ or wholly ‘bad’: they embodied the ‘angel in the house’ or ‘the monster in the house’.

has called ‘the angel in the ecosystem’.²¹⁵ In contrast, we have ‘Fallen Eve’, who is ‘dark and witch-like’ and bound to the ‘disorderly and chaotic’²¹⁶ elements in Nature – and it is with this figure, of course, that my interest lies. Whilst Gilbert and Gubar’s infamous ‘angel in the house’ becomes, for Plumwood, ‘the angel in the ecosystem’,²¹⁷ she provides no environmental counterpart for the equally illustrious ‘monster in the house’. Yet, we encounter this archetype again and again, and so she deserves a name. I choose to call her ‘the she-devil in the wilderness’.

The first example of this figure that I wish to examine is in William Friedkin’s *The Guardian*. This is a text in which we have an explicit alignment between woman and the forest and in which Nature, undeniably, is *not* a ‘passive resource’ – and is animated predominantly through its feminine emissary. The film centres on a woman named Camilla (Jenny Seagrove) and her employment as a nanny to the firstborn child of a newly married couple, Phil (Dwier Brown) and Kate (Carey Lowell), who live in an isolated house beside the woods. It transpires that this seemingly benevolent woman is in fact the ‘guardian’ of a tree within these woods, which feeds on new-born children (*figure 2.7*). She is, we are told, one of the ancient ‘Druids’, who ‘worship’ the forest. This is significant because these pre-Christian Pagans, as Matthew Hall asserts, are generally thought to have vehemently believed that trees are ‘alive’ and ‘fundamentally autonomous’²¹⁸ – a firmly antithetical viewpoint to the idea of Nature as a ‘passive resource’. The woman’s intention, ultimately, is to bring the child into the forest, so that it might be consumed by this living and monstrous tree. In the end, however, she is unsuccessful, as this ‘unruly’ and ‘female’ Nature is ultimately ‘slain’.²¹⁹

Sourced: Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (USA: Yale University Press, 1979).

²¹⁵ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 9.

²¹⁶ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, p. 20.

²¹⁷ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 9.

²¹⁸ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 11.

²¹⁹ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures’, p. 281.

It becomes increasingly explicit, throughout the text, that woman and tree are merged and that she serves as its predominant means of animation. The tree itself, which has been described by S. Biodrowski as a ‘hideous [...] sort of Demon God’,²²⁰ is undoubtedly living and even physically animate. However, it may only harm those in immediate proximity and so is reliant on its ‘guardian’. She may be seen, then, as something of an extension of the woods: enabling an invasion by the ‘outside’ of the forest into the ‘inside’ of the home. To begin with, this invasion is only subtly evident, though we see it – quite literally – within the walls of the house. In the nursery, the mother paints on the walls an elaborate woodland scene. In her creation we see only trees, though gradually, if observing closely, we see that this ‘background’ mutates. It is increasingly filled with yellowed eyes, as the environment becomes menacing. The picture’s transformation undermines not only our deluded ideas of the domestication of Nature, but the idea too that humans may be authors of Nature. This idea of an intrusion from the outside is underlined, too, by her very role as a nanny: she is an ‘unnatural’ mother to the child. This is in accordance with the film’s fairy tale themes – it has been described as a ‘resetting’²²¹ of ‘Hansel and Gretel’²²² – as she assumes the famously ‘unnatural’ role of the ‘wicked *stepmother*’. Much like the stepmothers in ‘Snow White’ and ‘Hansel and Gretel’, who send or abandon the children to be killed in the woods, the woman here goes slightly beyond this as she brings them to be eaten. Both she and the tree are ‘non-nurturing’²²³ ‘mothers’ indeed. She implements the children’s deaths, whilst the tree, which ingests the various infants into its centre, darkly parodies the state of pregnancy. The image is one of Mother Nature who feeds on her own children.

²²⁰ S. Biodrowski, ‘The Story of how William Friedkin got out of his Tree’, *Cinefantastique*, May 1990, 20 (5), p. 12.

²²¹ Quoted in Thomas D. Claggett, *William Friedkin: Films of Aberration, Obsession and Reality* (North Carolina: McFarland and Co., Inc., 1990), p. 259.

²²² The film is not a straightforward retelling of this classic tale, but certainly shares some of its central themes. Most obviously, there is the threat of children being consumed in the woods. Here, however, the part of the cannibalistic witch is substituted by the monstrously voracious tree.

²²³ Bondar, ‘Bodies on earth’, p. 72.

In the midst of the film, we have an important scene in which the woman is shown, indeed, as an extension of the woods. Here, she lies within its branches and seems to merge with its form (*figure 2.8*), as flesh and bark become intermixed. She then bathes in waters beneath it, but is witnessed by a man named Ned (Brad Hall), a local admirer who has followed her into the woods. This scene is reminiscent of the myth of Diana bathing, whilst watched by Actaeon – a voyeurism she punishes by having him transformed into a stag and devoured by his hounds. Clark has noted the ecocritical importance of this myth, suggesting that the reader is significantly forced to experience ‘the animal’s fate as human’.²²⁴ Moreover, I would add that it is particularly poetic that the animals that destroy him are not only his ‘own’, but kill him in the manner of the prey that he has trained them to pursue. The allusion to this myth is underlined by the fact that we learn that Camilla’s former name was Diana, and recall that Camilla in mythology is Diana’s servant. It is further emphasised by the fact that Ned enjoys a similar fate to Actaeon. Whilst he is not transformed into an animal himself, he is nonetheless torn apart and devoured by Nature, as he is consumed by wolves. The evocation of this Ovidian myth as it is replayed returns us to Karen Armstrong’s definition of a myth as something that in a sense happened once, yet happens all the time.



Fig. 2.7. The monstrous tree consumes human infants in The Guardian (1990).

Fig. 2.8. Camilla (Jenny Seagrove) merges with the tree in The Guardian (1990).

²²⁴ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 62.

In the film's finale, the imbrication of woman and forest is again underlined. Here, Nature is doubly confronted, as Phil goes into the woods to attack the 'source', whilst Kate remains in the home for a showdown with Camilla, who animates the forest's violence within the domestic setting. Phil arms himself with a chainsaw, a traditional symbol of the forest's destruction, and is cast in the traditionally 'heroic' role of masculine 'order'²²⁵ in this literalised battle between man and Nature. We have the image again of the tree that bleeds, underlining the idea that it is *alive*. Significantly, as the tree is harmed, so too is Camilla, illustrating their connection. In accordance with the foundations of ecofeminism, we see the woman is simultaneously wounded as the man destroys the natural world. The connection between woman and Nature is further emphasised in this final scene as Camilla seems suddenly to be *made* of wood, thoroughly resembling the tree that she serves. She is the very embodiment of female Nature out of control. Indeed, as she and the tree are simultaneously 'slain',²²⁶ the intimation, indeed, is that order is restored.

Another text in which we return to an ordered Nature once a monstrous woman is destroyed is Rupert Sanders' *Snow White and the Huntsman*. The film, as its title suggests, is based on the classic fairy tale 'Snow White', of which, as Kathi Maio contends, there have been 'near infinite retellings'.²²⁷ The film is a part of what some have termed a 'fairy tale renaissance' in mainstream cinema (*Mirror Mirror* [2012], *Jack the Giant Killer* [2013], *Into the Woods* [2014], *Cinderella* [2015], etc.) This one strays firmly into the Gothic, which is little wonder considering the story of the original tale, which revolves around bitter rivalry, murder, and seeming revivification.²²⁸ It is fitting within the context of the ecoGothic because 'Snow

²²⁵ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, p. 21.

²²⁶ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p. 281.

²²⁷ Kathi Maio, 'Beauty Fades, but Fairy Tales Never Die', *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. Sep/Oct 2012, Volume 123, Issue 3/4, p. 204.

²²⁸ This well-known tale, in short, centres on a vicious rivalry between two women. The unnamed wicked stepmother to Snow White is obsessed with the confirmation from a Magic Mirror that she, undoubtedly, is 'the fairest of them all'. One day, she is informed that Snow White is still more beautiful and so decides she must die. She sends the girl into the woods with a huntsman, who promises to kill her. However, he takes pity

White', in one light, is a tale about being abandoned in the wilderness, and endeavouring to survive it. In Sanders' revision, Snow White (Kristen Stewart) is not a child, but a young woman, who seems a similar age to her infamous adversary, who is here named Ravenna (Charlize Theron). The central rivalry of the tale is here significantly configured in terms of a conflict between 'good' and 'bad' Nature – and more specifically, between the 'good' and 'bad' *forest*. The 'good' forest, here, is termed 'Sanctuary': a name that underlines its formation as the 'antidote' to civilisation; the 'bad' forest, more simply, is termed 'The Dark Forest' (compares *figures 2.9 and 2.10*). Each version of this dualistic setting is assigned a woman: Snow White is thoroughly associated with the 'Sanctuary', whilst 'The Dark Forest' is created and animated by Ravenna.²²⁹ Snow White, therefore, may be seen to stand for 'virgin Eve', or 'Mother Eve', as she is associated with a 'prelapsarian'²³⁰ Nature: she is a classic example of Plumwood's 'angel in the ecosystem'.²³¹ Ravenna, in contrast, is 'fallen Eve' indeed, associated with the 'disorderly and chaotic' environment: an obvious instance of the 'she-devil in the wilderness'. We have, then, what might be seen as two alternative 'Mother Natures': one that is natural and benevolent, and one that is infecting and monstrous.

of Snow White and so instead merely abandons her to the wilderness. There she finds seven dwarves, who house her in return for her enactment of domestic duties. Learning that Snow White still lives, the wicked stepmother disguises herself as an elderly crone and convinces the girl (in the most common versions of the tale) to eat a poisoned apple. Snow White chokes and seemingly dies, but is ultimately revived. We have our 'happily ever after' as the two are wed and the stepmother is killed.

²²⁹ It is worthy of note that each of the women are inherently bound to Nature. Snow White, traditionally, is created from some of its various elements: her skin 'as white as *snow*', her lips 'as red as *blood*', and her hair 'as black as *ebony*'. Ebony is a dense, black wood that derives from various trees in the genus *Diospyrus*: Snow White, therefore, is to some degree imaginatively born of the forest. Meanwhile, the name Ravenna of course evokes the raven, which is a classic symbol in Nature that is associated with the Gothic.

²³⁰ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, p. 20.

²³¹ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 9.

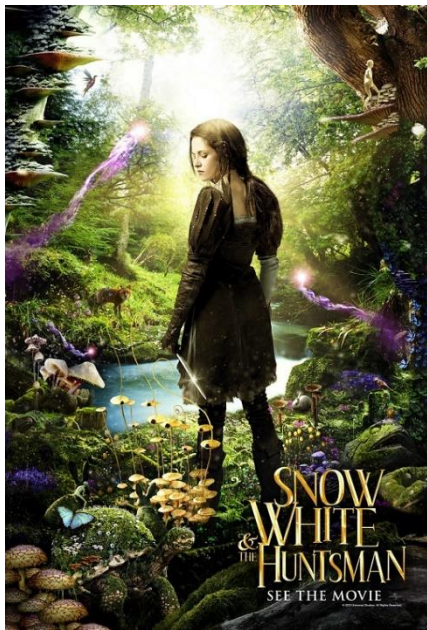


Fig. 2.9. 'Sanctuary' in *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012).

Fig 2.10. 'The Dark Forest' in *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012).

The fact that Ravenna is based on the classical archetype of the wicked *step*mother underlines ideas of the 'unnatural' or 'non-nurturing'²³² mother, and therein her role as a malevolent Mother Nature. Much like The Guardian, she is a mixture of the human and non-human: mostly she is shown in what we assume is her 'natural' state as a woman, but she is able, too, to assume the form of an unkindness of ravens. These birds are traditionally associated with Gothic Nature, therein foreshadowing the fact that she will be too. She is aligned from the outset with the monstrous wilderness, as we are told explicitly that it is her usurpation of the kingdom that has created 'The Dark Forest'. Its animation is inherently bound to her will. She is associated from the outset with ecofeminist themes, as her 'female rage'²³³

²³² Bondar, 'Bodies on earth', p. 72.

²³³ Isabel Cristina Pindeo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 4.

against mankind becomes confused with the idea of Nature's revenge against all of humanity. Early on in the film she seduces Snow White's father, the King, so as to be made Queen. In the bedroom, on the night of their wedding, she murders her husband in an act of violent misandry. As she kills him, she recites bitterly: 'men use women, they ruin us, and when they are finished with us, they throw us to the dogs like scraps'. Her words could equally be read as a denouncement of humanity's treatment of the natural world and the Western tendency to 'feminise' Nature as merely an 'object'²³⁴ to be similarly 'used' and 'ruined'. This connection is underlined as she vows to 'give this wretched world the Queen it deserves': Mother Nature has turned on us indeed. The Dark Forest, which serves as an extension of her wrath, is thoroughly animate indeed. As with Disney's depiction of these woods, mentioned above, everything here is hideously *alive*. The trees and the very grounds of the woods squirm and writhe, all the while making monstrous sounds. The setting is filled with smoke and a blood-like ink and is scattered with the bodies of hundreds of birds – an image indicative of environmental collapse.²³⁵ Moreover, the environment is reminiscent of a perverse version of Eden. Its slithering branches make it seem like it filled with snakes, whilst for much of the film it is inhabited only by Snow White and the Huntsman: one man and one woman, who symbolise the roles of Adam and Eve. In accordance, Snow White – or 'virgin Eve'²³⁶ – is tempted by the apple, which is an unambiguous substitute for the 'forbidden fruit'. We are told that 'the forest gains its strength from human weakness', which is significant in this context because it returns us to the idea in Chapter One that wilderness was created by the Fall from Eden: it is an environment born of transgression. If we are to see Ravenna, indeed, in the role of 'Fallen Eve',²³⁷ then this only underlines the idea that it is *she* that has created and animated this monstrous environment.

²³⁴ Ingram, *Green Screen*, p. 36.

²³⁵ This is seen, for example, in the opening to Rachel Carson's classic *Silent Spring* (1962).

²³⁶ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, p. 20.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

In the film's ending, we have indisputable evidence that Ravenna is literally, and horribly, 'at one' with the Gothic forest. We learn that its animation and very existence is bound to her own. When she is finally killed, The Dark Forest is simultaneously, and consequently, destroyed. 'Evil nature', in accordance with Zipes, is bound indeed to 'female nature out of control'²³⁸. With her death – as she is 'slain'²³⁹ – the forest is no longer animate and threatening, and order is restored. Interestingly, in contrast with Roberts' assertions, this ordered Nature is *not* male.²⁴⁰ Instead, it takes the form of Snow White, our 'angel in the ecosystem',²⁴¹ who in the end is made Queen. The image of this woman enthroned is certainly reminiscent of a benevolent Mother Nature, as she is literally crowned with flowers and elaborately adorned with relics of idyllic Nature. This is the final image of the film, as she sits silent and still in the pastoral throne. The simplistic nature of this 'happy ending' is notably incongruous with the Gothic tone that has dominated throughout the film. The image is one of utter and saccharine *passivity*, which exists in stark contrast to the monstrous *animation* of the woods that are bound to Ravenna. We seem, with this ending, to return indeed to 'the old reductive identifications of women with idyllic and *passive* "nature"'.²⁴² Moreover, one of the reasons, maybe, that this ending sits so uneasily is that a modern-day audience may find it difficult to imagine that the 'angel in the ecosystem', and not 'the she-devil in the wilderness', is truly 'the queen it deserves'.

A text in which we find remarkably similar themes, in which once again the threateningly animate forest is bound to an 'evil' queen, is Naomi Novik's novel *Uprooted*. Here, once again, we have a vengeful queen who is monstrously 'at one' with Nature and creates her very own malevolent forest. The novel tells the story of a young wizard's

²³⁸ Zipes in Whitley, *The Idea of Nature*, p. 24.

²³⁹ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p. 281.

²⁴⁰ Roberts, *The ecoGothic*, p. 12.

²⁴¹ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 9.

²⁴² Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 117.

apprentice, Agnieszka, who lives in a valley surrounded by thoroughly menacing wilderness, which is known only as ‘the Wood’.²⁴³ Her task, along with the wizard, is to keep its ‘malice’ [8] at bay. Its age and origins, throughout much of the text, are wholly unknown. However, we ultimately learn of its source: a fearsome entity known as ‘the Wood-queen’.²⁴⁴ She is fought by the kingdom and ultimately subdued – and, consequently, the Wood is destroyed and made a site of tranquillity. Throughout the text, the Wood is discussed in terms of a threatening, sentient, and animate entity. We are told, explicitly, that it is ‘alive’,²⁴⁵ that ‘it can think and plan and work towards its own ends’,²⁴⁶ and that it ‘wants to devour’²⁴⁷ humankind. Its monstrosity is bound to what Agnieszka calls ‘that *animating* power of the Wood’²⁴⁸ [my emphasis]. It is animate in several ways. Firstly, the trees themselves attack those who wander within them. Secondly, it is filled with hideous creatures: ‘the Wood’, we are told, is ‘something worse than monsters: something that *makes* monsters’.²⁴⁹ Thirdly, it inflicts what is known as ‘corruption’,²⁵⁰ wherein it contaminates the humans in close proximity: ‘it can see into the hearts of men, all the better to poison them’.²⁵¹ And, finally, in the Wood-queen, it is made manifest.

As in *Snow White*, we have clear representatives of the ‘good’ woman, associated with all that is ‘good’ in Nature, and the ‘bad’ woman, associated with all its ‘wickedness’. We have, in Agnieszka, the ‘angel in the ecosystem’²⁵², and in the Wood-queen, we have the she-devil in the wilderness. Much of Agnieszka’s magic is bound to the natural world, and this is shown very positively. Though it is subtle, it is significant that we are told early on that she

²⁴³ Naomi Novik, *Uprooted* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2015), p. 3.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

²⁵² Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 9.

‘loves’ the ‘woods’;²⁵³ the ‘woods’ here notably distinct from the ‘Wood’. The same setting, therefore, in accordance with its dualistic nature, is simultaneously two spaces. When linked to Agnieszka it is wholly benevolent, though tied to the Wood-queen it is thoroughly monstrous.

Initially, in order to enter the valley, the Wood-queen assumes the form of one the kingdom’s royalty, who has been missing in the woods, known as Queen Hanna. She is welcomed joyously by what is seemingly her son, Prince Marek. However, as she is truly the Wood-queen in disguise, she soon murders the prince, in what is an image of ‘non-nurturing’²⁵⁴ motherhood indeed. It becomes increasingly evident that there is ‘another queen beneath’²⁵⁵ as the longer the Wood-queen is away from the forest, the more her stolen form comes to resemble the wilderness. ‘Her limbs’, we are told, ‘were like branches, her toes [...] long roots’, and ‘her fingers like knobbled twigs’.²⁵⁶ She is shown as hideously and literally ‘at one’ with Nature: ‘she was the Wood, or the Wood was her’.²⁵⁷ Significantly, we learn in the end the origin story of this malevolent forest, which essentially is a tale of ecofeminist revenge. We learn that the Wood-queen once belonged to a primordial race, known as ‘the wood-people’,²⁵⁸ who were ‘forest-dwellers’²⁵⁹ indeed. They lived an existence wholly distinct from the humans who dwelt in crowds in the valleys, who might be seen a sort of equivalent of our modern-day ‘apartment-house-dwellers’²⁶⁰. Whilst the wood-people lived in harmony, those in the valley were more contemptuous, as they ‘had learned the wrong things’.²⁶¹ Yet despite these discrepancies, a marriage took place between the Wood-queen and the king of the valley: a

²⁵³ Novik, *Uprooted*, p. 59.

²⁵⁴ Bondar, ‘Bodies on earth’, p. 72.

²⁵⁵ Novik, *Uprooted*, p. 382.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

symbolic union between Nature and civilisation. However, once the king had naturally died, his people turned on the Wood-queen, endeavouring to imprison her for all of eternity. They set out, too, to destroy her people – who, in order to save themselves, transformed irreversibly into the very trees of the woods. Once the Wood-queen escaped and learned of their fate, she initially intended to join them. Yet at this moment she witnesses axemen ‘cheerfully’²⁶² destroying the trees and is filled with an unquenchable ‘rage’.²⁶³ Their axes are described as ‘biting’²⁶⁴ into the wood, until she places the men *inside* the trees, so that they might be revived: we have a confusion, indeed, as to whether it is humanity, or the forest, that is the more *consuming* threat. It is in this action of revenge that the Wood is created; it is quite literally in retaliation against humans’ destruction of the forest. Ultimately, she explains in her own words her violence towards humanity: ‘They burned the trees [...] They cut them down. They will always cut them down.’²⁶⁵ Though in the end the Wood-queen is not strictly ‘slain’,²⁶⁶ the effect is identical as she is entirely subdued and the Wood is destroyed. Agnieszka and the wizard are able to convince her to become, like her people, one of the trees in the forest. They achieve this by channelling the essence of one of the trees that once was the Wood-queen’s sister, and who is another example of a ‘positive’ identification between woman and Nature. The sister-tree is described in wholly idyllic and passive terms: she embodies a ‘calm’ and a ‘stillness’.²⁶⁷ This is used to then transform the Wood-queen, as our she-devil in the wilderness quite literally becomes *inanimate* Nature. Though she presents us with a thoroughly impressive example of the monstrously animate forest, aligned with autonomous woman, we ultimately

²⁶² Ibid., p. 416.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 417.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 416.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 419.

²⁶⁶ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p. 281.

²⁶⁷ Novik, *Uprooted*, p. 420.

return to what Clark terms ‘the old reductive identifications of women’ with ‘*passive* “nature”’.²⁶⁸

Lars von Trier’s *Antichrist* is a film seemingly designed to be studied in an ecoGothic context. It examines, explicitly, the question of *why* the forest is construed as frightening. It is so relevant within this section because it explores the idea that ‘humans know nature [...] through gender’,²⁶⁹ and moreover because at its centre lies the question of whether the forest is merely a ‘passive resource’,²⁷⁰ or if it is a treacherous and threateningly animate entity. The film tells the story of a nameless couple, listed only in the credits as ‘He’ (Willem Defoe) and ‘She’²⁷¹ (Charlotte Gainsbourg), following the death of their only child. The husband, who is a trained psychiatrist, assumes the care of his own wife during her bereavement. Following the tragedy, she experiences attacks of acute anxiety. When asked ‘what’ exactly it is that she fears, she is unable to explain. He asks her, instead, ‘*where*’ it is that she fears, and she whispers ‘*the woods*’. Consequently, he engages her in a form of ‘exposure therapy’,²⁷² taking her into this setting that she fears the most, to a cabin named ‘Eden’, with the intention of demonstrating this environment to be harmless. The film, then, is an interrogation into ecophobic anxieties. It presents us with two starkly different views of the forest, each of which aligns, respectively, with the male and the female: ‘He’ and ‘She’ may be read as the very embodiments of the ‘reason/nature story’.²⁷³ The man, much like Adam, is a ‘symbol of order’,²⁷⁴ insisting that ‘Freud is dead’ and that the forest is categorically ‘*not dangerous*’. He views the environment merely as a recreational space and a setting in which his wife may be ‘healed’: it is, for him, a

²⁶⁸ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 117.

²⁶⁹ Scharff, *Seeing Nature through Gender*, p. xiii.

²⁷⁰ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

²⁷¹ Throughout this discussion, I will write ‘He’ and ‘She’ within quotation marks when referring to these characters as though by name, in order to enhance clarity.

²⁷² This is a technique within behaviour therapy, designed to treat anxiety disorders. It involves exposing (safely) the subject to his or her feared object or context, in order to remove the anxiety.

²⁷³ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 196.

²⁷⁴ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, pp. 20-21.

‘passive resource’.²⁷⁵ The woman, conversely, believes the forest is *living* – ‘it has a strange sort of personality, I’ve always felt that’ – and insists, vaguely, that ‘everything’ within it is to be feared. When ‘He’ pushes her towards a more concrete answer, ‘She’ replies ‘Can’t I be afraid without a definite *object*?’ [my emphasis]. Her wording underlines – and *questions* – his view of the woods in such terms. Ultimately, his view of the environment as harmless and inanimate is violently undermined. The forest is shown, indeed, to be sentient and foreboding: it is *through* its intimacy with the woman, this ‘she-devil in the wilderness’, that it becomes hideously and threateningly animate.

The imbrication between the woman in *Antichrist* and the animate environment is emphasised firstly by the fact that both are portrayed as ‘non-nurturing mothers’.²⁷⁶ In the opening to the film, we see the woman’s child fall to its death, whilst she engages in sexual intercourse with her husband. This tragedy then seems to be reflected in the forest, as we see within it numerous instances of falling or fallen ‘children’, unheeded by their maternal guardians. We see, for example, a stillborn faun, suspended from its mother’s uterus, and a young owl that has fallen from the nest, only to be eaten by its mother. These images, which punctuate the film, reveal the forest and its creatures to be in dark sympathy with the woman. This recurrent imagery of falling of fallen ‘children’ is significant too because it underlines the status of *fallen humanity*. The fall of the child at the beginning is a striking analogy for *the Fall* of humankind. Here, however, we have an interesting reversal of events. In the traditional story, man and woman are born into paradise, transgress, and are cast out into the wilderness. Yet here, the Fall *precedes* the entry into ‘Eden’, which here is no garden or celestial paradise, but a threatening forest that harms the humans within it.

²⁷⁵ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

²⁷⁶ Bondar, ‘Bodies on earth’, p. 72.

It is, of course, extremely ironic that the ominous woods in this text are named ‘Eden’. As discussed in the previous chapter, the wilderness, according to Genesis, was only created with the expulsion from paradise. The fact, therefore, that the couple name the retreat as they do is something of a paradox. Moreover, it reveals human arrogance in the assumption that wilderness exists to serve as paradise, or at the very least to perform some ‘special function’²⁷⁷ for us. This is underlined, of course, by the fact that the man uses the woods as a mere visual aid in the ‘healing’ of his wife. The role of the woods in this text as a perverse or distorted Eden is further underlined by the presence of ‘He’ and ‘She’: one man and one woman, who are obvious analogies for Adam and Eve. Even in the opening to the film, before we reach the woods, these identities are suggested. *Both* of the parents are distracted when the child falls to his death, just as both Adam *and* Eve eat of the tree – yet it is the woman, in each case, that is consumed by guilt and meted more blame. The role of the woods as a seriously twisted Eden is again demonstrated in the title of the film. We are warned, from the outset, of a thoroughly *antichristian* setting and this is epitomised in one of the film’s most infamous lines: ‘*Nature is Satan’s church*’.²⁷⁸ Each of these elements foreshadows the identity of ‘She’ as a counterpart to God’s first woman. The fact that this ‘Eden’ is monstrous and distorted means that we expect these same qualities in its version of Eve. Indeed, ‘She’ is cast, from the outset, as Merchant’s ‘fallen Eve’. She is ‘dark and witch-like’, certainly, and bound to the ‘disorderly and chaotic’²⁷⁹ wilderness which surrounds her – and is born, symbolically, of her own flawed nature.

When examining the connections between ‘She’ and the threateningly animate forest, it is greatly significant to note that the forest is first seen by the audience in the woman’s *mind*.

²⁷⁷ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

²⁷⁸ The title, too, is evocative of Nietzsche’s *The Antichrist* (1895), an infamous polemic against Christianity. It is possibly inspired also by the *Malleus Mallificarum*, a fifteenth century treatise on the existence of witchcraft, which is referenced in the film. Malleus, interestingly, uses the words ‘Devil’ and ‘Antichrist’ synonymously and explicitly interrogates the connections between devilry and femininity – connections with which the film is unquestionably concerned.

²⁷⁹ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, p. 20.

As the couple travel towards the woods, she is asked to envisage them in her imagination. These scenes are shown in black and white and punctuate the film at various intervals – reminding us constantly that we are within the *woman's* terrain. These scenes, moreover, are markedly *animate*. The trees are shown to be constantly moving and many are surreally comprised of what seem to be human forms: images that literally suggest life within the trees. She tells us, too, of the trees' *'personality'*. The idea of these woods serving as a psychological landscape as much as a physical one is underlined by their notable lack of geographical specificity. We are never told where we are. In one easily missed shot, we see an envelope addressed to the couple, which reveals that they live in the state of Washington. However, *Antichrist* was filmed in Germany, which lends it, as Linda Bradley asserts, a feel of 'the very grimmest of fairy tales'.²⁸⁰ The man speaks with an American accent, whilst the woman's is European: all that is certain is that the film is set in a Western vision of the forest. The idea that these woods are in some way bound to the woman's psyche is solidified by the fact that 'She' is instructed, whilst envisaging them, to *'melt into the green'*. 'She' is instructed, explicitly, to become 'one' with the natural world and we are shown this fusion (*figures 2.8 and 2.9*). Significantly, because 'She' is terrified by the woods, the woman is extremely adverse to this idea. In line with Roberts' arguments, she greatly fears such an intimacy with Nature.²⁸¹ Interestingly, Ellen Moers has argued that Gothic environments 'give voice to women's fear of themselves'²⁸² [my emphasis] and certainly we see evidence of this within the text. Once in the woods, the woman is asked continually what it is that she fears, and the man creates a pyramid to reflect these anxieties. It is divided into three: at its base is listed 'Forest/Leaves' and 'Satan', but above these it simply says 'Me'. Such fears, it transpires, are not unfounded. As 'She' embraces this intimacy between woman and Nature, as she allows herself to 'melt into the

²⁸⁰ Linda Bradley, *Lars Von Trier (Contemporary Film Directors)*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), p. 150.

²⁸¹ Roberts, *The ecoGothic*, p. 6.

²⁸² Ellen Moers, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 92-3.

green', she becomes 'one' with the animate forest and becomes truly dangerous: 'She' becomes 'the she-devil in the wilderness'.



Fig. 2.11 and fig. 2.12. 'She' (Charlotte Gainsbourg) 'melts into the green' in *Antichrist* (2009).

The most violent threat of the animate forest manifests in the woman's bodily abuse of the man. 'He' is a man who views Nature and women in passive terms, and himself as above them. Thus, as 'She' revolts against him, we have a confusion again between woman's revenge and Nature's revenge. Eleanor Windsor Leach argues that men fear Nature because 'Nature threatens masculine identity'.²⁸³ Certainly, this is true in the text of both woman and forest. The very environment is presented as a 'feminising' threat. Within the forest, the man awakens to find on his arm a genus of ticks, heavy and swollen with the weight of his blood. They

²⁸³ Eleanor Windsor Leach, in Roberts, *The ecoGothic*, p. 12.

visually evoke the maternal themes of the film: they are ostensibly ‘pregnant’, but are torn from his skin in an image once again of aborted motherhood. He disgustedly removes the insects, seeming to rid himself of this enforced image of femininity, but its remnants remain beneath the skin.²⁸⁴ The woman, too, may be seen to ‘feminise’ the man. In one of the film’s most violent scenes, ‘She’ sexually molests him, providing us with what might be seen a startling analogy for the reversal of the ‘rape of nature’.²⁸⁵ Moreover, she violently tortures him, attaching a stone lathe to one of his limbs. The use of the lathe is significant, as it is symbolically associated not only with the destruction of the forest, but with the murder of thousands of women.²⁸⁶ Her violence towards the man, therefore, may be seen to unite the revenge of the woman and the forest.

In the film’s ending, we find once again that unruly female N/nature is ‘slain’.²⁸⁷ The man murders his wife and – ostensibly – ‘masculine order’ is restored.²⁸⁸ He surrounds her body with branches from the woods and sets it alight – destroying these symbols of both woman and the forest together. The woods, then, are shown once again in black white. This time, however, now the woman is dead, the implication is that these are the woods as seen by the *man*. The forest is shown, for the first time, as a site of tranquillity. Its animals exist in harmony with one another and fruits and berries abound, as the man feeds on Nature’s bounty. It exists, in this scene, to serve his needs. He is no longer in any way ‘feminised’, but instead is equipped with a large and phallic branch – using the forest, quite literally, as a crutch. However, in the very final image of the film, this picture of ordered Nature is starkly undermined. It illustrates what might be seen as ‘Nature’s message’ in the film, as in one scene it is given a voice through

²⁸⁴ This metaphor is based on the fact that ticks in reality are insects that bury their heads and legs beneath the skin of their host, whilst their bodies remain outside; if only the swollen body is improperly removed, the tick will remain alive beneath the skin.

²⁸⁵ Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, p. 91.

²⁸⁶ Infinite numbers of ‘witches’ were bound to stone lathes and drowned. Sourced: Larry Gross, ‘The Six Commandments of the Church of the Antichrist’, *Film Comment* 45.5, (2009), p. 46.

²⁸⁷ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures’, p. 281.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

one of its animals, and its message is terrifying: it tells us only that ‘*chaos reigns*’. In the film’s surreal ending, this is demonstrated as we see a sea of faceless women descend through the trees. Whilst this final tone is one of extreme ambiguity, one thing is definite: the forest is shown as indisputably animate, and its form, here, is firmly aligned with the female.

In each of the texts discussed in this section, we have forests that are threateningly animate *through* their intimate connections with women. Gothic Nature is associated, indeed, with ‘female nature out of control’,²⁸⁹ as we encounter this figure of ‘the she-devil in the wilderness’. Moreover, the women in each of the texts are themselves ‘non-nurturing mothers’,²⁹⁰ therein underlining their crossover with ‘unwelcoming’ or ‘evil’²⁹¹ Nature, which we view in these terms: in *The Guardian* and *Snow White*, we have women emulating the archetypal ‘wicked stepmother’, in *Uprooted* we have the false imitation of the mother, and in *Antichrist* we have a woman who merely watches as her child falls to its death. Thus, we have illustrative examples of our imbrications between ecophobic and gynophobic anxieties, which centre on the foundational themes of ecofeminism. Interestingly, when Michael Marder talks about our tendency to view trees as mere ‘background’²⁹² – solely in the terms of a *passive* setting – he echoes feminist writings by those such as Luce Irigaray, who contend that there is a history of women being ‘backgrounded’, of being viewed as the ‘environment’ in which male ‘achievement’²⁹³ takes place [my emphasis]. The implication, then, is that in these texts wherein ‘the old reductive identifications of women’ with ‘passive “nature”’²⁹⁴ are firmly undermined, the source of anxiety lies in the idea of women and Nature as thoroughly animate – and vengeful – entities. This is demonstrated in each of these texts by the fact that the ‘unruly

²⁸⁹ Zipes in Whitley, *The Idea of Nature*, p. 24.

²⁹⁰ Bondar, ‘Bodies on earth’, p. 72.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Marder, *Plant Thinking*, p. 3.

²⁹³ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Jill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

²⁹⁴ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 117.

women' are 'slain'²⁹⁵ and the monstrosly animate woods are seemingly (and consequently) overcome or destroyed. In imagining the animate forest through monstrous women – in 'knowing nature', indeed, 'through gender'²⁹⁶ – we encounter something of a contradiction. In aligning the forest with the female, it is viewed then in explicitly *human* terms. It is, to an extent, anthropomorphised in this essentially anthropocentric vision. Whilst the forest, therefore, *does* in these texts defy the idea of Nature as a 'passive resource',²⁹⁷ this is arguably somewhat undermined, as it is animate in these texts only through the human.

2.4 Conclusion

When questioning the reasons why the forest is, as Yi-fu Tuan states, a 'landscape of fear',²⁹⁸ one of the most immediate answers is that it is an environment we continually depict as consciously – and even maliciously – *living*. In our Gothic fictions, we find it is shown again and again as threateningly *animate*. This is so unnerving, as we have seen, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it is a setting that is viewed as exactly that, a *setting*: it 'shouldn't' be living or animate. This is due to the fact that in the Western world there is a common tendency to view Nature as an 'object',²⁹⁹ as mere 'background',³⁰⁰ or as a 'passive resource'.³⁰¹ In order to justify the exploitative existence of the Western world, it is in our own interest to continue to view it in these terms. The texts examined throughout this chapter, however, strongly destabilise such thinking. They thoroughly express Estok's ecophobia – especially if we return to his definition of this term as 'the contempt and fear we feel for the *agency* of the natural

²⁹⁵ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p. 281.

²⁹⁶ Scharff, *Seeing Nature through Gender*, p. xiii.

²⁹⁷ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

²⁹⁸ Yi-fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1979), p. 1.

²⁹⁹ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction*, p. 57.

³⁰⁰ Marder, *Plant Thinking*, p. 3.

³⁰¹ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

environment'³⁰² [my emphasis]. As I discussed in the beginning, ecophobic anxieties are frequently intangible: 'this tree and forest business', as Sophia Bittacy claims, 'is so vague and so horrible'.³⁰³ However, in these texts wherein 'the woods themselves' become hideously animate, such anxieties become more concrete. We find that landscapes are *not* 'devoid of agency' and that they are fully able, indeed, to 'chase' and 'devour us'³⁰⁴. This is so effectively frightening firstly because it is wholly uncanny and moreover because it forces us to imagine the consequences of a truly sentient Nature. If the woods are *aware* of human destruction, then the obvious result is that we have created an enemy; if the woods are *animate*, then they are fully able to enact revenge on humankind. In thinking in these terms, we are forced towards a more *ecocentred* perspective. Humanity, suddenly, becomes very small – and we return to this idea of all of human civilisation, in one light, as a mere clearing in the forest.

Throughout the texts in this chapter, we have seen the 'Seven Theses' be of continual relevance. First and foremost, we have seen that our fears of the forest are bound to the idea that it is defined as *against* civilisation. This has manifested firstly in the fact that the forests in these texts are shown to be animate and living, and so are more indistinct from human life than might be imagined. Mainly, however, the idea of the forest as against civilisation is seen in the pervasive theme of Nature's revenge on humankind. In this context, human and nonhuman Nature are cast as enemies. It has been implied in the majority of these texts that should the two come directly into conflict, it would be, in the words of Blackwood, a 'soft and easy victory' for Nature.³⁰⁵ This ties into fears of the forest symbolising a return of the *past*. If the forest is an animate and sentient adversary, then should it wish to do so, it might easily reclaim our sites of human habitation. This leads us to themes of the forest and *trial* as in several of these texts it seems humans have been tested and found severely wanting. This is

³⁰² Estok, 'Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', p. 203.

³⁰³ Blackwood, 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved', p. 40.

³⁰⁴ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p. 283.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

most exemplified in the ending to *The Happening*, in which it is revealed that the trees' animation and violence manifested as a warning to humans to amend their treatment of the natural world. The *consuming* threats of the forest are seen throughout in the ambiguity as to whether humankind or Nature is 'gobbling' the other.³⁰⁶ This is most memorably literalised, of course, in *Otesánek*, where the forest feeds and thrives on human bloodshed. The idea of the forest as a site of the human unconscious has been seen in themes of theurgy in Blackwood, which have continued into our texts with 'She-Devils in the Wilderness', in which women become horribly and psychologically at one with the surrounding forest. Finally, the idea of the woods as an *antichristian* environment is represented in Sophia Bittacy's fears of this setting in 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved', in the images of Hell in the *Evil Dead* films, and with the themes of Eden's corruption in *Snow White and the Huntsman* and of course *Antichrist*.

This chapter has centred on fears of 'the woods themselves' as a living and animate threat.³⁰⁷ However, our fears of the forest are by no means bound only to its material form, but centre too on what it might *conceal*. This brings us to the subject of the following chapter, and our anxieties as to what we may find hidden amidst the forest: this brings us to its monsters.

³⁰⁶ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 263.

³⁰⁷ *The Evil Dead*.

CHAPTER THREE

‘WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE’: MONSTERS IN THE FOREST



Fig. 3.1, Kiki Smith, Infiltrator (2000), paper pulp, oil paint, human and horse hair (38 x 33 x 23 inches).

‘Monsters are metaphors of our anxiety. [...] Without them, we know not what we are. With them, we are not what we know’.

— Richard Kearney.¹

‘The wilderness is where “unordered” things such as monsters rightly belong’.

— Jan Bremmer.²

In the previous chapter, we examined some of the various ways in which the forest manifests as a Gothic space because it is animated. Here, we examine instead the forest as an arguably ‘natural’ habitat and home to ‘the monster’.³ If we return to the central question of this thesis – ‘Why is the forest frightening?’ – then one of the most obvious and immediate answers is surely that this is a setting we associate with monsters. Throughout literary and mythological history, we have endless examples of monsters that reside in the woods. From such classic examples as the Big Bad Wolf⁴ to the modern day Slender Man,⁵ there is a recurrent tendency to place these fearsome creatures amidst the forest. ‘The wilderness’, as Bremmer contends, is ‘where [...] monsters rightly belong’. The presence of monsters is a classic determinant in

¹ Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 117.

² Jan Bremmer, ‘Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous’, *The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds Asa Simon Mitmann and Peter J. Dendle, trans. in D. Felton (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), p. 105.

³ Much like my use of the word ‘Nature’ throughout this thesis, when I discuss ‘the monster’, I refer to this multitudinous and fluid construct in the terms of a collective and archetypal symbol. As I come to discuss ‘Monster Theory’, momentarily, I examine in more detail the various definitions of ‘the monster’.

⁴ This infamous villain from ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ is one we will come to discuss in the final section of this chapter.

⁵ The Slender Man is an example of a modern day ‘boogiemán’. Originating as a meme on the internet, this unique monster quickly went viral. He is generally depicted as a suited male – with the body of a man, but a head devoid of any human or facial features. In addition, he is sometimes shown to have a multitude of tentacles. Significantly, he is usually placed in the midst of the woods, or at their edges – and frequently in sight of children. His image is usually superimposed into a photograph and presented as evidence of his existence in reality. His creation provides a key example of a modern day myth, as there are many that attest to his authenticity. Infamously, in 2014, two 14-year-old girls from Wisconsin brutally stabbed a fellow classmate in the woods, insisting later on that they had been instructed by The Slender Man. There have been several attacks and suicides that have been linked to ‘his’ influence.

casting the forest environment as explicitly frightening. Simultaneously, however, they reflect fears of this setting. They are, as Kearney says, ‘metaphors of our anxiety’.⁶ My focus here, therefore, is the ways in which they might be seen as metaphors more specifically for our *ecophobic* anxieties.

The subject of monsters is of course enormous. My analysis is limited, therefore, to how they function in the construction of the forest as a Gothic locale. If we return to this idea of Robert Pogue Harrison’s that we have lost the ability to see the forest ‘as strange, *monstrous*, or enchanting’,⁷ then surely one of the most obvious ways to remedy this is to ‘rewild’ this setting with monsters. In doing so, we *remythologise* this environment. My approach in this chapter is certainly not encyclopaedic. There is an extensive wealth of Monster Theory and a whole host of monsters that reside in the forest, such as trolls, wendigos, huldra, fauns, and even the Devil himself. It would be simply impossible in this work to discuss them all. Consequently, I have chosen just a few categories on which to focus. The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first is entitled ‘Here Be Monsters’: this serves as an introduction to some of the main ideas in Monster Theory, and concentrates on the ways in which these can be tied to ecocriticism and human geography. I introduce the resounding theme that the monster, essentially, is a perverse embodiment of human and nonhuman Nature, which thus violently undermines the so-called ‘human-nature dualism’ discussed in the previous chapters.⁸ We will find in these texts, again and again, that the monster manifests the vagueness of ecophobia. In Section Two, ‘Ambiguous Monsters’, I discuss texts in which the monsters are not clearly defined as any one ‘species’. I focus here on Stephen King’s *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* (1999), Jesse Holland and Andrew Mitton’s *YellowBrickRoad* (2010) and Robert

⁶ Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 117.

⁷ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 121.

⁸ In short, the ‘human-nature dualism’ is a strict and largely imagined distinction between humans and nonhuman Nature. Val Plumwood argues that it is an idea that is inherent to post-enlightenment modernity. Sourced: Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 81.

Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* (1984). The third and fourth sections focus on two individual monsters from our histories and fairy tales: witches and wolves. I have chosen these two because each is extensively linked to the forest: they are woodland monsters in our history, myths, and fairy tales, and remain popular monsters to this day. The witch section is entitled "'She Was an Old Lady with the Fur of a Horse": Witches in the Woods'. Here, we again encounter themes of ecofeminism, as this figure is associated with both gynophobia and ecophobia. I focus here on the fairy tale 'Hansel and Gretel' and then several texts in which this monster is bound to the woods: Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez's *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), Jessica Hausner's *Hotel* (2004), and Lucky McKee's *The Woods* (2006). The wolves section is entitled "'Forest Assassins": Wolves in the Woods'. Here, I examine the dualistic role of wolves as historical representatives of our ecophobic dread and yet as symbols of environmental restoration. Here, I focus on the classical tale of 'Little Red Riding Hood' as a warning against the fragility of our boundaries between humans and Nature. I then focus in the main on Catherine Hardwicke's *Red Riding Hood* (2011), Anthony Schmitz's *Darkest Desire* (1998), John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Little Star* (2010), and Angela Carter's collection of wolf stories in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979).

3.1 Here be Monsters

'Monster movies [...] could be the single most significant genre for ecocriticism'.

— Stacy Alaimo.⁹

⁹ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films', p. 279.

For most of humankind's history, we have widely believed in monsters. In our modern, contemporary world, however, notions of literal, supernatural monstrosity are given considerably less credence. Stephen T. Asma argues that we have this idea that 'we previously believed in monsters', but that such belief is now 'a thing of the past'.¹⁰ However, he asserts that this idea is merely 'a comforting illusion'.¹¹ We take a child-like pride in declaring, loudly, that 'there's no such thing as monsters'. Such an assertion can be linked to the comparable idea that there is little reason, these days, to be afraid of the woods. (We are, as Sarah Maitland highlights, now 'post-enlightenment' and 'would-be rational'.¹²) There is the widespread sense that we are somehow above and beyond such superstition. This of course ties in with themes of 'mythoclasm'¹³ and the idea that we have lost the ability to see the forest 'as strange, monstrous, or enchanting'¹⁴ [my emphasis]. Yet the significance of monsters and their surrounding environments goes well beyond the question of whether or not we simply believe in them. One needs only to glance at our wealth of fictions and mythologies pertaining to monsters to see that David Gilmore was right when he said 'the mind needs monsters'.¹⁵ My interest lies more specifically in the idea that the mind needs monsters to be situated in the forest.

Despite what Asa Simon Mittman has called the 'global cultural interest'¹⁶ in monsters and the monstrous, the formal study of this subject is only relatively recent.¹⁷ Nowadays, however, there is a wealth of material to be found under the heading of 'Monster Theory' –

¹⁰ Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 278.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Stephen Sondheim, 'Prologue', *Into the Woods*, (1986). Musical.

¹³ Rollo May, *The Cry for Myth*, (London: Souvenir Press, 1993), p. 25.

¹⁴ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 121.

¹⁵ David Gilmore, quoted in Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), p. 1.

¹⁶ Asa Simon Mittman, 'Introduction', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), p. 3.

¹⁷ It is only recently, Mittman writes, that 'Monster Theory' has been acknowledged as 'real scholarship'. Sourced: Mittman, 'Introduction', p. 3.

and here I endeavour to summarise, broadly, some of its foremost ideas that will be of relevance in the context of the forest and the ecoGothic. Firstly, there is the complex matter of the monster's definition. This is neither certain nor static: as Mittman argues, 'we are continually redefining the parameters of the monstrous'.¹⁸ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in his seminal work *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996), provides the following definition: 'monsters', he argues, are 'the ultimate incorporation of our anxieties – about history, about identity, about our very humanity'.¹⁹ They embody, as Gilmore continues, 'all that is dangerous and horrible in the human imagination'.²⁰ Patricia McCormack argues that they are definitively 'not human'.²¹ They comprise, as Dana M. Oswald contends, 'a primarily physical and visible category'.²² When it comes to the monster's cultural function and symbolic significance, there is a multitude of theories in existence. A common conjecture is that the monster is reflective of the fears – and sometimes desires – of the *society* by which it is created. We may return here to Andrew Smith and William Hughes' argument that we find many of our environmental anxieties are captured in our Gothic fictions.²³ This ties in, too, with my argument in Chapter One that in widely repressing environmental concerns, we make them all the more monstrous – and here, this may be taken literally. Whilst certainly there are texts in which monsters stand clearly as warnings against the destruction of the natural world,²⁴ my interest lies more with monsters as embodiments of Simon C. Estok's 'ecophobia'.²⁵

¹⁸ Mittman, 'Introduction', p. 7

¹⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. xii.

²⁰ David Gilmore, quoted in Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, p. 1.

²¹ Patricia McCormack, 'Posthuman Teratology' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Mittman and Dendle (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), p. 294.

²² Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), p. 5.

²³ Smith and Hughes, 'Introduction: Defining the EcoGothic', p. 5.

²⁴ For example, recent examples of this would include André Øvredal's *Troll Hunter* (2010) and Aleksander L. Nordaas' *Thale* (2012). Sourced: *Troll Hunter*. Dir. André Øvredal. Norway. SF Norge A/S, 2010; *Thale*. Dir. Aleksander L. Nordaas. Norway. Screamefest, 2012.

²⁵ Estok, 'Theorising in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', p. 203.

The relationship between monsters and Nature is certainly complex. Firstly, it is interesting to note that if we return to Garrard's definition of ecocriticism – 'the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human throughout cultural history and the critical analysis of the term "human" itself'²⁶ – we can see that it takes on a rather different meaning within the context of teratology. That is to say, the 'non-human' extends to the figure of the monster, which must then, in part, define the 'human' ('without them, we know not what we are'). Indeed, Alaimo contends that 'monster movies [...] could be the single most significant genre for ecocriticism'.²⁷ Though it is likely she is referencing texts that would fall more easily under the heading of 'ecohorror' that texts read with the lens of the ecoGothic, the monster is certainly of key interest within ecocritical studies – or it should be. In light of Tom J. Hillard's assertion that it is 'astonishing' that ecocriticism has 'largely ignored'²⁸ our monstrous depictions of Nature, it seems logical that the ecoGothic should give some attention to the figure of the monster in Nature, examining its relations to both the human and to the natural environment. There are several significant comparisons that can be made between the symbolism of the monster and the symbolism of the forest as a frightening locale. In Chapter One, I introduced some of the various requisites for the forest as a Gothic and mythological space, which I termed the 'Seven Theses'. Each of these can be seen reflected and embodied in the functions of monsters on this setting. I have already mentioned that the monster defies the dualism between human and nonhuman Nature. In this way, it can be seen to play into this idea of civilisation as defined *against* the forests. In destroying or threatening this dualism, the monster reveals the fear that the 'civilised' and the 'primitive' are not neatly distinct. Moreover, just as civilisation is defined 'against the forests',²⁹ creating a dichotomy between order and wilderness, so too are monsters associated with *chaos*. As well as being linked often to

²⁶ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 5.

²⁷ Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films', p. 279.

²⁸ Hillard, 'Deep Into the Darkness Peering', p. 688.

²⁹ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 2.

destruction, in their very physicalities they are ‘harbingers’, as Cohen asserts, of ‘category crisis’.³⁰ They are often comprised of mismatched elements already existing in Nature – we may recognise the teeth, claws, or gargantuan size of various animals – but it is Nature perverted. Moreover, such elements are frequently merged with the human, destroying any illusion of distinction between humankind and Nature. I argued that the Gothic forest is tied to our fears of ‘the return of the *past*’³¹ [my emphasis] – and the same might be said indeed about monsters. Asma notes that we tend to assume that these mythical creatures have no real credence in the modern world.³² They suggest an earlier, more primitive time: the pre-enlightenment and non-rational times when it ‘made sense’ to fear the forest. If the Gothic forest is a landscape of *trial*, then its many monsters may serve as the obstacles that must be overcome: we will find that often the forest cannot be exited unless the monster is vanquished. The very meeting of monsters in this setting can seem the inevitable consequence of being *lost* in the woods. Just as the Gothic forest is cast as a *consuming* threat, monsters are famously symbols of terrifying voracity. ‘The monster’, writes Joseph Andriano, embodies ‘the primal fear of being eaten’.³³ Moreover, they threaten the loss of the *self* and so much like the forest are bound to themes of psychoanalysis. The monster, as Mittman argues, is simultaneously ‘defined from without’ – it represents the dangers of the *outside* – yet it is also ‘defined from within’.³⁴ In this light, if the forest is viewed as the symbol of the psychological unconscious, then its monsters may be read as expressions of the Id. They may be tied, too, to the idea of the forest as an *antichristian* space. They are agents of Beal’s ‘chaogony’,³⁵ as they defy Eliade’s ‘cosmogony’³⁶: indeed, they are tied to notions of sin and evil and the irreligious. In accordance

³⁰ Cohen, *Monster Theory*, p. 6

³¹ Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith, *Modern Gothic*, p. 94.

³² Asma, *On Monsters*, p. 278.

³³ Joseph Andriano, quoted in Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2010), p. 6.

³⁴ Mittman, ‘Introduction’, p. 8.

³⁵ Beal, *Religion and its Monsters*, p. 41.

³⁶ Douglas Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 197.

with the recurrent idea that the forest is an *antichristian* space – or ‘Satan’s church’ – we will find that its monsters are in some ways suggestive of Satan. This is fitting, if we are to return to ideas of the forest’s creation from the downfall of paradise: Satan, as the serpent, was the original monster of Eden. Moreover, it is interesting to note that our common images of Satan depict this villain as an unholy conflation of the human and the nonhuman. Significantly, Ronald Hutton has argued that ‘the standard modern conception of the devil as a being with cloven hooves, goat’s horns and pointed beard is a nineteenth century creation caused by a Christian reaction to the importance of Pan in the literary imagination’.³⁷ Quite literally, the ‘God of Nature’ – or ‘Lord of the Woods’,³⁸ as Nash would term him – has gradually become our embodiment of Satan. It is little wonder, then, that there is so frequent a connection between our monsters in the woods and constructions of the Devil.³⁹ We will see in several of these texts the implicit – and occasionally explicit – presence of the Devil in the forest.

The settings in which we place our monsters are by no means coincidental. On the contrary, as Mittman asserts, it is ‘vital’⁴⁰ to examine the environments selected as their territories. We return, then, to themes of human geography, as we now discuss its dark twin: ‘monstrous geography’.⁴¹ When considering Yi-fu Tuan’s notions of ‘Space’ and ‘Place’ (as discussed in Chapter One), the monster – like the forest – is ordinarily aligned with the former. It is necessarily born, as Chet van Duzer asserts, from ‘the realm of the entirely unknown’.⁴² As Cohen suggests: ‘it is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond’.⁴³ Whilst of course we

³⁷ Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 46

³⁸ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 11.

³⁹ Interestingly, the word ‘panic’ derives from the figure of Pan, as its original meaning, as John Boardman states, conveyed the fear induced by the anticipation of his approach in the forest. Sourced: John Boardman, *The Great God Pan: The Survival of an Image* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 35.

⁴⁰ Mittman, ‘Introduction’, p. 8.

⁴¹ Chet Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Mittman and Dendle, p. 433.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁴³ Cohen, *Monster Theory*, p. 7.

have many examples of urban monsters in our fictions, it is traditionally more common to place them *beyond* human settlements. We have ‘specifically Western ideas’, writes Duzer, ‘about the geographic distribution of monsters’ and a ‘pronounced tendency to locate them at the edges of the earth’.⁴⁴ If they cannot be destroyed, as Cohen asserts, then they must be ‘exiled’.⁴⁵ The placing of monsters in wild, unpopulated and indomitable landscapes, he continues, is simply ‘standard monstrous geography’.⁴⁶ As Bremmer asserts, the wilderness is where monsters ‘rightly belong’. But why is this the case? Firstly, as Richard Buxton contends, ‘distance creates possibilities’.⁴⁷ If the monsters are out of sight, it is more difficult to deny their existence. Moreover, wild and distant regions lend authenticity to such tales. As Joseph Campbell writes, ‘our myths wake a little and stir as we venture into the wilderness’.⁴⁸ The forest environment, significantly, is one that is not so defamiliarised that its dangers are merely abstract, yet it is distant enough that the notion it may hold a multitude of monsters is not wholly incredible. Monsters in the woods may be seen to provide a dark reassurance for our fears of this setting: substantial terrors imply mortality, whilst intangible dread of the entirely unknown is intolerable. Throughout early history, when lands were unknown, there was a tendency for cartographers to fill the uncharted areas with images of monsters.⁴⁹ This represents, as Duzer asserts, ‘an intriguing tension between helplessness and control’.⁵⁰ On the

⁴⁴ Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, p. 387.

⁴⁵ Cohen, *Monster Theory*, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, p. 433.

⁴⁷ Richard Buxton, quoted in Chet Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Mittman and Dendle, p.393.

⁴⁸ This is demonstrated, for example, in Stephanie Meyers’ vampire phenomenon, the *Twilight* series (2005–2008), in which the existence of monsters is deliberately introduced in the woodland setting: ‘Here in the trees it was much easier to believe the absurdities that embarrassed me indoors. Nothing had changed in this forest for thousands of years, and all the myths and legends [...] seemed much more likely in this green haze than they had in my clear-cut bedroom.’ In the first book of the *Twilight* series, the forest of Forks is an ambient presence throughout the text. However, it is shown as an ‘unnatural’ home to main vampire monsters, who hunt there only because they deny themselves their more ‘natural’ human victims in the city. Sourced: Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, (London: Transworld Publishers, 1989), p. 68; Stephanie Meyer, *Twilight*, (London: Atom, 2006), p. 119.

⁴⁹ This is the origin of Latin expression *Hic Sunt Dracones*, or ‘here be dragons’.

⁵⁰ Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, p. 389 .

one hand, these monsters are markers of chaos and threats unknown. Yet on the other, they provide a form and image for fears that are frighteningly anonymous: for what Arthur Machen termed ‘that awful secret of the wood’.⁵¹ In this light, then, it is our unease with the forest environment as a site of the unknown that frequently demands the presence of monsters. In the examples below, we will find monsters that vivid reflections of our ‘vague and horrible’ fears of the woods.⁵² We will begin with those that are so vague that they defy definition – and are, indeed, firmly ambiguous.

3.2 Ambiguous Monsters

‘The monster is a harbinger of category crisis’.

— Jeffrey Jerome Cohen.⁵³

Whilst there is a multitude of more identifiable monsters to be found in the woods, there are just as many in this setting that resist easy categorisation. This is fitting in accordance with the very nature of the monster, which is to defy borders, boundaries and any semblance of order and to be, as Cohen insists, ‘a harbinger of category crisis’.⁵⁴ Here, I examine some of those texts in which monsters align with no one category, as I discuss Stephen King’s novel *The Girl That Loved Tom Gordon* (1999), Jesse Holland and Andrew Mitton’s film *YellowBrickRoad* (2010) and Robert Holdstock’s novel *Mythago Wood* (1984). The examples I have chosen each demonstrate various monsters that are intricately bound to their forest environments and are

⁵¹ Machen, ‘The Great God Pan’, p. 106.

⁵² Blackwood, *Pan’s Garden*, p. 40.

⁵³ Cohen, *Monster Theory*, p. 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

fearful contradictions of the ‘human-nature dualism’⁵⁵, as they merge the human with nonhuman Nature.

In both *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* and *YellowBrickRoad*, we encounter forest texts in which the main monsters somehow embody the threat of being lost in the woods. We find in each of these examples a return to the idea, as expressed in *Antichrist*, that ‘Nature is Satan’s church’. In Stephen King’s *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, a young girl named Trisha becomes horribly lost in the woods of New England for days on end. As she struggles to survive, it quickly becomes clear that she is not alone in this forest. Observing her every move is a monster that describes itself as ‘the thing in the woods’⁵⁶ and is more formally titled ‘The God of the Lost’. This creature is a hideous mixture of human traits with monstrous Nature: ‘the human-nature dualism’⁵⁷ is thoroughly destroyed. It is shaped like a man and is clad in human attire, but has ‘yellow-white claws’ and ‘a misshaped head made of wasps’.⁵⁸ These claws and insects firmly signify the predatory and injurious elements of Nature. The insects conceal putrid flesh beneath, thus evoking a rotting corpse. This image is suggestive of the idea that in death, the body is reclaimed by Nature. Specifically, it shows the body *consumed* by Nature. Indeed, this creature embodies the voracious threat of the forest, as the girl is cast continually as its prey, waiting to be eaten. The name of this monster, ‘The God of the Lost’, is especially significant. As Stephen J. Spignesi has noted, it may in fact be read as ‘God’s opposite’.⁵⁹ What we might usually call the Devil, therefore, in the woods becomes ‘God’. ‘Nature’, indeed, ‘is Satan’s church’, as we again see the forest as an explicitly godless and unchristian environment. Moreover, this monster’s title suggests that this creature, in some

⁵⁵ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 81.

⁵⁶ Stephen King, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* (New York: Scribner, 1999), p. 79.

⁵⁷ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 81.

⁵⁸ King, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, p. 236.

⁵⁹ Stephen J. Spignesi, *The Essential Stephen King: A Ranking of the Greatest Novels, Short Stories, Movies, and Other Creations of the World’s Most Popular Writer* (New Jersey: Career Press, 2001), p. 123.

sense, is a manifestation of our fears of being *lost* in the woods. This threat is suggested as one that is as much psychological as it is physical. Each time that the ‘wasp-priest’⁶⁰ speaks, there are no quotation marks around his words. The significance of this is that there is no firm division between his words and the thoughts of the child. The suggestion, therefore, is that he may be a construct of her own unconscious: as Asma asserts, there are many who view monsters as mere human ‘*projections*’ [my emphasis].⁶¹ Such an uncertainty is illustrative of the fear that in the woodland setting *we* become more bestial and monstrous. The longer Trisha remains in the forest, the more she comes to resemble not only her hideous adversary, but the very environment. As she becomes increasingly filthy, an ‘ever-present cloud of bugs’⁶² surround her head – visually recalling *The God of the Lost*. Moreover, her teeth and skin are gradually turned green, as she is likened to the woodland surroundings. *She* is no longer distinctly separate to the forest setting. The implication, however, that *The God of the Lost* is merely the fantasy of a frightened child is undermined by the novel’s ending. Here, as the girl confronts the monster, they are witnessed by a man. Though he later claims what he saw was an *ursus americanus* (an American black bear), he is secretly haunted by the fear that it was ‘something else’⁶³ altogether. Having faced and overcome her adversary, Trisha leaves the woods and returns to the city. The forest is cast, indeed, as a landscape of trial – and one in which she is ultimately victorious. Her reward, or ‘happy ending’ manifests in her return to ‘Place’. This is underlined by one of her final lines, in which she places herself in the role of an educated Little Red: ‘I was stupid, wasn’t I, to get off the path like I did?’ Much like the morals that follow the fairy tales by those such as Charles Perrault, King provides a short

⁶⁰ King, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, p. 137.

⁶¹ Asma, *On Monsters*, p. 57.

⁶² King, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, p. 36.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

commentary following the story: ‘The woods themselves are real. If you should visit them [...], bring a compass, bring good maps... and try to stay on the path’.⁶⁴

In *YellowBrickRoad*, we encounter a monster that may be seen as an equivalent to The God of the Lost, as it similarly embodies our fears of disorientation. This film tells the story of a backwoods legend from 1940 in which the entire population of a New England town abandoned their homes and went into the forest. The bodies of many were later found in the woods, either frozen or brutally murdered. Over two hundred of the residents, however, were never seen again. The film is set in the modern day, in 2008 – in the year that the coordinates to the woodland trail taken by the ill-fated wanderers from 1940 are finally declassified. We follow a group of young adults who set out to solve the mystery of what happened to the townsfolk, all those years before. It soon transpires that they are condemning themselves to an identical fate, as one by one they are taken or killed by a mysterious and monstrous entity in the woods. This adversary, with its unsettling vagueness and indefinability, is illustrative of the mysterious dangers of the forest.

With the film’s title and subject matter, it deliberately evokes both the classic film *The Wizard of Oz* and the history of early settlements in the New World. This is an intriguing juxtaposition, but both, I suggest, underline the nature of the forest as a threatening locale. *The Wizard of Oz*, with its vengeful apple trees and ‘Haunted Forest’, has provided popular cultural examples of arboreal menace.⁶⁵ With its yellow brick road, which quite literally passes through the forest, we have a classic example of a path in the woods that is to be followed. Unlike Little Red, Dorothy (Judy Garland) does *not* stray from this path and is ultimately rewarded by the wizard in the Emerald City. The wizard is a benevolent bestower of wishes and the city is the

⁶⁴ Stephen King, ‘Author’s Postscript’, in *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, p. 224.

⁶⁵ Incidentally, this infamous scene may be read to carry environmental themes. Dorothy, unthinkingly, plucks an apple from what she assumes is inanimate Nature. The tree, however, is very much alive and physically defends itself, scolding her with the educationally ecocentric words: ‘how would you like it if somebody came along and picked something off you?’ *The Wizard of Oz*. Dir: Victor Fleming. USA. MGM, 1939. Film.

ultimate contrast to the frightening forest. The ‘happy ending’ is presented in the moral ‘there’s no place like home’ – as indeed the safety and security of the home as ‘Place’ is firmly underlined. In *YellowBrickRoad* this is all turned on its head: the ‘wizard’ is a monster, the ‘city’ is Hell and the security of ‘home’ is never seen again. In its legend of the missing town, which is significantly located in New England, the film simultaneously evokes some of the stories of the New World. This era, of course, carries strong connotations of humanity cast *against* the wilderness in the dangerous errand of subduing the forests of early America. The premise of the film’s legend explicitly evokes historical tales of those such as the Roanoke Colony – known also as ‘The Lost Colony’ – in which entire settlements mysteriously vanished. We are reminded, then, of *real* stories in which humans have been lost in the woods and never seen again – thus lending to the tale a taste of authenticity. The story that we are told at the beginning of the film is especially unnerving because there is no obvious explanation in the twentieth century for a society *in its entirety* to enter and vanish into the woods. Indeed, there is the sense that there is something dangerous and *unnatural* about voluntarily abandoning the towns for the forest. This is only confirmed by the various fates of the residents, which each represent fears of what might happen to those who go into the woods. Those that are frozen signify the very real challenges to survival in this environment; the ones brutally killed suggest some monster in this setting; and finally, the majority that inexplicably vanish embody the threat of *lostness* that is encompassed by the forest and illustrate indeed the ‘awful secret of the wood’.

As the film centres on the intention to illuminate such mysteries, what we are essentially presented with is the idea that in the twenty-first century, we are ‘beyond’ needing to fear the forest. The subject, therefore, of citizens being permanently lost in the forest is something confined to our history. As one character in *The Blair Witch Project* (a film we will come to in our discussion of witches) boldly declares: ‘it’s very hard to get lost in America these days –

and it's even harder to stay lost'. Moreover, if no longer viewed as 'strange, monstrous, or enchanting', then the forest is seen as devoid of monsters. The modern-day researchers certainly embody this 'comforting illusion'.⁶⁶ There are seven in total and each stands as a symbol of the heights of civilisation. Our protagonists, named Melissa (Annessa Ramsey) and Teddy (Michael Laurino), are two established academics. Accompanying them are two cartographers, a member of the forestry service, a medic and a psychologist. The first three of these specialise in categorising the forest in strictly geographical and pragmatic terms. The last two are in place to manage any physical or psychological maladies that may occur in the woods. The presence of the psychologist is especially interesting, as it is demonstrative of the awareness that we may be psychologically influenced in the forest setting. It is assumed that with this array of expertise, the forest, surely, is no longer to be feared.

Of course, these bastions of modernity are gravely mistaken. The woods *are* dangerous and they are governed by a mysterious and monstrous entity (Lee Wilkof). This figure, listed in the credits only as 'Clerk/Usher', is described by the directors in the DVD commentary as a symbol for 'all the evil in the forest'.⁶⁷ Though when seen, he appears predominantly human, he is undoubtedly supernatural. Interestingly, he remains out of sight for the majority of the film – we are aware only of his ambiguous and seemingly omnipotent and omniscient presence. As each of the human characters are killed, one by one, we see only his hands, gloved and white, as he removes the corpses. In one especially memorable scene, a body is found grotesquely displayed so as to resemble the scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*. When we first meet the scarecrow in Victor Fleming's film, he responds to Dorothy's bewilderment by crossing his arms in front of his chest and simultaneously pointing in opposite directions (*figure 3.2*).

⁶⁶ Asma, *On Monsters*, p. 278.

⁶⁷ Dir: Jesse Holland, Andy Mitton, *YellowBrickRoad*. Points North Films: 2011. Film.

The image is one of utter disorientation. In the children's classic its effect is humorous, yet when hideously recreated by the monstrous Clerk, it becomes quite terrifying (*figure 3.3*).



Figures 3.2 and 3.3, images of 'lostness' in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *YellowBrickRoad* (2010).

The image, here, is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the Clerk is shown to deliberately exploit our fears of disorientation: the murdered human quite literally becomes a symbol of being lost in the woods. Its message, it seems, is that whichever way one turns in the forest, one's fate will be invariably gruesome. Moreover, if we are to compare the settings of these two images, they are starkly divergent. The scarecrow is brightly lit in a neatly agricultural scene, which symbolises human control and influence in the environment. The dead woman, contrastingly, is amidst the chaos of the forest, which here is accentuated by the fact that dozens of trees have inexplicably been felled. Finally, this symbolic reference to *The Wizard of Oz* may be seen as a clue to the Clerk's identity as a monstrous alternative to the film's eponymous character. This theory gains further credence if we note that the Clerk is portrayed by Lee Wilkof, who played the wizard in the Broadway production of *Wicked*.⁶⁸ If we see this entity,

⁶⁸ Created by Stephen Schwartz and Winnie Holzman, *Wicked* (2003) is a musical that focuses on the story of the Wicked Witch of the West preceding the events of *The Wizard of Oz*.

then, as a substitute for The Wizard of Oz, he is shown as a monstrous inversion. He does not grant wishes with benevolence, leading those who seek him to discover in themselves hidden strengths and abilities, but instead is a Satan-like figure that aids in the discovery of the very darkest capacities of human nature. Some of the party are driven to murder one another: again, we see primitive violence drawn out in the primitive setting. As the trailer to the film announces, underlining such psychoanalytical themes: ‘they were searching for an evil in the forest... but the forest found the evil in them’. Interestingly, there is no allusion here to any monster: it is the *forest* that is cast as explicitly threatening. This further underlines the idea that the Clerk is a ‘symbol’, indeed, ‘for all the evil in the forest’. He may be read then, in a sense, as an extension of his surrounding environment.

In the ending to the film, the title of ‘Clerk/Usher’ is given a context as the trail ends, curiously, at an abandoned cinema. Only Teddy has made it to the end of the trail and is greeted there by the Clerk, whom we finally meet. (It is by closely observing his uniform that we see the white gloves and ascertain that his is the presence that has haunted the forest throughout). Teddy is led by the Clerk into the cinema and is forced to take his seat. We see glimpses of an audience of corpses around him – whom we may surmise are those who vanished down the trail in 1940. The suggestion, then, is that he must remain here eternally, against his will. In place of the magical Emerald City, we are presented instead with an explicitly Hellish domain. With this in mind, the title of ‘Clerk/Usher’ takes on additional meaning. If we are to read this cinema in the midst of the woods as a literal Hell, then the monster assumes the role of Satan. He awaits those who wander into the midst of the woods – and then leads them into Hell. On the screen we are shown a violent image, which interestingly evokes undeniably environmental themes. Melissa’s body has been merged with a tree, which is blackened and dying, and we see a mixture of trees and flames in the background. The scene is accompanied by the following words: ‘This is our home. The grass is black, The sky is choked with smoke. All the people

have disappeared. This is our home.’ Melissa quite literally becomes a part of the forest and the ‘human-nature dualism’ is destroyed in this image. Visually, she recalls the suicide victims from Dante’s seventh circle of Hell: we see again the unholy union of human and forest as a symbol of Hell. The tone to the ending of *YellowBrickRoad* is intriguingly one of environmental apocalypse. We are visually shown the destruction of Nature – and specifically the forest – in an image that recalls the cover to Harrison’s work on forests, with its monochrome scene of burning woodland in the background. Melissa’s wording describes a world destroyed by pollution (‘the grass is black’, ‘the sky is choked with smoke’) and in which we have brought about our own demise (‘all the people have disappeared’). The line ‘this is our home’ is a variation of Dorothy’s lesson ‘there’s no place like home’. The moral here may be read as an environmental warning of what will become our home if we fail to value and protect the world around us – we risk the danger of creating a Hell on earth. In addition to these environmental themes, it is worth questioning why it is a *cinema* that lies at the end of the trail. Firstly, it is significant that the coordinates to the trail began by a cinema in town and end with a cinema in the forest. The trail, impossibly, begins and ends in much the same place. This underlines the film’s themes of disorientation and the idea that humans, unwittingly, walk in circles in the woods. Moreover, the cinema, like the forest, is a space we associate with tales of the unconscious: it is, as Freud declares, a ‘dream factory’. Finally, the cinema introduces a ‘meta’ element to the film, as we are alerted to the fact that we ourselves are watching a screen. What is so frightening about the forest, it seems, is its *mediation* through our fictive portrayals. It is we that cast it as a Gothic locale. What Teddy sees is in some sense real: Melissa is dead, and has been taken by the forest. So, too, the (doubly) mediated image of environmental destruction is loosely based in reality. With the film’s ending, we are left disoriented and questioning what exactly is real and is to be feared in the forest. There is nothing explicit to name: we have only the film’s ambiguous monster.

The monster in this film exists in order to punish human arrogance and to lead those who seek to reveal what Arthur Machen called ‘that awful secret of the wood’⁶⁹ to its very source. The explorers, who assume that with the knowledge and technologies of Western modernity the forest is not frightening, are horribly mistaken. They illustrate that is still entirely possible in modern-day America to be lost in the woods – and that it is entirely in our interest to stay away from the forest and the monsters it contains.

There is one further text that must be examined before we narrow our focus to specific monsters. This is Robert Holdstock’s *Mythago Wood* (1984). The forest in this text is instinctively British. It carries no connotations of the New World, but instead is littered with English mythologies that are bound to the woodland setting. ‘Holdstock’, according to Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, ‘has travelled deeper into the woods than any other mythic writer’.⁷⁰ Though generally discussed in the context of fantasy, his novel may be seen, as Brian W. Aldiss argues, as ‘a horror story’.⁷¹ It is of seminal relevance here because its subject, in essence, is about the creation of monsters in the forest setting. We are essentially presented with the following equation: the human mind + the forest environment = the monster. We thus have strong themes throughout of psychoanalysis, as the forest is cast, unequivocally, as a setting of the human unconscious. Moreover, the text engages with the connections (as discussed in Chapter One) between ‘mythoclasm’ and ‘the death of nature’. The forest here *is* thoroughly ‘strange, monstrous and enchanting’, as it is filled with animate examples of our various mythologies – which are here named ‘mythagos’. The woodland and its mysterious (and often monstrous) denizens are intricately linked: here, they are mutually dependent on each other’s

⁶⁹ Machen, ‘The Great God Pan’, p. 106.

⁷⁰ Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, *The Green Man: Tales from the Mythic Forest* (New York: Viking Juvenile, 2002), p. 15.

⁷¹ Brian W. Aldiss, ‘Foreword’ in *The Mythic Fantasy of Robert Holdstock: Critical Essays on the Fiction*, eds Donald E. Morse and Kálmán Matolcsy, (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2011), p. 2.

existence. The mythagos thrive only if the forest is thriving, which in turn only thrives if it is filled with its mythologies.

Mythago Wood tells the story of a man named Stephen Huxley and his treacherous journey into the forest. The story begins when he learns of his father's death and returns to the family home in Herefordshire, where only his brother Christian remains. The house, which is named Oak Lodge, is set on the edge of an ancient forest called Ryhope Wood. It transpires that this woodland is home to the mysterious mythagos: an infinite multitude of various creatures from our history of mythologies. Stephen learns that his father devoted his years to the study of these woodland denizens and that his brother is now continuing the obsession. Slowly, he too gains an insatiable desire to know the secrets of this wood. With the aid of his friend Harry Keeton, he embarks on his journey to the centre of the forest.

The forest of this story lies at the very heart of the text and is inextricably linked to its various inhabitants. We are told that it is one of the very last areas in England of primeval woodland. The idea that the forest is a space that is historically and geographically endless is here literalised, as it is spatially and temporally infinite. Significantly, we learn that Ryhope Wood is not an anomaly and that mythagos are to be found in ancient forests all over the world. This setting, then, along with its subjects, is endowed with a universal symbolism. The mythagos may be seen to stand for the very idea of the myth. As they 'play out their fates', as Richard Matthews contends, in 'eternal repetition',⁷² they illustrate Karen Armstrong's definition of a myth as an event which in some sense 'happened once' and yet 'happens all the time'.⁷³ They are, as Kálmán Matolcsy argues, the various 'archetypes'⁷⁴ created by humankind throughout the centuries in our various mythologies. They may be good or evil, human or

⁷² Richard Matthews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 188.

⁷³ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 7.

⁷⁴ Kálmán Matolcsy, 'Masks in the Forest: The Dynamics of Surface and Depth in *Mythago Wood*', in *The Mythic Fantasy of Robert Holdstock: Critical Essays on the Fiction*, eds Donald E. Morse and Kálmán Matolcsy (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2011), p. 28.

animal – and many are monsters. They are created, significantly, when the human mind interacts with the forest environment. Though they may take any physical form, they are invariably comprised of ‘wood and leaf litter’⁷⁵ and are – albeit unconsciously – of human design. There is an inherent irony, as whilst the human is necessary in the mythagos’ creation, the modern human is simultaneously to blame for these creatures’ demise. As the forests are destroyed, so too are these inhabitants. Modernity, we are told, is defined by what the creatures term ‘the dying of the green’.⁷⁶ With this poetic allusion to what we may now construe as environmental crisis, we can find an explicit connection between the endangerments of both myth and the natural world. The creatures, along with their environment, grow increasingly fearful and hostile to humankind. The mythagos become more difficult to locate and the forest assumes various defences against human intruders, such as deliberate disorientation. The forest is cast *against* modern civilisation. Simultaneously, the reality of myths and monsters becomes mere fantasy to a society that is increasingly separate to the forest environment. This distinction, however, only substantiates the forest as a suitable setting for our fantastical imaginings. This is merely in accordance, as Duzer asserts, with ‘standard monstrous geography’. ‘Distance’, as Buxton writes, ‘creates possibilities’ and indeed this is reflected by the fact that the mythagos are visible only to those in the forest.⁷⁷ As Joseph Campbell writes, ‘our myths wake a little and stir as we venture into the wilderness’.⁷⁸ At its edge, they are mere flickers in one’s peripheral vision, but as one enters its midst, they are fully manifested.

It is fitting, as the forest is cast as a setting of the human unconscious, that its most monstrous mythagos lie in its darkest recesses. Here, we are told, are its ‘darkest’ and most

⁷⁵ Donald E. Morse, ‘Introduction’ *The Mythic Fantasy of Robert Holdstock: Critical Essays on the Fiction*, eds Donald E. Morse and Kálmán Matolcsy (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2011), p. 27.

⁷⁶ Holdstock, *Mythago Wood*, p. 33.

⁷⁷ Richard Buxton, quoted in Chet Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, p. 393.

⁷⁸ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, p. 68.

‘terrifying’ creations.⁷⁹ We encounter, as Aldiss asserts, our ‘childlike fears’.⁸⁰ Along with allusions to such classic monsters as those from our fairy tales, we encounter the text’s ultimate adversary: the foreboding Urscumug – the prefix of which (‘ür’) underlines the monster’s originary status. This monster has the body of a man, but is twice his size, and in place of its head is the skull of a boar. The image is a crude conflation of human and nonhuman Nature as the ‘dualism’ is destroyed. This hideous creature stalks each of the Huxley brothers throughout the forest – seemingly threatening their bloody demise. In the end, however, we are presented with a twist, as the Urscumug is revealed to be a monstrous version of George Huxley – Stephen and Christian’s deceased father. Moreover, its intention is not simply malevolent, as it ultimately serves to demonstrate [to *demonstrate*⁸¹] a valuable lesson⁸² to its youngest son. The fact that this monster – this frightening hybrid of humanity and Nature – is a blood relative is important. The monster, along with its environment, is revealed as something that is not so distinct from the human as we might first imagine: instead, it is undeniably akin to us.

Mythago Wood is a text that engages thoroughly with the question of ‘standard monstrous geography’⁸³ in our placement of monsters in the forest setting. The forest is shown as the natural and necessary environment for these creatures’ existence. Moreover, it is human interaction with this environment that creates them. The most frightening mythagos that are indubitably monstrous are born of human dread within this setting: thus, they may be read as literal manifestations of Estok’s ‘ecophobia’.⁸⁴ This is reflected by the fact that the further one

⁷⁹ Holdstock, *Mythago Wood*, p. 217.

⁸⁰ Aldiss, ‘Foreword’, p. 2.

⁸¹ Timothy K. Beal discusses the etymology of the word ‘monster’, tracing it back to its Latin origins in the word *monstrare* (to ‘show’ or ‘reveal’) and *monere* (to ‘warn’ or ‘portend’). He ties the word ‘demonstrate’ to the same origin, suggesting a key function of the monster is to serve as a lesson. Sourced: Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 6.

⁸² Throughout the story, Stephen loves a mythago named Guiwenneth, whom he seeks to rediscover in the wood. Ultimately, the Urscumug removes her to another realm, but not before indicating to Stephen where and when she is to return to him. Thus, whilst abiding by the laws of this setting, he provides some comfort to his son and informs him of his intended fate.

⁸³ Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, p. 433.

⁸⁴ Estok, ‘Theorising in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia’, p. 203.

ventures into the forest, the more monstrous and terrifying its mythagos become. As the creatures are literally comprised of their forest surroundings, their survival is bound to that of the forest. The ‘dying of the green’⁸⁵ ties in with Timothy Clark’s ‘disenchantment thesis’⁸⁶ within ecocriticism: as the remaining wilderness is increasingly endangered, so too are our mythologies that are bound to this setting. Interestingly, the text’s most threatening monster, the Urscumug is revealed not only as a complex entity beyond human understanding, but as an ancestor, or origin, of *human* existence. Cohen’s contention that ‘monsters are our children’⁸⁷ is here reversed, as they are cast instead as our predecessors. They are shown as a part of our history – and as a part of ourselves. As they are so intimately bound to the forest setting, we return to Jay Appleton’s assertion that naturally we are ‘forest-dwellers’⁸⁸ and Richard Hayman’s contention that ‘an echoing green’ continues to resound ‘within and around us’.⁸⁹

In each of these texts, we find monsters that are firmly bound to their forest settings. In *The Girl who Loved Tom Gordon* and *YellowBrickRoad*, we have Satan-like entities that have hideous dominion over this environment and those who are lost within it. In *Mythago Wood*, the monsters are quite literally extensions of the forest environment and made of its materials. In each, the monsters may be seen as illustrations of ecophobic dread, as they are the objects to be feared in this environment. Each undermines the ‘dualism’ between humanity and Nature and augments our fears of being lost in the forest.

As I have intimated above, when it comes to individual monsters associated with the forest, there are simply too many for each to be discussed in any detail here. I have chosen, then, just two identifiable ‘species’ on which to focus: witches and wolves. My reasons for this

⁸⁵ Holdstock, *Mythago Wood*, p. 33.

⁸⁶ Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 143.

⁸⁷ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ‘Postscript’ in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Mittman and Dendle, p. 452.

⁸⁸ Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p. 29.

⁸⁹ Hayman, *Trees, Woodland and Civilisation*, p. 1.

selection are quite simple. Witches and wolves may each be seen as ‘traditional’ monsters of the forest. Each is linked – in both history and mythology – to the woodland setting. Each is an example of an archetypal adversary in the Deep Dark Forest of traditional fairy tales. In our contemporary horror fictions, witches and wolves continue as popular monsters. Whilst they may now be found, too, in more urban environments, they are yet consistently located in the forest setting.

3.3 ‘She Was an Old Lady with the Fur of a Horse’⁹⁰: Witches in the Woods

The witch is a classic monster in Western culture. It is born of myth, history and fiction alike. ‘The word “witch”’, argues Jack Zipes, ‘is memetically loaded’⁹¹ and holds an array of connotations. Whilst some of these are positive, the vast majority are monstrous.⁹² Generally speaking, the witch is an individual that is credited with the supernatural ability to practice witchcraft and magic. In addition, as Kim Newman contends, the witch is ‘usually a woman’⁹³ and is traditionally associated, as Asma notes, with Satanism,⁹⁴ The witch is a significant monster in the context of the ecoGothic because it is, as Carolyn Merchant argues, ‘a classic symbol of the wildness and violence of nature’.⁹⁵ In the figure of the witch, the lines between

⁹⁰ *The Blair Witch Project*. Dir. Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez. 20th Century Fox: 2003. Film.

⁹¹ Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of Genre* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 56. Zipes uses the word memetic in the sense of Richard Dawkins’ definition of the ‘meme’ as a cultural idea that is analogous (in its imitation and recreation) to the ‘gene’. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene: 30th Anniversary Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁹² In Pagan times, for example, witches were widely revered. It is worthy of note, also, that in the present day, many of those who call themselves ‘witches’ (such as Wiccans) consider themselves wholly benign. Interestingly, there is a tendency for contemporary ‘witches’ to align themselves with some of the romantic elements in ecofeminism, with the connections between women and the natural world. Satanism is considered by the majority of these movements as distinct from the notion of witchcraft, and as aligned instead with the darker elements in Christianity.

⁹³ Kim Newman, *The BFI Companion to Horror* (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 341.

⁹⁴ Asma, *On Monsters*, p. 113.

⁹⁵ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p. 127.

human and nonhuman Nature are frighteningly indistinct.⁹⁶ She is human in form, yet essentially bestial. Traditionally, as Carol F. Karlsen argues, the witch is so intricately bound to the forces of Nature, that she is said to be able to control them⁹⁷. ‘Witches’, writes Merchant, ‘could make hail or rain, destroy crops, or bring plagues and disease’.⁹⁸ We have an extensive history of viewing these monsters as embodiments of frightening Nature: consequently, in the discussion of Estok’s ‘ecophobia’, they are greatly significant. More specifically, we have many examples in which they are firmly associated with our fears of the woodland setting. ‘It is in the dark forest’, writes Bruno Bettelheim, ‘that we often encounter the witch’.⁹⁹ In order to examine this tradition, I consider first some of the associations between witches and the woods in history and in fairy tales, before looking to several texts that illustrate these connections.

Sally J. Morgan, in her discussion of witchcraft, has introduced the term ‘heritage noire’.¹⁰⁰ In essence, she argues that the horror genre is largely reliant on our fears of a dark and bloody history that continues to haunt us. The witch is an obvious example of this. She is a figure made all the more frightening by the fact that once upon a time she was believed to be real – and in consequence, thousands (if not millions) of women were tortured and killed.¹⁰¹ The infamous histories of witch trials and witch hunts in the Western world inevitably inform our understandings of this ‘monster’ today. Significantly, in both the Old and New World, the role of setting was important – suggesting a connection between fears of Nature and fears of

⁹⁶ Several parallels may be drawn between the witch and the ‘She-Devil in the Wilderness’ in the previous chapter. However, the two are distinct as the ‘She-Devil’ is not necessarily supernatural, whereas the witch is inherently so.

⁹⁷ Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1998), p. 7.

⁹⁸ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p. 140.

⁹⁹ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 94.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan, ‘Heritage Noire’, p. 137.

¹⁰¹ As Elizabeth Reis has noted, ‘no accurate record’ of the number of ‘witches’ killed throughout the centuries exists and estimates vary for tens of thousands to millions. Sourced: Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. xv.

witches. Brian P. Levack has highlighted the significance of what he terms ‘rural witchcraft’ in Europe – noting that ‘the vast majority of these witchcraft trials began in the countryside’.¹⁰² Meanwhile, in America – which has provided us, as Hillard notes, with our ‘most infamous’¹⁰³ examples of ‘witches’ in history – the experience of the settlers was largely defined by the struggle with the surrounding wilderness. As discussed in Chapter One, the relationship between Puritans and the natural world is certainly intriguing in the context of the ecoGothic. The outbreak of fears concerning witchcraft in this period, according to those such as Elizabeth Reis, was ‘intimately related to the religious culture of New England Puritanism’ – and this, undoubtedly, included the settlers’ symbolic associations with the untamed wilderness.¹⁰⁴ The wilderness was a setting that was greatly feared: entering within it, as Smith and Hughes contend, was for many ‘tantamount to confronting Original Sin’.¹⁰⁵ It was firmly associated with humankind’s expulsion from paradise and so was deemed an ungodly and threatening setting. The forests of the New World, as Hillard suggests, were highly ‘Gothicised’ to those within them.¹⁰⁶ ‘For the Puritans’, writes Morgan, ‘all fears came together in the location of the woods’.¹⁰⁷ This was interestingly reflected in the curious practice of at times abandoning convicted witches in the forest, which were left then to die – something we will see when we discuss *The Blair Witch Project*.¹⁰⁸ As these ‘monsters’ were deliberately removed from civilisation and placed in the wilderness setting, we have a historical – and quite literal – example of ‘standard monstrous geography’.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, p. 516.

¹⁰³ Hillard, ‘From Salem Witch to *Blair Witch*: The Ritual Influence of American Gothic Nature’, p. 106.

¹⁰⁴ Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England*, p. xv.

¹⁰⁵ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Hillard, ‘From Salem Witch to *Blair Witch*: The Ritual Influence of American Gothic Nature’, p. 113.

¹⁰⁷ Morgan, ‘Heritage Noire’, p. 146.

¹⁰⁸ Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, p. 433.

One of the most famous categories of witches in the woods are the witches in our Western fairy tales. ‘The first volume of the Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales was published in 1812’, writes Walter Rankin, ‘with images of neighbourhood sorcerers, witches, and witch trials still fresh in the societal memory’.¹¹⁰ The fairy tale witch, then, whilst a figure of mythology, is certainly influenced by history. In the modern day, when one thinks of the witch – and especially the witch in the forest setting – it is likely that fairy tales come quickly to mind. Sharon Russell, in her discussion of the evolution of the witch in popular culture, argues that fairy tales present us with some of the most frightening images of this monster. In these stories, she argues, they are ‘powerful [...] figures of fear’.¹¹¹ When it comes to our fears of the forest, two of the most infamous witches that are bound to this setting are Baba Yaga and the flesh-eating monster of ‘Hansel and Gretel’.

Baba Yaga is a monster of Slavic origin, but as Zipes has argued, these tales ‘*should be studied alongside Grimm and Perrault*’, as they tend to provide ‘fruitful parallels’.¹¹² I mention Baba Yaga here as she is a creation that demonstrates some of the intricate connections between our fears of the forest and our fears of the witch. Baba Yaga has appeared in literally thousands of tales, which have been recorded in writing since 1755.¹¹³ She is always depicted in the midst of the forest, which is cast quite clearly as her domain. She is, as Joanna Hubbs argues, ‘an archaic form through which nature is embodied’.¹¹⁴ According to Zipes, she may in fact be ‘Mother Nature herself’.¹¹⁵ Yet if she is Mother Nature, then we are left with a thoroughly

¹¹⁰ Walter Rankin, *Grimm Pictures: Fairy Tale Archetypes in Eight Horror and Suspense Films* (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2007), p. 144.

¹¹¹ Sharon Russell, ‘The Witch in Film, Myth and Reality’, in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film: Revised Edition*, eds Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2004), p. 64.

¹¹¹ Christina Hole, *Witchcraft in England* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1977), p. 65.

¹¹² Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, p. 60.

¹¹³ Andreas Johns, *Baba Yaga: The Ambiguous Mother and Witch of the Russian Folktale (USA)* (Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2004), p. 12.

¹¹⁴ Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 36.

¹¹⁵ Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, p. 61.

monstrous guardian. This is in accordance with the stereotype of the witch as something of a wholly unmaternal figure. Moreover, if we are to read Baba Yaga as a manifestation of the natural world, then Nature, significantly, is cast in itself as monstrous. She is no symbol of romantic fecundity, but instead she signifies the death of humanity. Baba Yaga is at times depicted with an array of spiked skulls in the thriving forest – suggesting Nature’s supremacy over a vulnerable humanity. Baba Yaga has a predilection for eating humans, most especially children. Those who are lost in her woods are at risk of being eaten, as she embodies the *consuming* threat of the forest. Most interestingly, however, she illustrates our fears of being *lost* in the woods. This is most memorably demonstrated in the image of her curious abode. This infamous structure is a little wooden hut perched on giant chicken legs, which roams endlessly throughout the forest (*figure 3.4*). If we return to the terms in Human Geography of ‘Space’ and ‘Place’, as discussed in Chapter One, then this image firmly signifies the destruction of the stability of Place. The hut is an image of ‘anti-settlement’ in its uncanny mobility, therein emphasising and reflecting the forest’s categorisation as threatening *Space*. The manufactured structure of the home – that classic example of Place – is something we assume is inherently stationary. There is something literally uncanny (‘*unheimlich*’/‘unhomely’) in its addition of legs: this ‘home’ suddenly – and bewilderingly – signifies instability and transience. Finally, in this unforgettable image, we see also the destruction of the ‘human-nature dualism’. Nonhuman Nature, in the form of the fragmented animal, is merged with the structures of civilisation.



Fig. 3.4, Baba Yaga and her hut.

In ‘Hansel and Gretel’ we find a ‘fruitful parallel’¹¹⁶ indeed to this hybridised image of ‘civilisation’, with the infamous gingerbread cottage. This story, as we have already seen in texts such as *The Guardian* and *The Happening*, is one that is often evoked in our portrayals of the forest as a frightening locale. The tale, along with its central monster, the witch, is infamous throughout Western culture. It follows the story of an impoverished family that live ‘at the edge of a great forest’¹¹⁷ – a location which, as Bettelheim argues, is ‘essential’ and determines the dark events of the tale as ‘imminent from the start’.¹¹⁸ The two children, Hansel and Gretel, are led into the forest by their father and stepmother (a version of the witch)¹¹⁹ and abandoned to the wilderness. The adults are unable to feed the siblings and so use the forest as an indirect means of murdering the children: they assume it will *consume* them. Soon enough, Hansel and Gretel are victims indeed to the dangers of the forest. Firstly, they become horribly *lost*, as their markers of space (a trail of scattered breadcrumbs) are quickly destroyed. Disoriented, they stumble across the witch’s gingerbread cottage and begin to devour it. The

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 60.

¹¹⁷ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, ‘Hansel and Gretel’, in *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, ed. Maria Tatar (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 2004), p. 73.

¹¹⁸ Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, p. 163.

¹¹⁹ In the end of the tale, when the witch is killed, the stepmother mysteriously dies as well, suggesting a symbolically shared identity.

fact that it is edible means that much like Baba Yaga's hut, we have an image of Place again as twisted and transient. As its boundaries ('walls protect, divide, distinguish'¹²⁰) are quickly destroyed, so too are the distinctions between inside and outside. Themes of eating and voracity are central to this text, which is fitting in light of recurrent themes of the forest as a *consuming* threat. If we read the children as representatives of humanity, and the witch and her abode as extensions of the forest, then we find some interesting themes in the context of ecocriticism. In the image of the voracious children consuming the cottage, we have a demonstration of Peter Barry's contention that 'nature is being *gobbled* by culture'.¹²¹ The witch's reaction, then, to the destruction of her home may be seen, in one light, as Nature's revenge.¹²² As she endeavours to eat the intruders, she embodies the consuming threats of the forest. Finally, as Gretel outwits the witch and the children are able to escape the woods, the monster is revealed as a manifestation of this setting as a site of *trial*.

There are countless examples of texts in which we encounter the witch in the forest setting, with clear influences in history and fairy tales alike. The texts on which I focus are *The Blair Witch Project*, *Hotel* and *The Woods*. *The Blair Witch Project*, however, is the predominant focus, as it is such an infamous tale of woodland terror. *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), directed by Eduardo Sánchez and Daniel Myrick, is a modern example of a text that similarly relies on the dark histories of New World witch trials. It is a further instance of Morgan's 'heritage noire'.¹²³ Moreover, it strongly evokes the tale of 'Hansel and Gretel' and carries, as Hillard contends, an 'ecocritical thread'¹²⁴ throughout. Indeed, it is firmly relevant in an ecoGothic context because 'the story', as Rebecca Coyle argues, 'is essentially about the

¹²⁰ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 15.

¹²¹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 263.

¹²² This parallels the reaction of the old lady in *The Happening*, as seen in Chapter Two.

¹²³ Morgan, 'Heritage Noire', p. 137.

¹²⁴ Hillard, 'From Salem Witch to *Blair Witch*: The Ritual Influence of American Gothic Nature', p. 105.

terror of nature'.¹²⁵ It is a classic example of a modern text that centres on our fears of the forest and the monsters that might be within it.

The basic premise of the film revolves around a group of students making a documentary about a legendary monster of the Maryland forest, known as 'the Blair Witch'. As they set out to document this creature, we have clear parallels with *YellowBrickRoad*, as discussed above. Much like the explorers in Mitton and Holland's film, the students illustrate what Asma has called the 'comforting illusion'¹²⁶ that monsters no longer exist. They do not *really* expect to find a witch and have no reason to believe that the woods they traverse will be in any way threatening. Nature and myth are believed to be 'dead' and they have lost the ability indeed to see the forest as 'strange, monstrous, and enchanting'. They endeavour in their film to cast it as such, but fundamentally believe that they will be creating a fiction. Of course, it transpires that they are horribly mistaken. The film's tagline was: 'it does for the woods what *Jaws* did for water'. However, I would argue that it could not have been such a phenomenon if the woods were not *already* viewed as frightening. The film's status, then, is explained by the fact that it clearly struck a chord with widely existing fears.

The Blair Witch Project, along with the publicity that surrounded its release in 1999, was something of a phenomenon. The faux documentary about three Americans who went missing in the woods was widely marketed as entirely *real*. In what Morgan has called a 'carefully constructed conceit'¹²⁷, the filmmakers presented four stages to the story. Firstly, there was the footage allegedly found buried in the woods. Secondly, there was a book said to be from the eighteenth century, entitled *The Blair Witch Cult*. Thirdly, there was an extensive website (still in existence)¹²⁸ that detailed the history of the witch and included interviews with

¹²⁵ Rebecca Coyle, 'Spooked by Sound: *The Blair Witch Project*', in *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound and Horror Cinema*, ed. Philip Hayward (London: Equinox, 2009), p. 217.

¹²⁶ Asma, *On Monsters*, p. 278.

¹²⁷ Morgan, 'Heritage Noire', p. 139.

¹²⁸ www.blairwitch.com

‘professors’ and ‘historians’ on the subject of this monster. Finally, there is the edited film that we see, which Håxan (the production company) claimed to have released at the bequest of one of the victim’s mothers.¹²⁹ The names of the three predominant actors in the film – Heather Donahue, Michael C. Williams and Joshua Leonard – were used also for their characters, and at one point the popular movie website IMDB listed these three as ‘deceased’.¹³⁰ Each of these elements effectively conspired towards an illusion of realism. The result is something of a social experiment, as we are presented with an example of human interaction with mythology. The amount of people that were willing and able to believe in the story’s events revealed a more readily superstitious audience than might first have been expected. This illustrated that we are not as ‘post-enlightenment’ and ‘would-be rational’ as we might like to imagine, and that we continue, indeed, to be ‘terrified by the wild wood’.¹³¹ The film, then, gives us a thoroughly ‘meta’ element: whilst the students set out to prove the existence of monsters in the forest, so, too, do those in its audience who are convinced of its authenticity.

If one is to impose a chronology of the various legends that have been propagated on the Blair Witch, her story reads something like this. In 1785, in a Maryland town called Blair, a woman called Elly Kedward was believed to be a witch after it was discovered that she was ‘bleeding’ many of the local children. The townspeople searched her body, located the witch’s teat, and the woman confessed to having relations with the Devil.¹³² She was found guilty of witchcraft and was banished from the town, bound by a tree and left to die in the forest (an example, indeed, of ‘standard monstrous geography’,¹³³ which was practised in historical

¹²⁹ Interestingly, even the name of the production company is an illusion to witchcraft, as it evokes the 1922 film of the same name. *Håxan*. Dir. Benjamin Christensen. Sweden. Skandias Filmbyrå: 1922. Film.

¹³⁰ Sean Smith, ‘Curse of the Blair Witch’, <http://www.newsweek.com/curse-blair-witch-125931> Accessed 04.03.2014.

¹³¹ Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, p. 200.

¹³² As Karlsen notes, it was historically believed that witches bore manifest ‘signs’ of their monstrosity in either a ‘witch’s teat’ or ‘Devil’s mark’. Sourced: Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, p. 12.

¹³³ Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, p. 433.

instances of ‘witchcraft’¹³⁴). The website includes a fictitious wood cut (*figure 3.5*), depicting her punishment. Over the following year, however, all of her accusers and half the town’s children mysteriously disappeared. As the disappearances were credited to the witch, her dangers merged with the threat of the forest as a site in which one is lost.



Fig. 3.5, The Blair Witch Woodcut.

Those who remained quickly fled, and the town – much like that in *YellowBrickRoad*¹³⁵ – was left abandoned. The legend of Blair continues with the town being rediscovered in 1824 and renamed Burkittsville. Children continued to disappear and those who went looking for them were found brutally murdered. During this time, the name Elly Kedward is replaced with ‘The Blair Witch’ – a significant detail, as the monster is made synonymous with her setting. In 1940, so the story goes, seven children were killed in a house deep in the woods by a man named Rustin Parr, who claimed he had only done what ‘the old lady’ had told him. The ways in which this information is conveyed creates the sense that we are not being presented so much with a story, but with evidence. The accusation of Elly Kedward *could* be a part of colonist history, whilst lines in *The Blair Witch Cult* such as ‘you have a neighbour living not far off,

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 433; Levack; *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, p. 6.

¹³⁵ Again, histories such as ‘the lost colony’ and abandoned settlements in the New World are evoked.

who is a witch'¹³⁶ could be lifted straight from the *Malleus Maleficarum*.¹³⁷ The next significant events in the story of the Blair Witch are what we see in the film.

The title of the film announces that this is an entity-based horror and yet, surprisingly, we never directly see the witch.¹³⁸ As Matt Hills asserts, the film 'posits but withholds its monster'.¹³⁹ We have, then, only the various descriptions of the witch and the signs of her presence. As Bryan Alexander contends, the Blair Witch is 'a creature of blurred and shifting boundaries'¹⁴⁰. In appearance, we are told that she is an 'old lady' with 'the fur of a horse', whose 'feet never touch the ground'.¹⁴¹ The merging of human and animal elements disturbingly combines the human with nonhuman Nature. Moreover, the fact that she does not touch the ground provides us with an image of *anti*-settlement (much like the hut of Baba Yaga). The signs of her presence in the film seem, initially, quite innocuous. She leaves bundles of twigs and small piles of stones outside the students' tents and human figures, made with branches, hanging throughout the forest. The 'gifts' she leaves demonstrate a presence and interference in Nature, whilst the iconic hangings visually merge the human with the forest and may also evoke the witches' execution. The evidence of the Blair Witch's existence becomes increasingly sinister. When one of the students, Joshua, vanishes in the woods, the bundles of twigs contain his entrails: we have a metonymic image of the 'human' *inside* the 'forest'. As we never see the witch throughout the entirety of the film, its majority is comprised of endless – and panicked – shots of the woods. This emphasises and reveals the role of the monster as a

¹³⁶ <http://www.blairwitch.com/book3.html> Accessed 12.02.2014.

¹³⁷ This was a 15th century treatise on the prosecution on witches and werewolves.

¹³⁸ In most horror texts that are named after a primary monster (*Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Godzilla*, etc.) the titular adversary dominates the narrative.

¹³⁹ Matt Hills, 'An Event-Based Definition of Art Horror', in *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, eds Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2003), p. 149.

¹⁴⁰ Hillard, 'Deep Into the Darkness Peering', p. 113

¹⁴¹ Her hirsute and animal-like appearance is echoed in the recent film *Mama*, directed by Andres Muschietti, in which the children who come under the care of a woodland witch become thoroughly feral.

representative of ecophobic dread. What is truly frightening, throughout this film, is the forest landscape.

The film centres on the horror of being lost in the woods – and moreover, on the horror that this could *still* happen to us in the present day. The students, who firmly believe they can master this terrain, serve as metonyms for the anthropocentric arrogance of modernity. In addition to constant claims such as ‘I know exactly where we are’ and ‘I know exactly where we’re going’, Heather insists: ‘It’s very hard to get lost in America these days, and it’s even harder to stay lost’. Her words echo the pride of the man in *Antichrist*, who insists that the forest is ‘not dangerous’. When asked to justify her claim, Heather replies ‘this is America and we’ve destroyed all our natural resources!’ The idea that humanity is destroying the environment is here presented as reassuring. If we are to destroy the majority of our forests, then we will have no reason to fear them. It is this destruction, it seems, that *makes* us ‘rational’ and ‘post-enlightenment’. Yet, soon enough, the students are irrevocably lost. They find that even with the aid of a map, they are travelling in circles. As they find themselves, inexplicably, by a fallen tree they passed days before, they literally enact Freud’s exemplary image of the uncanny: ‘When one is lost in the forest [...] every endeavour to find the marked or familiar path ends again and again in a return to one and the same spot, recognisable by some particular landmark.’¹⁴² Initially, they cling to the map and what it represents. ‘Maps’, argues Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, ‘in general can be said to allow a communication between civilisation and wilderness in which the latter is domesticated and rendered intelligible by the former’.¹⁴³ The students’ map, however, is ultimately useless and is eventually lost, much like the breadcrumbs in ‘Hansel and Gretel’. The students then orient themselves in accordance with childish fantasy.

¹⁴² Sigmund Freud, quoted in Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 178.

¹⁴³ Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, ‘Lostness (Blair Witch)’, in *Nothing That Is: Millennial Cinema and the Blair Witch Controversies*, eds Sarah Lynn Higley and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004), p. 230.

‘Wicked Witch of the West, or Wicked Witch of the East, which one was bad?’ asks Michael. After Heather says it was the Witch of the West, he determines ‘then we should go east’. Here in the woods, as Carol Clover contends, ‘the rules of civilisation do not obtain’; the stories of childhood are suddenly more relevant than the learnings of Enlightenment.¹⁴⁴ ‘Myths’, writes Karen Armstrong, are ‘the discourse we need in extremity’ – they are what we need in the forest.¹⁴⁵

In the end of the film, we are left only with Michael and Heather: clear substitutes for Hansel and Gretel. Much like the siblings of the fairy tale, they ultimately discover the house of the witch in the midst of the woods. Here, in line with the conventions of the fairy tale, is where they will finally encounter the witch. At this moment, however, the camera is destroyed and we are told only, with words on the screen, that the students were never seen again. There is no suggestion that Heather, like Gretel, outsmarts the monster, and instead it is firmly implied that the students will be met with gruesome deaths. The film ends, then, with no resolution: the students, therefore, for the audience, are forever lost in the woods. The setting is cast is one that is enduringly threatening. The elusive witch, in the end, is a symbol of our fears of the forest. The film, which was so readily believed by many, is a testament to the fact that the woods continue to instil our terror.

One text that is worthy of note is Jessica Hausner’s film *Hotel* (2004), which shares many of the same themes as *The Blair Witch Project*. Here, once again, the witch serves as a symbol of our fears of the forest. ‘The Lady of the Wood’, as this witch is named, is similarly never actually seen, whilst the forest landscape dominates much of the cinematography. This Austrian film is certainly more concerned with its atmosphere than with its story. In interview, Hausner claimed that she wanted to portray a ‘nightmarish situation’ that ‘could not be

¹⁴⁴ Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws*, p. 124.

¹⁴⁵ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 36.

attributed to a concrete circumstance'.¹⁴⁶ All we can know, she says, is that '*something* terrible is happening'.¹⁴⁷ The forest setting lends itself suitably to such an intention, as it seemingly harbours an 'awful secret'¹⁴⁸ indeed.

Hotel follows the story of a young woman named Irene (Franziska Weisz) and her employment during offseason in an isolated hotel on the edge of a forest. She takes the place of a girl named Eva, whom we learn has mysteriously disappeared. The setting, therefore, is immediately unnerving because it is already associated with unexplained disappearances. The hotel, which is largely abandoned, is significantly named 'Waldhaus': translating, literally, to mean 'Woodland House'. In its very name we are presented with the uneasy juxtaposition of Space with Place. Moreover, as a lone structure amidst the forest, it is symbolically evocative of the witch's cottage. As Newman summarises, Irene is increasingly 'drawn into the mysterious woodland' that surrounds the property, where she encounters intimations of 'witchery' and is ultimately met with an 'ambiguous fate'.¹⁴⁹

With *The Lady of the Wood*, we are given a far less extensive history than with the *Blair Witch*. We learn only that 'long ago' there was a witch in these areas, who was accused of sorcery and burnt to death. With Europe's extensive history of witchcraft, we are presented again with an instance of 'heritage noire', as such legends continue.¹⁵⁰ Like the *Blair Witch*, her name is taken from her surroundings – though here, she is named not after a town, but after the woods themselves. Her identity is merged with the forest setting. As the Lady of *the* Wood, her title suggests moreover this environment as an archetypal setting. She signifies the threat

¹⁴⁶ Jessica Hausner, in 'AFC Austrian Film Commission: Jessica Hausner about *Hotel*', http://www.afc.at/jart/prj3/afc/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1164272180506&artikel_id=8691. Accessed 23.02.2014.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Machen, *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural*, p. 105.

¹⁴⁹ Kim Newman, *Nightmare Movies: Horror on the Screen Since the 1960's* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988 and 2011), p. 542.

¹⁵⁰ Morgan, 'Heritage Noire', p. 137.

of being lost in the woods, as her legends tell of a multitude of those who have gone into the forest and mysteriously vanished. To the locals, she is a celebrated creature of mythology. A plaque marks a cave in the woods that is allegedly her home and the hotel displays her likeness in a small figurine. We have elements of what has recently been termed ‘dark tourism’ and a commentary on our modern understanding of monsters.¹⁵¹ The monster, here, is presented to tourists as something exciting – precisely because, in reality, it is not thought to be real. This is symbolically emphasised in the fact that the only likeness we see of the witch is in the form of the figurine, or doll, which looks like a *toy*. Monsters, then, may be seen as the playthings of our imaginings: things we make up to explain our more equivocal fears of certain settings. Moreover, the idea that the monster is an externalisation of human monstrosity is also suggested. Irene awakens one morning to inexplicably find the head of the effigy in the palm of her hand. In another scene, a man teasingly whispers to her ‘maybe *you’re* the witch’. Though this is never explicitly examined, there is undoubtedly a connection between the two. Such intimations underline the psychological implications of the forest environment and Russell’s assertion that the monster is a ‘projection’.¹⁵²

In this text, we again find intimations of the idea that ‘Nature is Satan’s church’. The forest, along with its ‘witchery’,¹⁵³ is cast firmly in opposition with Christianity. Christianity is symbolised in the film by a crucifix that is worn around Irene’s neck. It is endowed with great significance as it is only when without it that she vanishes into the forest. Early on, it goes temporarily missing in the hotel and then is found – with no explanation – within the forest. Indeed, there is no ‘concrete’¹⁵⁴ reason why this event in itself is in any way a tragedy, yet it

¹⁵¹ Dark Tourism, in short, is tourism that involves visiting places famously associated with death and suffering. An interesting recent work on this is *Dark Tourism and Place Identity: Managing and Interpreting Dark Places*, ed. Leanne White and Elspeth Frew (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁵² Jeffrey Russell, quoted in Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1978), p. 229.

¹⁵³ Newman, *Nightmare Movies*, p. 542.

¹⁵⁴ Hausner, in ‘AFC Austrian Film Commission: Jessica Hausner about *Hotel*’.

somehow underlines the idea that ‘*something* terrible is happening’.¹⁵⁵ There is something unsettling in the image of Christian iconography in the setting of the wilderness, as it seems to lose its protective value. It is suggested, therefore, that this is no setting for the Christian God, as it is claimed by His adversary.

In the ending to the film, as Catherine Wheatley argues, none of the elements of the story are fully resolved.¹⁵⁶ Irene, devoid of her crucifix, enters into the darkened forest, disappears from view, screams, and then the credits role. As her uniform is predominantly red, the image is evocative of the fairy tale: Little Red goes alone into the forest to be met with her monster. We do not see what causes Irene to scream and see only a wide view of the forest. As we have been led to imagine that she is claimed by the witch, the threats of monster and setting are merged. The ending is similar to the climax of *The Blair Witch Project*, as the final image, once again, is one of being lost to the woods and its imagined monsters.

Lucky McKee’s *The Woods* (2006) is a further text in which witches are intimately associated with the forest environment. It is a symbol retelling of ‘Hansel and Gretel’ in the sense that it follows a girl named Heather (Agnes Bruckner) who must, like Gretel, outwit the monsters she encounters in the woods. It is set in an all-girls’ school in the depths of the forest, which transpires to be secretly run by a coven of witches. Its subject is remarkably similar to Dario Argento’s 1977 film *Suspiria*, to such an extent that it has been said to ‘almost qualify as a remake’.¹⁵⁷ Set in an educational establishment, *The Woods* highlights the idea of the forest as a landscape of *trial*. It is set in the woods of New England, which as we have seen is a site

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Catherine Wheatley, ‘Not Politics but People: The “Feminine Aesthetic” of Valeska Grisebach and Jessica Hausner’, in *New Austrian Film*, ed. Robert von Dassanowsky (London: Berghahn Books, 2011), p. 141.

¹⁵⁷ *Suspiria* centres on a dance academy in the regions of the Black Forests of Germany, which is secretly run by a coven of witches in disguise. Some of its students, gradually, discover its secrets – and in consequence it is ultimately burnt to the ground. *The Woods* conforms to much the same structure. Sourced: ‘To the Woodshed’, <http://itallhappensinthedark.wordpress.com/2010/12/13/to-the-woodshed/>. Accessed 12.02.2014.

of historical relevance in regard to this setting. The title of the film announces from the outset the significance and centrality of the forested setting.

Much like the story of ‘Hansel and Gretel’, *The Woods* begins with the abandonment of the child amidst the wilderness and their subsequent entry into the witch’s cottage. Our protagonist, Heather, is left by her careless mother and vacillating father (fitting counterparts for the fairy tale parents) at ‘Falburn Academy’ in the midst of the woods. In appearance, the school resembles a cottage – and transpires, indeed, to be home to the witches. The school is run by a trio of these creatures and headed by the eldest, a Miss Traverse (Patricia Clarkson). The casting of monsters as teachers – as literal *demonstrations* – is underlined by this name, which unambiguously suggests the ‘traversal’ of boundaries. The school in itself is an example of this as it is, as McDonagh argues, ‘secretly wild’.¹⁵⁸ Here, there is little distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, as the surrounding forest grows in through the windows and up through the floorboards – suggesting visually that this structure belongs to Nature. Moreover, the school is filled with images of trees and wild vegetation, in almost religious veneration. Once again, we see this idea that God has no place in the woods, and that the forests of old are intent on reclaiming the structures of civilisation.

The witches themselves are firmly connected to the forest environment. We learn, eventually, of their histories, which explain this connection. Many years ago, as students of the school, the witches were discovered engaging in sorcery. They were pelted with stones and the eldest, in retaliation, ‘*called upon the woods for revenge*’.¹⁵⁹ A pact was then made, between witches and forest: the woods aided in the witches’ revenge, and in return were promised, for many centuries to come, the souls of young girls. The ability of the witches to bargain with the

¹⁵⁸ Maitland McDonagh, *Broken Mirror/Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento*, (London: Sun Tavern Fields, 1991), p. 142.

¹⁵⁹ *The Woods*. Dir. Lucky McKee. USA. Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer: 2006. Film.

natural environment remains unquestioned, as does the alignment of these creatures' mistreatment and the vengeance of Nature. As they agree to bring the forest the souls of young girls, the monsters are cast as servants to this setting, sating its desires as a *consuming* threat. This parallels the role of the nanny in *The Guardian* and the boy in 'The Transfer', as we saw in Chapter Two. Many years later, the witches continue to honour this agreement. This connection between the witches and the forest is suggested in the witches' appearance. Twigs, leaves and general forest debris litter their hair and are pinned to their clothes. Like the 'secretly wild'¹⁶⁰ cottage, they each signify the invasion of the 'inside' by the 'outside'. This suggested imbrication of human and nonhuman Nature extends to the students. In accordance with that primary threat of the forest – of being lost in the woods – one by one, the girls go missing. They vanish in the night and their beds, in the morning, are filled with leaves from the woods. We are presented with a visual *exchange* between humans and Nature, leaving little doubt that they have been claimed by the forest.

With the connection in the text between witches and Nature, it is unsurprising that we have themes of a monstrous *Mother* Nature. Again, we find parallels with the 'She-Devil in the Wilderness'. We see images of the children, whilst sleeping, cradled by branches that have entered the dormitory. In one scene, we hear voices amidst the trees, whispering to one of the girls, 'I love you'. The sentiment, however, is trickery, as much like the witch in 'Hansel and Gretel' who 'had only pretended to be so kind', the woods desire to consume the children.¹⁶¹ In addition, the witches themselves assume the role of 'unnatural' mothers. Much like the witch of the fairy tale, they at first seem kindly, providing shelter and sustenance. Yet, as in 'Hansel and Gretel', this belies a sinister motivation. It transpires that the milk that the girls are fed every day is laced with the witches' blood. The drinking of milk that contains the bodily fluid

¹⁶⁰ McDonagh, *Broken Mirror/Broken Minds*, p. 142.

¹⁶¹ Grimm and Grimm, 'Hansel and Gretel', p. 81.

of these grotesque women literalises the witches' roles as monstrous mothers, in a perverse image of nurturing witches and breast-fed victims. Towards the ending of the film, this blood is unwillingly consumed by Heather's father – who, in stark contrast to the role of the father in the original fairy tale, returns to the woods to rescue his daughter. He is quickly sick and finds amidst the regurgitated blood small branches of a tree. The image is striking as one of the wilderness *within*. It suggests, on the one hand, that the forest quite literally runs in the veins of the witch. Yet, this result may be reliant on the interaction of the blood with the *human*. In this case, we have a variation on the equation that we encountered in *Mythago Wood* of 'human mind + forest = monster', as here, instead, it may be that 'monster + human = forest'. Unquestionably, these three elements are intricately connected.

In the ending to the film, Heather, like Gretel, is successful in vanquishing her witch. She burns the school to the ground and her 'happy ending' is that she is able to leave the forest. In the final lines to the film we learn that whilst Falburn Academy was utterly destroyed, its surrounding woodland remained mysteriously unharmed. Whilst the monsters are overcome, the ultimate message we are left with is that the threats of the forest continue. Whilst Cohen argues that 'the monster will always return' - it will be destroyed in one text only to appear in another - it is suggested here that the setting and home to the monster will always remain.¹⁶² The forest stands, unchanged, readily awaiting its denizens.

Witches, as we have seen, are classic monsters of the forest. They are symbols, indeed, of 'the wildness and violence of nature'.¹⁶³ They merge the distinctions between 'inside' and 'outside', civilisation and the wilderness, and human and nonhuman Nature. As representatives of the more frightening elements in the natural world, they symbolically substantiate the claim

¹⁶² Cohen, *Monster Theory*, p. 20.

¹⁶³ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p. 127.

that ‘Nature is Satan’s church’.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, they are frequently linked to Satanism and illustrate the idea of the forest as an antichristian space, which continues themes of the wilderness as a corrupted Eden. As predominantly female monsters, they serve as extreme examples of some of the most deleterious associations between women and Nature. The idyllic construct of *Mother Nature* is turned on its head, as the witch is often a construct of monstrous Nature and monstrous maternity. Our classic fairy tales that depict this monster influence our modern constructions of this creature and associate her firmly with the woodland setting and its various threats. If our fears of the forest are caused in the main by its associations with the past, lostness, being eaten and being tested, then the witch is a fitting reflection of each of these dangers. In more traditional depictions of the witch as old and haggard, she stands, like the forest, as an image of antiquity. Moreover, as a monster that is based in history, she embodies our fears of ‘the return of the past’¹⁶⁵ and Morgan’s ‘heritage noire’.¹⁶⁶ In each of the texts discussed above, some allusion is made to the bloody history of ‘witches’ in the Western world. In *Hotel*, we learn that The Lady of the Wood was burnt to death in Europe, whilst the remaining texts are each set in the territories of the witch trials in the New World. Themes of the forest as a consuming threat are similarly represented in these witches, many of which either feed on human flesh (Baba Yaga, ‘Hansel and Gretel’, The Blair Witch, etc.) or feed it directly to the forest (*The Woods*). In each of these texts, the threat of the witch is a consequence to being lost – be it spiritually and/or physically – in the woods. Finally, as one of its many monsters, the witch is one of the trials of the forest: she must be overcome in order to find one’s happy ending, which is frequently synonymous with exiting the forest.

¹⁶⁴ *Antichrist*, Dir: Lars Von Trier. Artificial Eye: 2010. Film.

¹⁶⁵ Sage and Smith, *Modern Gothic*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁶ Morgan, ‘Heritage Noire’, p. 137.

3.4 'Forest Assassins': Wolves and the Woods

'It is as if the vegetation itself were in a plot with the wolves who live there'.

— Angela Carter.¹⁶⁷

'To put it bluntly, I'll eat you'.

— Italo Calvino, 'The Wolf and the Three Girls'.¹⁶⁸

Wolves and werewolves are classic monsters of the forest. When one envisages the Gothic forest, it is very likely that wolves come quickly to mind. We may think, for example, of such classic Gothic texts as *Dracula* (1897), in which the expansive forests are made all the more ambient as they are filled with wolves and their haunting cacophony. Wolves serve, as we will see, as a classic example of humankind's tendency to demonise and Gothicise the wilderness. Such attitudes seemingly vindicate the destruction of the wild and so this has led Aldo Leopold to argue that environmental concerns began with the killing of a wolf.¹⁶⁹ Wolves serve almost as shorthand symbols of continuing ecophobia. Much like the witch, who we have seen is 'a classic symbol of the wildness and violence of nature',¹⁷⁰ the wolf, as Malcolm Drew Donalson asserts, is 'a symbol for the irrationality and the uncontrollable in nature'.¹⁷¹ Like the witch, too, the wolf is 'an interdisciplinary mutant': its origins – and moreover, its associations with

¹⁶⁷ Angela Carter, 'The Company of Wolves', p. 129.

¹⁶⁸ Italo Calvino, 'The Wolf and the Three Girls', in *Italian Folktales* (London: Harcourt Inc., 1980) p. 75.

¹⁶⁹ Discussed in John T. Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 191.

¹⁷⁰ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, p. 127.

¹⁷¹ Malcolm Drew Donalson, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation: From Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellis Press, 2006), p. 163.

the forest setting – lie in history, myth and fairy tales alike.¹⁷² It is simultaneously a very real animal that continues to exist today and it is yet a mythological monster. We have therefore wolves in reality as well as what Paul Williams has called ‘wolves of the imagination’.¹⁷³ Indeed, the vast majority of us will not have seen wolves outside of a zoo, yet ‘the world’, as Elisa Rambo argues, ‘is filled with wolf images’.¹⁷⁴ In the context of my argument that monsters of the forest usually undermine the divisions or ‘dualism’ between humans and Nature, wolves and especially werewolves serve as an excellent and even archetypal example. The werewolf is the most famous ‘werebeast’ in the Western world. It is, as Hans Peter Duerr contends, a creature that ‘dissolves the boundary between civilisation and wilderness’.¹⁷⁵ It is all the more relevant in the context of ecocriticism because the wolf in recent times has come not only to symbolise our fears of Nature, but our fears of its decline. It is a symbol, simultaneously, of the monstrosity of the forest, and it is an icon of the wilderness we fear we have lost.

In this section, I examine the role of wolves and werewolves as monsters of the forest. I begin with a small overview of its more menacing associations in history, Christianity, and mythology before touching on its environmental symbolism. I then introduce the significance of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ in these texts and argue that this is a fairy tale that encapsulates our terror at the idea of the ‘human-nature dualism’ being destroyed. I then discuss a selection of Gothic texts which features wolves in the woods. I focus on the ways in which these wolves demonstrate the unsettling imbrication of civilisation and the forest. I look first at male wolves in Catherine Hardwicke’s *Red Riding Hood* (2011) and Anthony Schmitz’s *Darkest Desire*:

¹⁷² Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*, p. xi.

¹⁷³ Paul Williams, *Wolves of the Imagination: Wolves of England* (Loughborough: Heart of Albion, 2007).

¹⁷⁴ Elisa Rambo, ‘Preface’, in Malcolm Drew Donalson, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation: From Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellis Press, 2006), p. iii.

¹⁷⁵ Hans Peter Duerr, *Traumzeit: Über die Grenze Zwischen Wildnis und Zivilisation* (*Dreamtime: Over the Border Between Wilderness and Civilisation*), (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1978), p. 108.

The Wolf's Own Tale (1998). Thereafter I focus on female wolves, which I argue demonstrate this merging between human and nonhuman Nature all the more because they simultaneously evoke both Little Red and her adversary. Here I examine in the main John Ajvide Lindqvist's *Little Star* (2010) and Angela Carter's collection of woodland wolf stories in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979).

Wolves of the woods are famously associated with monstrosity and evil. The reasons behind this are many and complex – and are tied, simultaneously, to both history and mythology. Firstly, if we are to look at the treatment of wolves throughout history, we must begin with the fact that in earlier times, the threat of this animal, as Marina Warner argues, 'was both real and frightening'.¹⁷⁶ Just as Harrison notes that 'most of the places of human habitation in the West were at some time in the past more or less densely forested',¹⁷⁷ Barry Hulston Lopez contends that these forests were filled with a multitude of wolves, which roamed freely across most of the Northern hemisphere.¹⁷⁸ Though naturally inclined to shy away from humans, the wolf was at times encountered by those who journeyed into the forest, and on occasion in the village, when prey was scarce.¹⁷⁹ 'Wolves and people were not natural enemies', writes Coleman, but were made so with humanity's tending of livestock – what might be seen, in one light, as humankind's interference with and dominion over Nature. 'Livestock could be an entire living', continues Lopez, 'and could be wiped out in one night by a pack of wolves'.¹⁸⁰ Thus they quickly became known merciless and violent. This was exacerbated by the fact that wolves are natural scavengers and so were witnessed to be feeding on human remains. They are 'prodigious eaters'¹⁸¹ – to such an extent that the very word 'wolf' has now

¹⁷⁶ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 299.

¹⁷⁷ Harrison, *Forests*, p. ix.

¹⁷⁸ Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1978), p. 12.

¹⁷⁹ Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, p. 299.

¹⁸⁰ Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*, p. 208.

¹⁸¹ Donalson, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation*, p.2.

become an adjective meaning to eat greedily and voraciously. It is little wonder then that may assume the *consuming* threats of the forest and have been seen as obvious monsters. They hunt in an organised and intelligent fashion, deliberately targeting the most vulnerable prey. In short, it is easy to see why they represented, for many, the monstrosity of Nature. Over the years, humankind has been responsible for slaughter and extinction of literally millions of animals. Yet, the history of its treatment of wolves, as Coleman insists, is laced with an unusual degree of ‘sadism’.¹⁸² The violence towards these animals – and to those thought to be allied with them – presents us again with an instance of ‘heritage noire’¹⁸³. If we return to Sharae Deckard’s argument in Chapter One that there is something essentially uncanny about encountering in our fictions the landscapes that we know we have destroyed, then the same can surely be said when we encounter wolves. Towards 1500, writes Donalson, wolves were marked for extinction ‘by all possible means’.¹⁸⁴ Within five centuries, as Coleman continues, the animals were driven to ‘near global extinction’.¹⁸⁵ The fearsome hatred of these animals – which were said to deserve not only ‘death’, but ‘to be punished for living’ – was brought from the Old World into the New, which contained no shortage of these creatures.¹⁸⁶ Here, these animals contributed to existing fears of the expansive wilderness. The wolf, as Coleman asserts, ‘symbolised the frustrations and anxieties of colonisation’, and so the bodies of slain wolves demonstrated the successful subjugation of Nature, in a similar manner to the fallen forests.¹⁸⁷ Heads of wolves were mounted and displayed outside civic buildings in the colonies, signifying the safety of these areas where the wolves had been slain. These violent emblems were clear

¹⁸² Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*, p. 3.

¹⁸³ Morgan, ‘Heritage Noire’, p. 137.

¹⁸⁴ Donalson, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation*, p. 162.

¹⁸⁵ Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*, p. 8.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

visual dividers between the monstrous threats of the outside and the imagined order of the inside.

I have argued that one of the main reasons that we fear the forest is because we believe it to be an *antichristian* space. 'The Bible', writes Roderick Nash, 'contains all you need to know in order to hate the wilderness'.¹⁸⁸ It is fitting, therefore, that much of wolves' ill repute is due to their unfavourable representations in Christianity. Such representations have held considerable influence over the relations between humans and wolves in both the Old and New World. In the Garden of Eden, which contained many animals, there were no wolves. I have argued already that the story of humanity's exile from Eden serves as a creation myth for the existence of wilderness. Malcolm Drew Donalson has made the same argument for the existence of wolves: 'one Christian explanation for the terror of the wolf is that it was one of the evils that resulted from the downfall in Eden'.¹⁸⁹ In the Bible, the wolf is explicitly aligned with trees, as it is said that 'this beast has to be destroyed, just like a rotten tree with bad fruit' (Matthew, 16:20). In addition, there are numerous allusions to Christ as Shepherd and his followers as sheep – subsequently casting the Devil as wolf, a comparison that is returned to in several of the wolf's literary imaginings.¹⁹⁰ As Orenstein notes, the Italian expression '*lupus in fabula*' ('the wolf in the story'), exists in the stead of 'speak of the Devil', again equating these two archetypes. The wolf becomes, as Rambo contends, 'devourer of the Christians'.¹⁹¹ The abolition of the wolf, therefore, has been seen at various times as 'the church's proper duty'.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 133.

¹⁸⁹ Donalson, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation*, p. 32.

¹⁹⁰ Settlers in the New World, who were drawn to biblical analogy, frequently cast themselves as 'innocent lambs', which implicitly suggested the dangers of 'wolves'. In addition, the Indians were termed by some of the early settlers as 'evening wolves'.

¹⁹¹ Rambo, 'Preface', p. 3.

¹⁹² Donalson, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation*, p. 151.

This ties to my discussion in Chapter One of the idea that in subjugating the wilderness, we are emulating the Divine.¹⁹³

When we think of wolves as monsters, it is likely that we quickly think of the werewolf. It is a monster, much like the witch, that features in our histories. Just as wolves were widely massacred, so too were humans who were believed to be in league or imbricated with the wolf, and these people were known as werewolves.¹⁹⁴ Though the numbers were far fewer, these executions of ‘werewolves’ serve as a historical parallel to those who were executed as ‘witches’. Werewolves, now, have been greatly mythologised in a multitude of horror fictions. ‘The legend of the werebeast’, states Lopez, ‘is almost universal’.¹⁹⁵ ‘The werewolf’, states Duerr, ‘is a human being who dissolves the boundary between civilisation and wilderness’.¹⁹⁶ it firmly destroys this imagined ‘dualism’. In the werewolf we have a mixture of the ‘human self’ and the ‘animal self’ and so it is little wonder that much attention has been given to this monster as an expression of the struggle between the Ego and Id.¹⁹⁷ It is, as Jeffrey Russell contends, a ‘perfect projection’.¹⁹⁸ If the wolf, as Rambo argues, is an embodiment of our ‘basal instincts’ and ‘attendant “animal” behaviours’,¹⁹⁹ then the explicit conflation of human and wolf in the figure of the werewolf seems an obvious illustration of the beast within. It demonstrates, as Angela Carter so eloquently put it, that we are all ‘hairy on the inside’.²⁰⁰ If

¹⁹³ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 21.

¹⁹⁴ There are numerous documented cases of lycanthropy and tales of those believed to be werewolves, such as Stubbe Peter, executed in 1589, who claimed the Devil helped him transform into the monstrous creature, or Gilles Garnier, who murdered and partially ate a girl in a vineyard before being burnt at the stake in 1573. Sourced: Donalson, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation*, p. 164.

¹⁹⁵ Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men*, p. 230.

¹⁹⁶ Duerr, *Traumzeit*, p. 108.

¹⁹⁷ In Chapter One, under the heading of ‘Landscapes of Our Minds’, I discussed in more detail the symbolic alignment of civilisation with the Ego and the wilderness with the Id.

¹⁹⁸ Jeffrey Russell, quoted in Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1978), p. 229.

¹⁹⁹ Rambo, ‘Preface’, p. iii.

²⁰⁰ *The Company of Wolves*. Dir. Neil Jordan. ITV Studios Home Entertainment: 1984. Film.

the forest is, as Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant argue, a common site of the unconscious, then such monsters are truly at home in this environment.

Though the wolf is undoubtedly ‘a symbol for the irrationality and the uncontrollable in nature’,²⁰¹ it has also been construed, more recently, as an emblem of lost wilderness. Much like the forest, it is something that is simultaneously feared and yet mourned. As the wilderness declines, so too do these animals. Our relationship with them is consequently changed as they are now in danger of extinction. We do not seek anymore to destroy these animals, but instead to preserve them as they are now legally protected. In consequence, they have now become, as Rambo asserts, ‘symbols of environmental responsibility’.²⁰² We wish to undo some of the demonization of these creatures and their natural environment, which led Leopold to trace the origins of environmental concerns in the killing of wolves.²⁰³ The idea that they serve as symbols for the lost wilderness has most recently been exemplified in the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone Park. We have an explicit example of humans endeavouring to rewild the environment. Though this illustrates our desire for wolves to be reintroduced, it is essential to note the utter furore that was caused by this modern-day rewilding. The extensively negative and fearful reactions to this demonstrated thoroughly that a fearful hatred of these creatures is certainly not extinct. We have a thoroughly ambivalent and increasingly complex relationship to these animals: we mourn their decline, and yet we continue to cast them as our monsters.

*

We have a multitude of ominous and monstrous wolves in our literary fictions. One of the most famous when it comes to wolves in the woods is of course the fairy tale of ‘Little Red Riding

²⁰¹ Donalson, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation*, p. 163.

²⁰² Rambo, ‘Preface’, p. iii.

²⁰³ Discussed in Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*, p. 191.

Hood’.²⁰⁴ This infamous story in which a girl meets a wolf in the midst of the forest and is beguiled by his trickery is one of the most renowned encounters with a monster in the woods in Western culture. The tale famously warns us not to stray from the path and into the wilderness. Moreover, its lupine monster is a classic embodiment of the threats of the forest. My interest in this story in the context of this work lies in the fact that it is, in essence, a story that centres on our fears of the ‘human-nature dualism’ being violently undermined. This is exemplified in a variety of ways. Firstly, it is worthy of note that one of the earliest extant examples of this story is ‘The Grandmother’s Tale’, in which the villain is not simply a wolf, but a werewolf. In its origins, therefore, the monster is a mixture of human and nonhuman Nature. It has been argued that Red and wolf – respective representatives of civilisation and wilderness – are not neatly distinct characters, but split facets of one single identity. Indeed, we will find in several of these wolf texts a considerable confusion of these two roles. This story, which so famously warns us not to stray from the path, creates a strict spatial division between civilisation and ‘Place’, and the forest and ‘Space’. Red’s journey is intended as direct: she is to leave the village, stick to the path, and arrive and Grandmother’s house in the woods. The path is human-made and explicitly designed to orient those in the woods: it exists to defy this setting as one in which we are invariably *lost*. It is a means by which to traverse the forest without actually *touching* it. The wolf of this story exists to ensure that Red *does* stray from the path. He is the satanic tempter. There is no obvious reason why he should not simply devour her on sight; instead, he determines to tempt her into the depths of the forest; her willing immersion in the wilderness is a requisite to her story. The wolf lures her from the path with the seductive qualities of the wilderness: in Charles Perrault’s version she is encouraged to

²⁰⁴ I rely in my discussion on the popular versions of the story by Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm. Sourced: Charles Perrault, *Perrault’s Complete Fairy Tales*, trans. A. E. Johnson (Middlesex: Kestrel Books, 1961); Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, ed. Maria Tatar (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 2004).

gather flowers and to chase butterflies,²⁰⁵ and in the tale by Brothers Grimm the wolf insists ‘it’s really so much fun out here in the woods’ and that ‘the most beautiful flowers’ are found ‘even deeper into the forest’.²⁰⁶ The tale is then an admonition against the enjoyment of the wilderness and warns us instead that it should be thoroughly feared. The moral that one should not stray from the path is one that firmly endorses the ‘dualism’ between humans and Nature. ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ is a story that famously hints at a *sexual* assignation between Red and the wolf. This would explain why he does not devour her immediately, but instead arranges a scenario where he awaits her in bed. Her consequent consumption is then implicitly erotic. This hinted consummation between girl and wolf suggests to the reader, subliminally, the potential outcome of such a union, which would utterly defy any semblance of the ‘dualism’. Several artists have played with this idea of the ‘breeding’ between human and animal. The imagined consequences may be seen, for example, in much of the work by artist Kiki Smith, and most especially in her sculptures ‘Infiltrator’ (2000) and ‘Daughter’ (2004) (*figures 3.1, 3.6 and 3.7*). In the first, we see an ostensibly human girl, though one of her legs is thoroughly lupine. On closer inspection, we see she is devoid of genitalia, underlining her distinction from normal reproduction. In ‘Daughter’ we see a more obvious conflation of human and wolf as the cloaked little female is wholly hirsute. The most memorable image in ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ which merges the child of civilisation with the monster of the forest occurs when she is eaten. She is then thoroughly inside and ‘at one’ with this monster, as she is symbolically consumed by the forest. It is significant here to note the distinctly different endings to this tale in the versions by Perrault and Grimm. In Perrault’s, the child is devoured without resurrection. She remains at one with the wolf. We are left with a moral which warns young women to be wary of seduction, which announces the tale as an allegory that warns of the dangers of *human*

²⁰⁵ Perrault, ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, pp. 73-74.

²⁰⁶ Grimm, ‘Little Red Cap’, p. 145.

males. In the Grimm version, however, they introduced a happy ending. Here, there is the additional character of the huntsman, who slays the wolf and delivers girl and granny from its belly unscathed. His essential function is to *divide* the humans of civilisation from the belly of the wilderness. Moreover, the skin of the wolf is removed and taken by the huntsman: the symbol of Nature is not only slain, but is utilised to serve man. Grimm's ending is the infinitely more popular and this is significant in terms of the 'human-nature dualism' for two reasons. Firstly, it is important to note that this is a deliberately *happy* ending and that this takes the form of Nature subdued and distinct from the human. Secondly, what is so important about this neat division of humans from this monster of the wilderness is that it is entirely unrealistic. The women would certainly be dead and far from whole: they would have been mixed, inextricably, with the insides of this monster. This ending, therefore, presents us with a *fantasy*, which is the neat and utter distinction between human and nonhuman Nature. The fact that this version of the ending is the one most widely reproduced reveals that this fantasy is one that is most thoroughly to our taste.



Fig. 3.6 and 3.7, Kiki Smith, *Daughter* (2004).

The extent to which our tales of wolves in the Gothic may be seen as revisions of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ varies from text to text. Catherine Hardwicke’s 2011 film *Red Riding Hood*, as its title suggests, is an explicit reimagining of the traditional fairy tale. The film is accompanied by a novelisation of the same name by Sarah Blakely-Cartwright and David Leslie Johnson (2011).²⁰⁷ In each of these texts, the fairy tale’s more frightening elements are brought to the foreground, so the result is thoroughly Gothic. The monsters here are not merely wolves, but werewolves, in accordance with the tale’s oral origins. The inclusion of this ‘hybrid figure’²⁰⁸ instead of the ordinary animal underlines, from the outset, the union between human and nonhuman Nature. This is emphasised by the fact that the heroine (Amanda Seyfried) is no longer a child, whilst one of the werewolves (Shiloh Fernandez) is cast as her love interest: latent fears, in the original tale, of ‘breeding’ the heroine and monster are here made explicit.

Red Riding Hood tells the story of a small village in the midst of a vast and threatening forest. The villagers live in fear of the surrounding wilderness, which is home to an infamous beast. A covenant has been made between the humans and this monster: so long as they leave some of their livestock in sacrifice, it will remain in the forest and not enter the village. The forest, then, is cast as the wolf’s home and territory: it is the presence of this monster that renders it frightening. Simultaneously, there is some comfort in its relegation to the woods. In accordance with ‘standard monstrous geography’, the monsters are ‘out there’ (in the wilderness) and so implicitly absent ‘in here’ (amidst civilisation). Early on the story, the covenant is broken and the distinct boundaries between the woods and the village are consequently destroyed.

²⁰⁷ Sarah Blakely-Cartwright and David Leslie Johnson, *Red Riding Hood* (London: Atom, 2011).

²⁰⁸ Maria Tatar, ed., *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 2004), p. 145.

The human identities of the werewolves in this tale are unknown. There is much mystery, therefore, as to which of the villagers is secretly monstrous. Significantly, then, this infiltrating element of the forest may not be easily or accurately discerned in the village: the idea of a neat and obvious distinction between humans of the village and monsters of the forest is undermined. These werewolves, ordinarily, seem wholly human in the village and assume the form of wolves only when in the forest. This accentuates this idea of the werewolf as a conflation of the civilised and the wild and interestingly binds these states to notions of Place and Space. The fact that the transformations usually take place in the woods literalises this idea that the forest *changes* those within it and underscores the psychological implications of the forest. The identity of the main monster is revealed, in the end, as Valerie's father, Cesaire (Billy Burke). Perrault's *Father Wolf* manifests here quite literally. The imbrication of roles is underlined as Little Red is shown to descend from the beast – we have similar themes as with the Urscumug in *Mythago Wood*. Yet, we find also Cohen's assertion that 'monsters are our children'.²⁰⁹ Valerie's lover, Peter (Fernandez), is bitten by Cesaire and so made a monster. Yet, it is shown that he retains his humanity and is ultimately sympathetic. She chooses to remain with her lupine lover, assuming the abode of her Grandmother in the midst of the woods. In an extended ending that appears on the DVD edition of the film, we see Peter, as wolf, approaching the cottage. He is met by a smiling Red, as Valerie cradles an infant in her arms. We do not see its features, but the child is evidence of the miscegenation between human and nonhuman Nature. Valerie, in the end, quite literally embraces – and moreover propagates – the 'improper' relations between human and the wilderness.²¹⁰

Towards the end of the novel, we are told: 'the whole world is just the village against the wolf'.²¹¹ This wording, with '*the* village' and '*the* wolf', presents us firmly with archetypal

²⁰⁹ Cohen, 'Postscript', p. 452.

²¹⁰ Roberts, *The EcoGothic*, p. 6.

²¹¹ Blakley-Cartwright and Johnson, *Red Riding Hood*, p. 179.

(and contrasting) symbols of civilisation and Gothic Nature. We are alerted to the universality of this story of the struggle between humans and our fears of the forest. With the ending to *Red Riding Hood*, the original fairy tale is turned on its head. In place of the ‘happy ending’ of Grimm, in which the wolf is killed and Red leaves the woods and returns to society, here she remains, by choice, with the beast in the forest. The woods, for the heroine, are no longer threatening and instead become home. The terribleness of the forest is here revealed as wholly dependent on the fear of the monster. Moreover, with the revelation of werewolves such as Cesaire, it is exposed that what is feared in the forest may be found to exist amidst the village. The ‘standard monstrous geography’ of locating monsters ‘out there’ in the wilderness is shown here as a fallacy: it is ultimately a setting in which to project the monstrous elements of the human that we would rather deny.

Such ideas may be interestingly examined in Anthony Schmitz’s novel *Darkest Desire: The Wolf’s Own Tale* (1998). This story takes as its subject the trials and tribulations of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’s infamous villain, instead of his eponymous adversary. The story is told in the first person from the perspective of this monster – a thoroughly literal wolf – whose greatest wish is to be cured of his predilection – his ‘darkest desire’ – for devouring the children he finds in the woods. His appetites not only represent the *consuming* threats of the forest, but are presented in sexual, and thus in paedophilic terms.²¹² Such themes may be found in the original tale, as the implicitly sexual assignation takes place not only between a human and an animal, but between an adult male and a female child. This has led Pauline Greenhill and Steven Kohm

²¹² It is important to note, as Philip Jenkins argues, that ‘no signifier used to describe sexual acts between adults and children represents a neutral consensus view, and most are either metaphors or reflect a discredited science’. I choose, then, to use James R. Kinkaid’s term of ‘child loving’. Sourced: Philip Jenkins, *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 8; James R. Kinkaid, *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 3.

to argue ‘that “Little Red Riding Hood” is a tale explicitly about paedophilia’.²¹³ If we view it in these terms, then the wolf’s ‘child loving’ predilections are cast literally as monstrous.²¹⁴ This makes sense in light of the assertion by James R. Kinkaid that ‘the way we talk about child loving is *monster talk* first of all’ [my emphasis].²¹⁵ Our wording evokes the carnivorous *animal*: we talk, as Brian Taylor argues, or ‘sexual *predators*’ and ‘unspecified *beastliness*’ [my emphasis].²¹⁶ The tale we tell is, as Kinkaid contends, one ‘of monsters and purity’: it belongs within ‘the literary territory of the Gothic’.²¹⁷ Significantly, even those critically examining our attitudes towards such ideas, casually liken child lovers to wolves in the woods and so symbolically situate them in this environment. Kinkaid says we need them ‘to remain *behind the tree*’,²¹⁸ whilst Philip Jenkins says we fear ‘these molesters [...] *lurk behind every tree*’.²¹⁹ The imagery suggests that naturally this ‘modern-day bogeyman’ resides in the forest.²²⁰ Moreover, this idea that we ‘need’ these figures to remain hidden in the woods validates this idea of ‘standard monstrous geography’. Interestingly, there is a wealth of texts in which child lovers are associated with wolves in the woods.²²¹ However, the association is

²¹³ Pauline Greenhill and Steven Kohm, ‘Little Red Riding Hood and the Paedophile in Film: *Freeway*, *Hard Candy*, and *The Woodsman*’, *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, 2009, 1 (2), p. 39.

²¹⁴ James R. Kinkaid, *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 3.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²¹⁶ Brian Taylor, *Perspectives on Paedophilia* (London: Billing and Sons Ltd.) p. xi.

²¹⁷ Kinkaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 10.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5

²¹⁹ Philip Jenkins, *Beyond Tolerance: Child Pornography and the Internet* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), p. 9.

²²⁰ Jon Silverman and David Wilson, *Innocence Betrayed: Paedophilia, the Media and Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 1.

²²¹ In many of these, incidentally, we find that the setting of the forest is in some way evoked. Interactions take place in public parks – the city’s answer to the forest – or the woods are momentarily visited at significant junctions. For example, in Wendy Wheeler’s ‘Little Red’ (1993) the traditional fairy tale is juxtaposed with Vladimir Nabokov’s infamous novel of child loving, *Lolita* (1955). Here, when the Humbert Humbert figure approaches the bed of the child, we are told that the floor of her bedroom transforms into ‘the grass of some old wood’. In Nicole Kassell’s *The Woodsman* (2004), the central character is aligned with both the wolf and woodsman of the fairy tale. He meets a young girl dressed in red in the midst of a park and becomes woodsman instead of wolf when he denies himself to see her. In David Slade’s *Hard Candy* (2005), our equivalent of Little Red deliberately entraps a would-be ‘wolf’ in order to teach him a lesson. She is depicted throughout in a red hoodie and with the end credits once she has slayed her adversary, she walks away and into the woods. In Matthew Bright’s *Freeway* (1996), a girl is exploited by a man who is ambiguously named

ordinarily only symbolic – these texts tend to centre on humans with wolf-like tendencies – and so do not align with the category of monsters in the woods. In *Darkest Desire*, however, our child loving protagonist is thoroughly and supernaturally lupine. The novel, we are told on the very first page, is an account of the wolf's 'unfortunate *Desires*, his *Deception* by the Brothers Grimm, his *Rescue* by Devil, and the *Lessons* gained thereby, which might benefit all creatures'²²² [emphasis and capitalisation in original]. The highlighted words – 'desire', 'deception', 'rescue' and 'lessons' – are intriguingly equivalent to the experiences of Little Red (her desire to stray from the path, her deception by the wolf, her rescue by the hunter, and subsequent lessons learnt), thus hinting at a shared, or at least analogous, identity between these two protagonists. Moreover, the intimation that this story 'might benefit *all* creatures' announces from the outset that we (humans) fall in with this category and may learn from the forest. Indeed, as Wolf later insists: 'we are *all* children of Nature, made from the rot beneath the trees'.²²³

The novel follows the story of our titular character, who is here simply named 'Wolf' – a detail that underlines his identity as an archetype, as opposed to an individual animal. His environment, similarly, is referred to only as '*the* woods' or '*the* forest'²²⁴ [my emphasis]: we are quickly made aware that we are in the realm of symbols and the setting of *the* fairy tale. One day, Wolf is met by the Brothers Grimm, who are here cast as fictional characters in the story. The men claim that they will be able to cure Wolf of his unsavoury appetites, but in fact their intention is only to encourage them, so that they might collect a sensational and gruesome

Wolverton. He even dresses as her granny and awaits in a bed to kill the girl. The girl grievously wounds him, which results in his teeth being permanently and involuntarily bared: she reveals his identity as the predatory 'wolf'. Ultimately, however, she kills her adversary and 'lives happily ever after', sporting a red leather jacket which is implicit of the hide of the beast. Sourced: Wendy Wheeler, 'Little Red', in *Snow White, Blood Red*, eds Ellen Datlow, and Terri Windling (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 146; *The Woodsman*. Dir. Nicole Kassell. USA. Newmarket Films, 2004. Film.; *Hard Candy*. Dir. David Slade. USA. Lionsgate: 2005. Film.; *Freeway*. Dir. Matthew Bright. USA. Republic Pictures: 1996. Film.

²²² Anthony Schmitz, *Darkest Desire: The Wolf's Own Tale* (New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1998), p. vi.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3;4.

tale. The story, significantly, is ‘the Wolf’s Own Tale’: it is entirely from the monster’s perspective. It may be seen, then, from the viewpoint of Gothicised Nature and in this sense is a firmly ecocentric narrative. The idea that Wolf and Red are mirror images of each other is reflected in Wolf’s understandings of the forest. For him, too, it is similarly a setting of *trial*, though whilst for Red this manifests as it is filled with monsters, for him this is the case because ‘the wood is full of children’. He exclaims early on, describing these children: ‘what big eyes they have [...] which is too bad for them, the forest being what it is’.²²⁵ The language he uses to describe the children is evocative of the words addressed in the fairy tale to the wolf in disguise (‘Oh Grandmother, what big eyes you have!’). Moreover, the ominous allusion to ‘the forest being what it is’ is disturbingly vague, underlining this idea that it holds an ‘awful secret’.

The wolf, as we have seen, is traditionally associated with the Christian Devil. This association is here interestingly examined. The woods of this story are home to Satan, who much like ‘Wolf’ is simply named ‘Devil’ – suggesting, immediately, a connection between these two archetypes. This woods are presented as the Devil’s domain and the monsters within it as within his influence. He is presented as God’s alternative, whilst Nature is shown, indeed, as ‘Satan’s church’.²²⁶ ‘I see Devil all the time’, says Wolf, ‘but God has never appeared in the wood’ [my emphasis].²²⁷ The first time we are introduced to Devil, he has significantly taken the form of a *little girl* – reminiscent, of course, of Little Red Riding Hood. He uses the language of Red, but it is twisted with violence, which immediately serves to disorient: ‘what big ears you have’, he says, greeting this Wolf, ‘I could bite your balls off’.²²⁸ Our Little Red, here, is quite literally the Devil, and she is shown to have *teeth* – the roles of girl, Satan and the Big Bad Wolf are disturbingly mingled. There is no distinction between ‘good’ and ‘evil’,

²²⁵ Schmidt, *Darkest Desire*, p. 4.

²²⁶ *Antichrist*.

²²⁷ Schmidt, *Darkest Desire*, p. 94.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

‘human’ and ‘animal’, or ‘civilisation’ and ‘wild’. Furthermore, these roles are confused with the very environment: Devil, in the guise of naked little girl, uses the branch of a tree with which to masturbate, and then *becomes* this element of the forest. In addition to casting the forest as a sexual entity (the scene is somewhat reminiscent of *Evil Dead* in this image of arboreal penetration), Satan is shown, quite literally, to be *inside* the trees. Subsequently, Wolf then consumes Devil, who has returned to his form as the child: the forest is inside Red, who is inside Devil, who is inside Wolf: these archetypes are presented as horribly synonymous.

The only real humans in this story – the exploitative Brothers Grimm – ultimately trick the Wolf, ‘all for the sake of a tale’.²²⁹ They lead him to scenarios that will make a good story – arguing, in a similar vein to the ‘exposure therapy’ of ‘He’ in *Antichrist*, that it is only by directly facing one’s fears in the woods that one will be ‘cured’. Of course, what actually happens (as in *Antichrist*) is that things only get tremendously worse. Eventually, Wolf is left by the men to drown, but is saved by Devil. In his devastation, he vows an allegiance to his saviour and ‘to show the world nothing but teeth’ – and this is where the story ends.²³⁰ The humans, in their mistreatment of Nature, as symbolised by Wolf, are shown to create the monster and deliberately to Gothicise Nature. Wolf is only aligned with Devil at the hands of storytelling man: this monster, indeed, is one of the human imagination. With this in mind, we may view the cover of the novel in a different context. It shows a blank book, with the *shadow* of a wolf: the implication is that this is the shadow of the reader. This assumes even more import if we see this shadow in a Jungian context: the wolf in the forest is the projection of the human, who reads from the safety of his or her home.²³¹

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 125.

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 134.

²³¹ In addition, this cover may be seen to provide a commentary on our attitudes to paedophilia. Judith Levine argues: ‘our culture fears the paedophile [...] not because he is deviant, but because he is ordinary [...] we fear him *because he is us*’. Sourced: Levine, *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 26.

With the remainder of texts with wolves in the woods, my focus now shifts to female wolves. This is due to the fact the female wolf is usually an embodiment of both Red *and* the wolf: she thus firmly embodies this imbrication of civilisation and the wild. It is worthy of note that the wolf in the original tale is somewhat feminised: as Anne Sexton describes him, in her poem ‘Red Riding Hood’ (1971), he is ‘a kind of transvestite’ who ultimately mimics pregnancy.²³² In these recent examples of female wolves, we return again to an engagement with the question of the ‘unnatural’ or ‘dangerous’ relationship between women and Nature which we saw in Chapter Two under the heading of ‘The She-Devil in the Wilderness’. Wolves, as we will see, serve as a means by which these women can confront Nature – and their own natures – simultaneously, whilst the forest is shown as an essential element within this. These texts serve as examples of what Orenstein has called ‘beast feminism’.²³³ This ties in, I suggest, with ecofeminism in the context of the ecoGothic, as ‘the old, reductive identifications of women with passive nature’ are thoroughly undermined.²³⁴ The word ‘beast’ here is symbolically equivalent to ideas of a Gothic Nature. These texts illustrate, in the words of Margaret Atwood, that ‘women can be werewolves too’.²³⁵ We find, interestingly, that with many of these examples of female wolves, there is the sense that woman-as-wolf, or woman-as-Nature, is justified in her monstrosity. Often she is pitted, as an embodiment of female Nature, against male civilisation.

The first text with female wolves that I wish to examine is John Ajvide Lindqvist’s novel *Little Star* (2012). When interviewed about his inspiration for the story, he said that he was intrigued by the ‘discomfort’ we feel when reading stories about ‘children in vulnerable

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Catherine Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 173.

²³⁴ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 117.

²³⁵ Margaret Atwood, ‘Running With the Tigers’ in *Essays on the Art of Angela Carter: Flesh and the Mirror*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994) p. 145.

settings'.²³⁶ It is ambiguous (and may be lost in translation) as to whether he means settings in which children are vulnerable, or settings that are themselves endangered. The forest is a significant setting throughout this work – and both interpretations would be equally valid. The German title given to the text is *Wolfskinder*, meaning 'Wolf Children', and this is certainly fitting. In essence, the novel is about a collection of little girls – substitutes, symbolically, for the eponymous Little Red – and their evolution into the 'wolves' of the fairy tale. The story centres in the main on two little girls: Theres and Teresa. It is firmly insinuated that Theres is a supernatural child of the forest who is firmly aligned with wolves, whilst Teresa is a human child who dreams of living amidst such animals. They form an intimate friendship and then a 'pack' of other female children, whom Theres initiates into supernatural monstrosity. They endeavour to assimilate themselves amongst literal wolves in the wilderness, but only once they have embarked on a bloody revenge against the adults in the city.

The novel begins in the woods. Theres, as a baby, is found by a man named Lennart, who is wandering in a seemingly secluded forest. The child's origins are extremely mysterious. It is suggested that she has been abandoned by humans: Lennart sees a car hastily making its exit and finds she has been tied and buried in a plastic bag. The image, before he discovers the child, is one of humanity contaminating Nature and is reminiscent of the fact that the forest continues as a site in which humans illegally dispose of their waste. Similarly, if we are to view her as monster, then the monster is excluded to the forest. Indeed, we are told that the child 'had been *dumped* in the forest' [my emphasis].²³⁷ In one light, then, it may be seen as a catalyst for ecorevenge and a possible motivation for the violence against the adults at the end. All we are told of the car is that it is German – an allusion, perhaps, to the tales of Grimm. Indeed, it is with the simplistic logic of the fairy tale that the man informs his wife: 'I found a child. A

²³⁶ John Ajvide Lindqvist, quoted in Jason Meredith, *On Children and Horror: An Interview with John Ajvide Lindqvist*, <http://constructinghorror.com/index.php?id=180>. Accessed 02.02.14.

²³⁷ John Ajvide Lindqvist, *Little Star*, trans. Marlaine Delargy (London: Quercus, 2011), p. 37.

baby. In the forest'.²³⁸ As she emerges from a hole in the earth, there is the suggestion, too, that she is a child *of the forest*. Certainly she demonstrates the dangers of bringing the wilderness into civilisation.

Lennart and his wife, Laila, live in an isolated house beside the woods. They are able therefore to raise Theres – whom they call simply 'Little One' – without the knowledge of the outside world. Only their adult son, Jerry, learns the secret. Theres is described increasingly in terms of a wolf instead of a human child. She is a 'creature', we are told, who never cries, but only '*growls*'.²³⁹ Moreover, she is – like so many wolves of today – a wild animal in captivity.²⁴⁰ She is told a story by the couple which ensures that she is frightened to go outside. It is a tale, incidentally, which explicitly enforces this idea that civilisation exists as *against* the forests. The 'Big People' (adults), she is told, are generally full of 'hatred and hunger' for the 'Little People' (children), and wish to devour them.²⁴¹ As a feral child of the wilderness, she may be seen as a symbol of Barry's Nature that 'is being *gobbled* by culture'²⁴². It is human adults, and not the forest, that are presented here as the consuming threat.

When Theres reaches the age of thirteen, she murders each of her surrogate parents, illustrating, much like Little Otík, that it is dangerous indeed to bring something in from the wilderness and assume it is innocuous. The novel, throughout, underlines the lesson that humans *cannot* control Nature. The age at which Theres commits this crime is significant: it is with the onset of puberty that she becomes increasingly monstrous. It is with the awakening of

²³⁸ Lindqvist, *Little Star*, p. 13.

²³⁹ Ibid. p. 105.

²⁴⁰ The title to this section in the novel is 'The Girl with the Golden Hair'. In addition to being a reference to ABBA, this is an alternative title to the fairy tale 'Rapunzel'. We have associations, therefore, with the child who is locked in the tower in the forest and hidden from all civilisation, as Lennart is a substitute for this tale's wicked witch. Indeed, as Daniel Kraus contends, he may be viewed as 'a thoroughly abusive parent'. Sourced: Daniel Kraus, Review of *Little Star*, <http://rptcd.catalogue.tcd.ie/ebsco-w-a/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c61e6acc-ecd1-4776-b612-1d977e8041b7%40sessionmgr4004&vid=2&hid=4209>. Accessed: 08.06.2014.

²⁴¹ Lindqvist, *Little Star*, p. 112.

²⁴² Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 263.

her own sexuality that she is more akin to the predatory beast. It is at this age, too, that she is 'reborn' in the forest. As Jerry deals with the crime scene, Theres buries her own body in the woods. As she emerges, she says 'I was dead. Then I wasn't dead'.²⁴³ The 'rebirth' echoes Little Red's emergence from the stomach of the wolf – though here, interestingly, she is not violently consumed by the animal, but instead voluntarily places herself inside what might be seen as both the 'mouth' and 'womb' of the forest. By murdering her human 'parents' and then emerging from the forest, she reclaims her identity as a creation of the forest.

Theres, or Little One, is juxtaposed throughout the novel with another young girl, Teresa. Teresa lives in a more suburban setting, but we hear early on of sightings of wolves in her area: an omen that elements of the wilderness may bleed into the city. Indeed, as the two girls – one from the forest and one from the city – are increasingly paralleled, these two spaces seem gradually less distinct. The two names are almost anagrams of one another and so interestingly suggest almost a shared identity between the two. Teresa shares in Theres' obsession with wolves. Though she was not found in the woods like Theres, she imagines her own forest origins: she dreams she was raised by wolves and that secretly she 'really belongs to the dark, wild forest'.²⁴⁴ Musing on the fact that this 'mythical creature' still exists in Sweden, she describes the animals as simultaneously 'terrifying' and 'promising'.²⁴⁵ These seemingly conflicting adjectives neatly surmise the dualistic symbolism of wolves and the wilderness they here represent. 'True' Nature, in its wildest forms, is something that is greatly feared and is yet symbolic of something intangible that we achingly feel we have moved away from. Teresa imagines, again and again, that she is in the woods amongst wolves, which lick her skin until layers of fur are revealed beneath its surface. We have a stark image of the

²⁴³ Lindqvist, *Little Star*, p. 240.

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 205.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 181.

wilderness within. Significantly, this fantasy is not so much terrifying as it is *liberating*. There is a strength for the girls in the idea of the assimilation with wolves.

Theres becomes what Doug Johnstone has described as a ‘messiah figure’²⁴⁶ for young girls. On an internet site devoted to the discussion of wolves, she meets a collection of girls who become, as Johnstone attests, her ‘disciples’.²⁴⁷ His wording underlines the idea of both wolves and the wilderness as antichristian. Importantly, the girls are not fully initiated until they have been taken into the forest setting. Here, in the woods, each of the girls is frighteningly ‘reborn’. As they are buried in the woods and then emerge unscathed, we again see the forest in the role of the monster of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’: it consumes the children, but only temporarily. The girls are not merged with wolves, until they are merged with the forest. It is only following this initiation that they become truly monstrous. We have, then, a direct correlation between the forest and monstrosity. We encounter an example of ‘standard monstrous geography’ as the wilderness is revealed as the site, in one way or another, in which monsters are born. The girls return to the woods later in the text to torture and kill the main adversary of the text, a man named Max Hansen. An adult male with a sexual predilection for young girls, he may be read as the more ‘traditional’ villain of the fairy tale. The female wolves, who are simultaneously an army of Little Reds, are here directly juxtaposed with the ‘original’ male monster. He is shown as simplistically villainous, whilst the girls, who attack him only once he has molested one of their own, are shown to be vindicated in their monstrosity.

In the ending to the novel, we have the most extreme and climactic image of the ‘dualism’ between civilisation and the wilderness destroyed. The climactic scene takes place at an outside concert, which is located by a large enclosure of wolves. The animals and the

²⁴⁶ Doug Johnstone, ‘*Little Star* by John Ajvide Lindqvist: Raised in the Dark, Powered by Vengeance’, 09.10.11, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/little-star-by-john-ajvide-lindqvist-2367601.html>. Accessed 04.03.2014.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

forest are literally behind bars, as we are presented with an obvious image of Nature as ‘controlled’ by humanity. The wilderness is presented as something to be enjoyed visually, but at a distance and with complete security: in other words, it is not truly experienced at all. As we are told early on, describing this setting, ‘nothing bad can happen here’.²⁴⁸ These words illustrate the arrogance of a humanity that believes it has fully subjugated the wilderness. This is utterly invalidated, as the novel concludes with the girls massacring the audience in a finale that Meli Hooker has argued is reminiscent of *Carrie* (1976)²⁴⁹. They then quite literally destroy the boundaries between humans and Nature, as they release the wolves from the enclosure. The novel ends as they walk towards their ‘grey brothers and sisters’.²⁵⁰ Significantly, it is left entirely uncertain as to whether these ‘wolfskinder’ will be truly assimilated with the ‘mythic creatures’,²⁵¹ or if they will be viciously attacked by the *real* and non-supernatural wolves of this tale. The image, interestingly, of humans forcing themselves into the wilderness to live amongst wolves provides us with what may be seen as an interesting commentary on what has taken place in Yellowstone National Park. The enclosure is a more mitigated example of humans ‘rewilding’ the landscape. Here, we are left with the uneasy feeling that this will be revealed as both naïve and dangerous. Moreover, as we are presented in this ending with two types of ‘wolves’, the threat of the wilderness is revealed – in the end – to stem from both outside civilisation and *within* it.

There are several texts that are worth briefly mentioning which show, like *Little Star*, female wolves enacting vengeance on human men. The first of these is Michael Dougherty’s film *Trick ‘r Treat* (2007),²⁵² which includes a massacre scene which may be seen to parallel

²⁴⁸ Lindqvist, *Little Star*, p. 3.

²⁴⁹ Meli Hooker, ‘*Little Star* by John Ajvide Lindqvist’, <http://dreadfultales.com/2013/04/22/little-star-by-john-ajvide-lindqvist/>. Accessed: 03.03.2014.

²⁵⁰ Lindqvist, *Little Star*, p. 531.

²⁵¹ Ibid. p. 181.

²⁵² The film is an homage to earlier portmanteau horror and includes several stories, much like *Tales That Witness Madness*. Here I exclusively discuss its tale of wolves in the woods.

both the murder of Max and the bloody ending to *Little Star*. *Trick 'R Treat* is set on the night of Halloween. A girl named Laurie (Anna Paquin), who is ultimately revealed as a the wolf, literally wears the costume of Little Red Riding Hood. We are led to believe that she is vulnerable and endangered: a mere victim in waiting. It seems that she is being encouraged by her friends to select a man to bring to the woods in order to lose her virginity. The man she selects an infamous murderer – a man we assume will be the Big Bad Wolf of this tale. However, it transpires that the rite of passage she so nervously awaits is not mere sexual intimacy, but her very first *kill*. She leads the man away from the town and into the forest where her fellow female werewolves await, accompanied by their exclusively male quarry. In an orgiastic display, the women rip the human flesh from their bodies to reveal their hirsute forms beneath and devour their victims. We have a manifestation of Teresa's fantasies of wolves that lie beneath female flesh – and a stark image of the wilderness within. These monsters are revealed, indeed, as 'prodigious eaters'.²⁵³ They serve as extensions of the forest as a *consuming* threat, as it is only in this setting that they consume their prey. Moreover, it is only in this setting that their true wolvine natures are revealed: this monstrosity is firmly bound to the forest environment. The transition is ultimately one of liberation: our ostensible Red, who is meek and mild when we meet her in the towns, becomes in the forest strong and voracious. She embraces her own sensuality and more primal desires, as the role of the victimised heroine is revealed as mere costume indeed. Our more 'traditional' wolf, the murderer whom she eventually kills, serves as parallel to Max in *Little Star*. Again, we see the male wolf as a figure that deserves to be punished, whilst the females are arguably vindicated in their monstrosity. In John Fawcett's film *Ginger Snaps* (2000) we again find a distinct connection between the forest and monstrosity. Moreover, there is a sense of strength, or 'beast feminism',²⁵⁴ in the

²⁵³ Donalson, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation*, p. 2.

²⁵⁴ Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, p. 173.

association between women and wolves. Fears of Nature and fears of femininity are intricately connected, yet revealed as darkly liberating. As the heroine in *Ginger Snaps* declares as she disposes of her latest victim: ‘no one ever thinks chicks do shit like this... a girl can only be a slut, bitch, tease or the virgin next door’ – here, however, ‘women can be werewolves too’.²⁵⁵ John Fawcett’s film, the transition of women into monsters is explicitly linked to puberty and the onset of menstruation. Our protagonist, Ginger (Katharine Isabelle), becomes a werewolf within minutes of her first bleed. This scene is significant in the way it presents the connection between monsters and the forest. The girl is shown sitting alone at night in a playground that lies at the edges of a forest. The juxtaposition is significant, as the playground is a traditional setting of innocence, whilst the forest is here distinctly its opposite. Within moments of bleeding, a lupine monster suddenly bursts from the trees and drags Ginger *into the woods*. It is here that she is bitten and her gradual transition is accordingly set in motion. The forest, literally, is shown as the setting that monsters come from and as the space in which new monsters are made. Like the girls in *Little Star*, she becomes the monster only when she is ‘reborn’ in the forest. The fact that the monstrosity is spread through bites, as in common with werewolves, suggests this darkness of the forest as something that is *infectious* – much like the ‘corruption’ of the Wood in *Uprooted*, as discussed in Chapter Two. Whilst the remainder of the film is set in the town, this early scene qualifies the narrative as one in which civilisation is invaded and endangered by the threats of the wilderness. In Kathe Koja’s short story ‘I Shall Do Thee Mischief in the Woods’,²⁵⁶ we again have a more ‘traditional’ wolf, which is juxtaposed with female versions of the monster. Here, a predacious man follows a young woman adorned in a red cape deep into the forest, with the intention of doing her harm. It transpires, however, that she is not as naïve as she pretends, but is in fact in league with her

²⁵⁵ Atwood, ‘Running With the Tigers’, p. 145.

²⁵⁶ The title is taken from William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In the play, the line exists in a playful and flirtatious context, whilst here it is wholly ominous.

Grandmother, who is the real monster of this story, who awaits in the forest. ‘There is only one beast in the woods’, we are told, ‘and its eyes are a woman’s’.²⁵⁷ The young woman and Granny alike are presented, unnervingly, as embodiments of Nature. The former is ‘like an animal’, with ‘sharp, broken teeth’, whilst the forest itself is compared with her form: ‘its branches are black and tangled as her hair’.²⁵⁸ The Granny, who is covered in grey and thickly matted fur, again resembles the wolf and is additionally likened to the trees, as monster and setting increasingly merge. The tale ends with the revelation of these women as the predators of the tale and the man’s realisation that he has not so much stalked a young woman through the woods, as been *lured* to this setting in order to be fed to a matriarchal monster of the forest. Again, the more ‘traditional’ villain is to be fittingly punished by these lupine women – and again, the forest is the essential setting in which this transpires.

The ‘most significant’ reimaginings of fairy tale wolves, argues Paul Williams in *Wolves of the Imagination*, are those in the writings of Angela Carter. She returns again and again to themes of female monstrosity, frequently twisting traditionally reductive paradigms of women into images of strength and empowerment. Her women aligned not with passive, but with Gothic Nature. One of the ways in which she achieves this is by *embracing* the ‘closeness’ between women and Nature, which often involves embracing the connection between women and so-called ‘monstrosity’. She is fascinated in her work by the existence (or absence) of boundaries between humans and Nature and is, as Lorna Sage contends, ‘a great lover of the hybrid’.²⁵⁹ In *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), which is a classic collection of revised and revitalised traditional fairy tales, she concludes with several distinctly Gothic tales that scrutinise wolves as woodland monsters – or, as she terms them, as ‘forest assassins’.

²⁵⁷ Kathe Koja, ‘I Shall Do Thee Mischief in the Woods’, *Snow White, Blood Red*, eds. Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 160.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²⁵⁹ Lorna Sage, ed., *Essays on the Art of Angela Carter: Flesh and the Mirror* (London: Virago, 1994), p. 250.

The first of these tales is entitled ‘The Werewolf’. Immediately, then, the focus shifts from the little girl to the animal adversary – and moreover, announces the villain as partially *human*, as in the oral origins of the tale. In the first few lines, we are alerted immediately to the significance of the forest setting. These woods, we are told, are filled with ‘wild beasts’:²⁶⁰ *they* are what render it frightening in this instance of ‘standard monstrous geography’ indeed. ‘To the woodsmen’, the narrator continues, ‘the Devil is as real as you or I – moreso’.²⁶¹ The Devil, it seems, is but one of these ‘beasts’, as the forest once again demands the presence of this villain. Subsequently, the focus is immediately on wolves, subtly underlining a connection between Satan and these animals. In this story, heroine, saviour and monster alike are *all* women. Little Red, though described as ‘the good child’,²⁶² is certainly no naïve construction of innocence. In place of the provocative cloak, she has been armed by her mother with a knife and has been taught, when in the woods, to be ‘always on her guard’.²⁶³ When she encounters a wolf, therefore, she strikes without hesitation. The monster, as in Kojá’s tale, is none other than the Grandmother. When the identity of the grandmother is revealed, she is executed by the villagers. We are told simply that in consequence the young girl ‘prospered’.²⁶⁴ The naïve child, lecherous wolf, and feeble Granny are all absent from this tale: instead, in all parts, we have strong and fearsome women. In this instance of ‘beast feminism’, strength is gained through an intimacy with Gothic Nature.

‘Wolf Alice’ is again a tale that fixates on the vulnerable dualism between human and nonhuman Nature. It is a tale of a young girl who, as we are told, ‘would have called herself a wolf’,²⁶⁵ if only she understood human language. ‘Suckled by wolves’,²⁶⁶ she is raised wild in

²⁶⁰ Carter, ‘The Werewolf’, *The Bloody Chamber* (London: York Press, 2008), p. 126.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

the forest until one day she is discovered by a huntsman. She is then taken to a convent where the nuns endeavour to ‘civilise’ the girl. They are unsuccessful and so they send her to live with a mysterious Duke, who it transpires is a vampire. Wolf Alice demonstrates, quite succinctly, our associations between the wilderness and monstrosity. It is the fact that she has existed in the setting of the forest that means she is deemed by the nuns as entirely monstrous. Wholly sickened by her feral ways, these women demonstrate – as symbols of Christianity – the notion indeed that ‘the Bible contains all you need to know in order to hate the wilderness’.²⁶⁷ She, as wolf, is its symbol. Their revulsion illustrates the reasoning behind ‘standard monstrous geography’, as it is deemed unnatural and frightening that something from the forest should exist within the walls of civilisation. By sending the child to the secluded mansion of the Duke, the nuns are relieved of her presence, which is ultimately a reminder of the bestial potentialities of the human. In the context of the story of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, she is an embodiment of both the heroine and the monster, as the dualism between humanity and Nature is destroyed. In the mansion, the girl discovers a full-length mirror – and accordingly, her own reflection. The significant use of mirrors throughout the story alert us to the idea of monsters as *human* reflections. Soon enough, she begins to bleed – her own blood serving in place of the iconic garment and literalising the multitude of interpretations of the fairy tale that deem the cloak a symbol of menstruation. Indeed, as Sage contends, she is a ‘most grotesque’²⁶⁸ version of Little Red. In one memorable scene, the girl – who ordinarily roams around naked – finds a dress in the mansion and forces her body, unnaturally, into the garment. She balances, momentarily, on her ‘hind’ legs to admire the image in the mirror, before returning to all-fours. The image reveals the beastly, naked woman of the forest as

²⁶⁷ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 133.

²⁶⁸ Atwood, ‘Running With The Tigers’, p. 146.

entirely natural and the civilised lady in noble attire as essentially an illusion. In the ending to the tale, she remains with the Duke by choice, embracing both his and her own ‘monstrosity’.

‘The Company of Wolves’ is undoubtedly one of Carter’s most infamous tales, due in part to Neil Jordan’s 1984 film of the same name. The short story begins with quite an extensive discussion of the forest and an insistence that wolves are the deadliest of its monsters: the two are intimately connected. ‘You are always in danger in the forest’, we are told, and of all its many ‘teeming perils [...] the wolf is the worst’.²⁶⁹ These ‘forest assassins’ are described as ‘carnivore incarnate’;²⁷⁰ they are embodiments of the consuming dangers of the forest. Those who wander ‘unwisely’ in the forest smell of meat and are instantly devoured. The word ‘meat’ describes the human uncomfortably as prey, whilst the word ‘unwisely’ distinctly suggests that one’s very presence in the forest environment is what warrants violent retribution. The connection between wolves and the forested setting is here made explicit: ‘it is as if the vegetation itself were in a plot with the wolves who live there, as though the wicked trees go fishing on behalf of their friends’.²⁷¹ These monsters and their setting are frighteningly united.

Following this introduction, we are told a short cautionary tale about a woman and a werewolf. This interlude exists in order to be undermined by the main narrative. Here, a man returns after many years of absence to a wife that has remarried. In a rage, he screams ‘I wish I was the wolf to teach this whore a lesson’.²⁷² Instantly, he is transformed into the beast – seemingly as a direct result of his more instinctual rage. Quickly, however, he is killed by the second husband. We have a tale in which the woman’s sexuality is brought morally into question (she is a ‘whore’) and the ‘happy ending’ is reliant on heroic male aid. ‘The familiar Gothic tale’, writes Donna Heiland, ‘is a woman trapped by one man, and rescued by

²⁶⁹ Carter, ‘The Company of Wolves’, *The Bloody Chamber* (London: York Press, 2008), p. 129.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

another'.²⁷³ In the ensuing narrative, Gothic conventions and those of the fairy tale are thoroughly overturned. Here instead we have a tale in which we are taught that 'if there's a beast in men, it meets its match in women too'.²⁷⁴ Our Little Red in this story meets 'a very handsome young man' (the wolf in disguise) in the 'dangerous forest'.²⁷⁵ She promises him a 'kiss',²⁷⁶ should he arrive at Grandmother's before her. She deliberately dallies ('children', warned Wolf in *Darkest Desire*, 'are made of dalliance') as she intends to lose the wager – it is quite explicit that she desires this monster.²⁷⁷ As expected, he arrives first at the cottage. We are told that as this one enters the cottage, 'he *brings the forest* into the kitchen' [my emphasis].²⁷⁸ He is symbolically synonymous with the woodland setting. His consumption of the Grandmother is unambiguously sexual. As the wolf approaches the old woman's bed, we are told only that his 'genitals are huge... Ah! Huge!'²⁷⁹ In the celebrated language of 'Little Red Riding Hood', much emphasis is laid on the immense size of the features of the wolf ('what big eyes you have', 'what big teeth you have', etc.) and so it is quite conceivable that Grandmother's bedding might conceal such delights. As Granny appears to enjoy this sight and to invite the creature's deathly embrace, it is the wolf that is sexually objectified, whilst the woman's appetites are sexually sated, underlining the aphorism that 'size matters'. Unlike tales such as 'Snow White' in which women are created in answer to fantasy, here the wolf may be seen a projection of *female* lusts. This is underlined further by Red's subsequent arrival to the scene. Seeing the 'tell-tale stained sheets', she determines to surpass her oedipal rival.²⁸⁰ As she strips before him, recalling the oral narrative, grandmother's 'bones beneath the bed set up

²⁷³ Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 1

²⁷⁴ This is a line from Neil Jordan's film version of the story, for which Carter wrote the screenplay.

²⁷⁵ Carter, 'The Company of Wolves', p. 282.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

²⁷⁷ Schmidt, *Darkest Desire*, p. 4.

²⁷⁸ Carter, 'The Company of Wolves', p. 289.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

a terrible clattering’.²⁸¹ their position *beneath the bed* perhaps alluding to the energetic activity *upon* the bed, whilst simultaneously suggesting the Grandmother’s own monstrosity, as she is resigned to the childhood space of monsters. Unlike the Granny, the girl survives, as she knows she is ‘nobody’s meat’.²⁸² She sleeps soundly ‘between the paws’ of what is now described as ‘the tender wolf’.²⁸³ She voluntarily embraces a ‘closeness’ with Nature and it is this very union that serves as our ‘happy ending’. As she becomes one with the animal, the dualism between humans and Nature is erased. The wilderness, replete with its ‘forest assassins’, is a site not merely of terror, but of liberation.

Jordan’s adaptation of the story, the screenplay of which was written by Carter, plays intriguingly with the imbricated fears of wolves and the wilderness. Much like the original story, this film is fascinated the margining of human and nonhuman Nature. The heroine is here named Rosaleen (Sarah Patterson). We are shown Rosaleen, at the beginning, fast asleep in the family home and the film’s events are presented as an elaborate dream. The forest of this text, therefore, is quite literally the landscape of the unconscious. Imagining herself the heroine of her own tailored fairy tale, Rosaleen embarks on a journey towards maturation – which of course takes the form of a journey from the village into the treacherous trials and depths of the forest. On her way, we are told several small stories within the framing narrative. The most significant of these, with regard to wolves in the woods, is one of a servant girl’s revenge on a careless nobleman. The servant girl is impregnated by the man, who then refuses to acknowledge the child as his own. She is banished and chooses to reside in the woods, becoming a wild woman. She waits in the woods until the day of the nobleman’s wedding to enact her revenge and then arrives, uninvited, at the lavish feast. Like the wolf in Carter’s original tale, she ‘brings the forest’ inside. She curses all of the lords and ladies in attendance

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 291.

²⁸² Ibid., p. 290.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 291.

and they are transformed into wolves (*figure 3.8*). The metamorphosis is one from the epitome of high civilisation to the very embodiment of unrestrained wilderness. Again, we have an image of the wilderness that resides within humanity, whilst the picture of wolves adorned in noble attire reveals 'high society' as an elaborate pantomime. Moreover, wolves are once again associated with woman's revenge. The animals are shown to be in league with the woman, as she returns to the forest to raise the child and enlists these creatures, nightly, to sing its lullaby. This interlude, which warns of the invasion of civilisation by the forest, portends the overall ending to the film. Rosaleen's dream is interrupted at the moment it seems that she and the monster will consummate their desires. She awakens, in reality, to find her bedroom is besieged by wolves.²⁸⁴ Boundaries between inside and outside are thoroughly destroyed as the wolves break through the windows and into the home: the psychological setting of the forest invades and manifests in the reality of civilisation. As the credits roll, Rosaleen's voice narrates the moral from Perrault's 'Little Red Riding Hood'. In his version, of course, the girl is killed without redemption and subsumed by Gothic Nature. The moral, as I have noted, clearly warns against human predators and so the final message is one that equates humans with wolves. There is an intimate connection between wolves and the woods. As Carter so eloquently writes, 'it is as if the vegetation itself were in a plot with the wolves who live there'.²⁸⁵ Though we certainly have ambivalent associations with this animal and its mythic connotations, it continues to serve as a shorthand symbol of ecophobic anxieties and of the Gothic nature of the forest environment. Lopez was certainly accurate when he argued that we confuse two very different types of wolves: the wolves of reality and the wolves of imagination, the latter of which are our own creation.²⁸⁶ The actual animal is widely misunderstood: it is extremely

²⁸⁴ Carter's intention was that whilst this invasion occurred, the floor to the bedroom would suddenly open and swallow the girl and monsters alike, but this effect was deemed too costly. The intention, however, is still interesting, as it underlines her desire to end with an image of the *consuming* threats of the forest, which are here intimately bound with the dangers of wolves.

²⁸⁵ Carter, 'The Company of Wolves', p. 129.

²⁸⁶ Williams, *Wolves of the Imagination*.

unlikely that we should be attacked by wolves, even when in their vicinity, as we are not ‘natural enemies’.²⁸⁷ The wolves of our imaginations, however, are so demonised and so dangerous that they have been made into monsters. Leopold argued that the origins of current environmental concerns can be traced to humankind’s hatred of wolves. They exemplify our ability and even tendency to demonise the wilderness, to encourage its fearsome reputation, and thus to vindicate its violent subjugation by any means deemed necessary. This idea of a distinction between ‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ wolves may be seen, too, in our understandings of the forest. In one sense, it is a very real and geographical environment; yet, as I argued in Chapter One, it is also a *landscape of the mind*. When made manifest as Gothic locale it is, as Chevalier and Gheerbrant contend, a site of the *human* unconscious.²⁸⁸ It is fitting, then, with our ‘standard monstrous geography’,²⁸⁹ that the wolves we imagine within this setting are so often bound to human as well as nonhuman Nature. This is epitomised in the figure of the werewolf, which is a literal mixture of the human and the animal. This infamous werebeast is a classic incarnation of the ‘dualism’ destroyed. It simultaneously embodies our anxieties of external and internal N/nature. It represents the unknown threats of the wilderness, but may reveal, too, that we are all ‘hairy on the inside’.²⁹⁰ When we associate the darker elements of humankind with this beast that is so very linked to the forest, we see an illustration of ‘standard monstrous geography’, as such elements are theoretically banished to ‘the outside’. We have seen with these texts with wolves in the woods that there is *always* some allusion to the story of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’. This story, as discussed, is not only a classic tale of a monstrous meeting in the woods, but is an archetypal example of our fears of the ‘dualism’ destroyed. Red is traditionally a symbol of civilisation, whilst the wolf is one of the wild: the story revolves

²⁸⁷ Coleman, *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America*, p. 49.

²⁸⁸ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 401.

²⁸⁹ Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters*’, p. 433.

²⁹⁰ *The Company of Wolves*. Dir. Neil Jordan. ITV Studios Home Entertainment: 1984. Film.

around the horrors involved should the two intermix. The more widely known version of the tale underlines, too, the inherent fiction in the idea that human and nonhuman Nature may ever be wholly distinct.



Fig. 3.8, The Feast in 'The Company of Wolves' (1984).

In an age where there is now 'no true wilderness' and wolves are creatures that are close to extinction, we have increasingly ambivalent ideas about this animal as monster.²⁹¹ The rewilding at Yellowstone Park illustrated such ambivalence. These creatures are desired so that we might 'undo' our damage to the wilderness; yet, we now have such anthropocentric notions as to what 'wilderness' even is,²⁹² that we view the *reintroduction* of wolves to this setting as indicative of its contamination. These wolves, which rightly belong in this setting, are deemed by many too monstrous. The fact that we now have such ambivalent views of this creature is reflected in its increasingly ambivalent depictions as monstrous. In each of the texts examined above, the wolf is never simplistically a monster of evil. There is always some mitigating

²⁹¹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

²⁹² This is an important theme that is discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter.

element which elicits our sympathy, or even adherence.²⁹³ In the first two texts, we saw male wolves unfairly demonised. This was most explicit in *Darkest Desire*, in which fictitious versions of the Grimm Brothers were cast as our villains. Storytelling humans are shown in this tale to frame and force the animal's image as a monster. In the other texts, where we encountered female wolves, these accentuated the imbrication of human and nonhuman Nature, as the assumedly distinct roles of Red and her wolf were merged from the outset. In these, we saw a continuous theme of 'beast feminism', which serves as something of a synonym of ecofeminism, as reductive associations of passive women and passive Nature were firmly undermined.²⁹⁴ This was most explicitly illustrated in the fact that in many of these texts, these bitches sought revenge on rapacious and exploitative men.

Each of these texts with wolves in the woods encourage us to question our understandings of these monsters and their monstrous surroundings. They force us to consider if we are, in fact, as distinct from these creatures as we might imagine – and to question if a likeness should indeed be simplistically feared, or if maybe it is even something to be desired. In an age where we both fear and yearn for this creature to rewild the wilderness, we can only conclude that its status as 'monster' is increasingly complex.

3.5 Conclusion

When considering the question of *why* exactly the forest is frightening, one of the most obvious and immediate answers, indeed, is that this is a setting we associate with monsters. It is an environment in which we *expect* to meet them. Of all the many, many monsters to be found in

²⁹³ It is worthy of note that several of the wolves in popular culture are now barely even monstrous. If one considers such texts as *Twilight*, *The Vampire Diaries*, or *Teen Wolf*, we see werewolves becoming increasingly domesticated as they are sold as archetypes of paranormal romance.

²⁹⁴ Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, p. 173.

the woods, I have discussed only a small selection, and yet we may already discern the fact that there are intimate connections between these monsters and their forested environments. The monster, as I have argued, is of importance in the context of ecocriticism. When we consider this movement's definition as an examination of the relations between human and nonhuman Nature and an interrogation into the meaning of the word 'human' itself, it may easily be examined in the context of teratology. The monsters discussed here are firmly bound to the forest: they are, indeed, 'embodiments of anxiety',²⁹⁵ and as such they are expressions and extensions of *ecophobic* anxieties. In studying our portrayals of these creatures, therefore, we are engaging in the ongoing task of 'theorising'²⁹⁶ such fears of the natural world.

There are several ways, as we have seen, in which monsters in the forest serve as illustrations of our fears of this environment. In short, it is our very unease with this setting that demands the presence of these monsters. As discussed, the distribution of these creatures into areas of wilderness, necessarily apart from civilisation, is merely 'standard monstrous geography'. Fears of the unknown – of what Machen called 'that awful *secret* of the wood' – become slightly more tolerable if given tangible form.²⁹⁷ Even in those texts where the monsters are not actually seen and instead underscore the *vagueness* of ecophobia (notably *Hotel* and *The Blair Witch Project*), such fears are nonetheless symbolically contained in one imagined figure. In the majority of texts where the monster *is* seen – traditionally, writes Oswald, it is 'a primarily physical and visible category' – its very corporeality holds the promise of its own destruction.²⁹⁸ Monstrous Nature – an overwhelming and indefinable 'adversary' – becomes, much more comprehensibly, monsters *in* Nature. If we return now to the 'Seven Theses' that explain our fears of the forest, we can see that its monsters assume and

²⁹⁵ Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, p. 117.

²⁹⁶ Estok, 'Theorising in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', p. 203.

²⁹⁷ Machen, 'The Great God Pan', p. 106.

²⁹⁸ Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, p. 5.

enact these various functions. The idea that civilisation is defined as *against* the forests is seen in this flawed idea that civilised humans are wholly distinct from woodland monsters. In each of the texts, we have seen that the monsters are precisely so frightening because they undermine this distinction. There have been very visceral imbrications of human and nonhuman Nature, as with the Wasp Priest in *Tom Gordon* and more subtle examples such as mythagos created from the very materials of the forest. Witches, unnervingly, can seem falsely to be human. However, they are revealed as ‘at one’ with Nature in monstrous ways. The Blair Witch, for example, is in appearance both woman and animal, whilst the blood of the witches in *The Woods* conceals that the forest quite literally runs in their veins. Wolves, as we have seen, are very often merged with the human, most commonly as werewolves. They embody the tension between our fears in the outside and the inside. The idea that we fear the forest because it is symbolic of the *past* is again reflected in its monsters. We are now, theoretically, ‘post-enlightenment’ and ‘would-be rational’, and so officially we no longer believe in monsters.²⁹⁹ Our forests are now all cartographically recorded and so there is no reason, ostensibly, to fill them with such creations. The idea of monsters, therefore, is in this sense regressive. In many of the texts, we have seen that the past is explicitly evoked. *Mythago Wood* envisages our very earliest mythologies, whilst *YellowBrickRoad* situates the horrors of the wilderness as originating in the New World. Witches and wolves are both ‘monsters’ to be found in our histories and are many centuries old. With each, we have firm examples of ‘heritage noire’. Monsters serve, certainly, as embodiments of *trial* as often they must be outwitted in order to escape the wilderness. In both *Tom Gordon* and *YellowBrickRoad*, they hideously underscore the need to find one’s way out of the woods. In ‘Hansel and Gretel’, the witch must be outwitted, and in ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, the wolf is intended as something that should be denied, and is ultimately overcome. The woodland monster is often the immediate consequence

²⁹⁹ Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest: The Tangled Roots of our Forest*, p. 200.

of being lost in the woods. Indeed, *Tom Gordon*, *YellowBrickRoad*, and *The Blair Witch Project* each centre on the idea of being lost in woods that harbour monsters. Meanwhile, the classic tale of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ warns us, without reserve, never to stray into the forest. Many of these monsters symbolise the *consuming* threats of the woods. We have the cannibalistic witch in ‘Hansel and Gretel’ and the ‘prodigious eaters’ that are the many wolves of these texts. These monsters, as frequent symbols of our darker natures in Nature, illustrate the *psychological* implications of being lost in the woods. We fear that the monster, indeed, is merely a ‘projection’ which conceals our *own* denied monstrosities. Finally, monsters illustrate, too, our fears of the forest as an *antichristian* space. They are bound, traditionally, to notions of sin and the Devil. In *Tom Gordon* and *YellowBrickRoad*, the monsters served as ‘anti-God’ figures. In our texts with witches and wolves, we saw that these monsters are traditionally associated with Satan. Their destruction, historically, has been deemed as divine. If Nature is Satan’s Church, then its monsters are his disciples.

If, as Harrison notes, we have truly lost the ability to see the forest as ‘strange, monstrous, and enchanting’,³⁰⁰ then surely an obvious way to remedy this would be to fill it imaginatively with our monsters. Consequently, the wealth of texts that continue to situate so many monsters in the woods are symbolic examples of *rewilding*. They undermine this idea of ‘mythoclasm’ and the Disenchantment Thesis: horror serves, as I have argued, as modern day mythology. Whilst Asma writes that it is a ‘*comforting* illusion’ to imagine we no longer believe in monsters, I would argue instead that it is a thoroughly *discomforting* notion [my emphasis].³⁰¹ In an age where Nature is viewed increasingly as a ‘passive resource’ and is consequently destroyed with little thought, it is essential that we rewild not only geographical spaces such as Yellowstone, but that we rewild the ‘landscapes of our minds’, so that we might

³⁰⁰ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 121.

³⁰¹ Asma, *On Monsters*, p. 278.

reconsider our environmental devastation. In the words of David Gilmore: 'the mind needs monsters'.³⁰²

We have seen throughout this chapter the idea that the relegation of monsters to the forest is simply an example of 'standard monstrous geography'. This setting, as we have seen, is both habitat and home to such creatures. Such ideas inform the themes of the next chapter. In this, I discuss the forest as a site of *human* settlement and the ways in which it is deemed as unsuitable and fearsome in this context. Indeed, if the woods are home to our monsters, then surely there are monstrous implications when humans are found to dwell within them.

³⁰² David Gilmore, quoted in Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, p. 1.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘IT ISN’T RIGHT TO BUILD SO CLOSE TO THE WOODS’: HUMANS IN THE FOREST



Fig. 4.1, Film poster for *Jug Face* (2013).

‘There’s some weird shit going on out there in the woods and we don’t want anything to do with it’.

— *Jug Face*.¹

I noted early on this thesis the fact that humans in the West have gradually evolved from ‘forest-dwellers’ to ‘apartment-house dwellers’.² Our origins, according to those such as Jay Appleton, are rooted firmly in the wilderness. Our contemporary existence, however, is with each day ‘increasingly urbanised’.³ It is interesting, therefore, to examine cultural reactions to those who *continue* to settle in the wilderness – to modern-day ‘forest-dwellers’. We have so far examined texts where the forest is a ‘landscape of fear’ because the environment itself is threateningly animate, or because it is cast as a home to our monsters.⁴ Here, I address our unease with the forest as a site of *human settlement*. I examine texts which demonstrate our contradictory reactions to the woods when cast as home to the human. The idea of humans living amidst the wilderness is one that may be viewed as the most natural or unnatural thing in the world. It may be seen as an idyllic return to our origins, or as a frightful and dangerous regression. Though I will address some of the reasons this habitat is desired, my main focus is of course on the reasons it is feared. I examine, here, several texts which demonstrate widespread ecophobia, as the forest is shown repeatedly as an unsuitable – and horrifying – site of human habitation.

In line with the central question of this thesis – ‘why is the forest frightening?’ – I ask in this chapter why it is feared as a site of settlement. My contention, broadly speaking, is that

¹ *Jug Face*. Dir. Chad Crawford Kinkle. USA. Bloody Disgusting, 2013. Film.

² Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p. 29.

³ David L. Brown and Kai A. Schafft, *Rural People and Communities in the Twenty-First Century: Resilience and Transformation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 35.

⁴ Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, p. 1.

there are two main and very different explanations for this. The first is that the forest is a Gothic and infectious environment: it endangers and corrupts the humans in its midst, making ‘monsters’ of us all. The second is that we, humans, are the infecting element: the woods are *made* Gothic by our presence within them. The chapter is structured in line with these explanations and is divided into three main sections. The first two align with the more obvious theory, that it is the *forest* to be feared, whilst the final one examines texts which suggest that it is *we* that should be dreaded. In the first section, ‘What Lies Beneath: That Awful Secret of the Wood’, I look at three texts in which wilderness communities are influenced and infected by something which literally lurks beneath the forest. Here I examine David Lynch and Mark Frost’s *Twin Peaks* (1990-1), T. E. D. Klein’s *The Ceremonies* (1984) and Chad Crawford Kinkle’s *Jug Face* (2013). I focus on the subterranean horrors in these texts and the ways in which they infiltrate and contaminate the surrounding community. In the second section, ‘You Are What You Eat and We Are What We Are: Cannibals in the Woods’, I examine texts which feature that classic example of human savagery, the cannibal. Here, I examine the associations of this figure with the woods and most especially the idea that it is *created* by this environment. These texts suggest that humans in this setting may come to embody themselves the *consuming* threats of the forest. The texts I address are Jack Ketchum’s *Off Season* (1980), Richard Layman’s *The Woods Are Dark* (1981), Lucky McKee’s *The Woman* (2011) and Jim Mickle’s *We Are What We Are* (2013). The final section, ‘The Death of Nature: Constructed Wilderness’, is concerned with *our* role in rendering the forest a Gothic locale. It focuses on texts that engage with themes of our ‘fragmentation’ from the natural world.⁵ It begins with an examination of Lucile Hadžihalilović’s *Innocence* (2004) and M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Village* (2004), each of which involves the forced recreation of humans in Nature, and the revelation of what John

⁵ Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 2.

Baudrillard describes as ‘artificial paradises’.⁶ In the last texts, Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* (2009) and Drew Goddard’s *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012), we find forests that have been explicitly designed as inhospitable and dangerous environments. Here, the Gothic forest is the creation of humans in the roles of the gods and is intended solely as a site of execution.

It is important firstly, before we come to each of these sections, to introduce some of the recurrent themes in this chapter and to discuss in more detail our more fearsome associations with human settlement in the woods. It is striking to note that there is one image that recurs throughout the vast majority of these texts, and that is the subterranean threat beneath the forest. It is for this reason that I begin by focusing explicitly on this image in the first three texts. It is my contention that we encounter this image in so many of these texts because it symbolises not only the vague and ‘awful secret’ of the forest, but the fear that the primitive human lies just *beneath* the civilised human.⁷ It is interesting to note, too, that a theme that runs throughout these texts of forest communities is that of sacrifice. This, I believe, is best explained if we consider René Girard’s theories on community and sacrifice. Importantly, he distinguishes between ‘primitive’ and ‘civilised’ societies based on whether they have a judicial system of law.⁸ The forest, traditionally, is a setting outside of the law and so is in these terms essentially primitive.⁹ Girard argues that humans, naturally, are violent creatures and must be ‘forcibly restrained from murder’.¹⁰ With no system of law, he argues that the cycle of violence would be unending, and would lead to our own extinction. Thus, he suggests that in communities devoid of law, there is instead a system of sacrifice. This sacrifice, seemingly, is

⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, (London: Verso, 1989), p. 8.

⁷ Machen, ‘The Great God Pan’, 106.

⁸ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 8-9.

⁹ Robert Pogue Harrison notes that the forest is ‘outside of the law’ and that ‘the law is forever threatened by nature’. We may note, too, the connotations of the word ‘outlaw’, which imply geographical banishment, and think of such classic examples of forest outlaws as Robin Hood and his Merry Men. Sourced: Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p. 69.

¹⁰ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 16.

a 'divine decree' that is 'imposed from without'.¹¹ Consequently, there can be no blame or revenge, and human violence is simultaneously sated and denied. For Girard, then, sacrifice is symbolic of our base and primitive desires for violence. Thus, the image of sacrifice serves in these texts much like the image of the 'secret' beneath the forest: it hints at the primitive beneath the civilised. This ties in too with the idea that these communities in the woods serve as reflections of our communities in the cities: our primitive settings reveal our primitive selves, much in line with the idea that the forest is a symbol of the human unconscious.¹² Fred Botting argues that 'Gothic spaces' serve as 'mirror images of society'.¹³ Certainly, we will see intimations of this in the forests throughout these texts. Moreover, Linda J. Holland-Toll argues that when we encounter communities in our horror fictions, we are presented with 'a carnival house mirror', which 'reveals the often warped and ironically true image of our society, our community, ourselves'.¹⁴ They reveal the primitive foundations of community, which rely on 'strategies of exclusion', the binary of 'us' and 'them', and sometimes 'communal evil' to ensure 'communal happiness'.¹⁵ In short, they reveal what she terms 'the skull beneath the skin'.¹⁶ One final theme I wish to highlight at this stage is that of human settlement amidst the wilderness of the New World. The vast majority of these texts are American and make some allusion (be it subtle, or explicit) to early American colonisation. This makes sense if we return to our discussion in Chapter One of the significance in cultural (especially American) memory of the forests of the New World. This is arguably the most infamous era in which human settlements have struggled amidst the forest environment. In addition, as already discussed, this was a time that firmly demonstrated our divergent views of the forest as it was seen as both

¹¹ Ibid., p. 15.

¹² Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1969), p. 401.

¹³ Fred Botting, quoted in Anya Heis-von der Lippe, ed., *Dark Cartographies: Exploring Gothic Spaces* (Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press, 2013), p. ix.

¹⁴ Linda J. Holland-Toll, *As American as Mom, Baseball and Apple Pie: Constructing Community in Contemporary Horror Fiction* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 2001), p. 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 248.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

a 'virtual Eden'¹⁷ and a 'howling wilderness'.¹⁸ It is little wonder then that in these texts of human settlement in the woods we find several allusions to the trials of New World settlers.

Our general associations with human settlement in the wilderness are starkly divergent. As Girard argues, we tend to view what we deem as 'primitive' societies as either 'vastly superior' or 'flagrantly inferior' to our own.¹⁹ It is key to highlight from the outset that our very understanding of wilderness as a site of settlement is something of a paradox. This is demonstrated in our definitions of the word. Let us begin with the legal definition of wilderness, as devised in the Wilderness Act in 1964:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.²⁰

In the Oxford English dictionary, 'wilderness' is given several definitions, which include: 'wild and uncultivated land', 'land uninhabited, or inhabited only by wild animals', and then the more figurative descriptions of spaces that evoke 'solitude and savageness', or 'in which one is lonely or "lost"'.²¹ The resounding theme is that this is a setting that is usually defined by

¹⁷ Dennis B. Blanton, "The Weather is Fine, Wish You Were Here, Because I'm the Last One Alive": "Learning" the Environment in the English New World Colonies', in *The Colonisation of Unfamiliar Landscapes: The Archaeology of Adaptation*, eds Marcy Rockman, James Steele and R. Blust (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 190.

¹⁸ Bernice M. Murphy, *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 86.

¹⁹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 20.

²⁰ Dodd, D.W., 'Wilderness Act' (1964), in *Encyclopedia of Politics of the American West*, ed. SL Danver, CQ Press, Washington, DC, pp. 665-66. Accessed 18.08.2015. (www.dx.doi.org).

²¹ "wilderness, n.". *OED Online*. (Oxford University Press, June 2015). Web. 16. July 2015.

the *absence* of humankind. Consequently, any idyllic notions of living in the wilderness are fraught with paradox, as the setting will only remain as a wilderness if humans (or at least, the majority of humans) do not themselves remain there. Nonetheless, we have many associations with the woods as a desirable site of habitation. We imagine positively ‘getting back to Nature’, rediscovering something we suspect we have lost, and finding for ourselves a *tabula rasa*. There is a tendency, argues Girard, to view civilisation en masse as ‘sick’, and consequently decide that a primitive existence must be ‘the healthy one’.²² It will serve as an antidote to modern urbanity. This is maybe most famously illustrated in Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1864), which is something of a definitive account of ‘getting back to Nature’. Thoreau informs us of his motivations early on:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and to see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.²³

The forest is presented in restorative terms, whilst the lives of those within it are implicitly more valuable. We are encouraged towards this ‘life in the woods’, which seems idyllic indeed. However, despite such Wordsworthian ideas of life in the woods, we simultaneously have a multitude of reasons to fear and avoid such an existence in modernity. There is an instinctive suspicion, as voiced in *The Ceremonies*, that ‘it *isn’t right* to build so close to the woods’ [my emphasis].²⁴ It is useful, here, to return to my contention that there are two very different reasons to fear human settlement in the woods. The first, as I have outlined, is that we fear the

²² Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 35.

²³ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1854), p. 143.

²⁴ Klein, *The Ceremonies*, p. 26.

forest will infect and awaken something primitive within us: the primitive setting creates the primitive human. This aligns with the idea that civilisation is defined *against* the forests, which are thus implicitly lawless and uncivilised. The idea of ‘getting *back* to Nature’ is imagined very negatively, as a fearsome regression into savagery. If we consider again the idea in Chapter Three that it is simply ‘standard monstrous geography’²⁵ to locate our monsters in the wilderness, then the implication is that the *humans* relegated to this setting must themselves be monstrous. Certainly, we have stereotypes to consolidate such thinking. We have an array of derogatory terms for these people who dwell within or beside the wilderness, but ‘the most lasting and pervasive’, according to Anthony Harkins, is ‘the backwoods hillbilly’.²⁶ The word ‘backwoods’ is interestingly defined as ‘a heavily forested and uncultivated area where few people live’, but has also come to mean ‘a remote and *culturally backward* area’ [my emphasis].²⁷ There is therefore an association in this rather fitting homonym (backwoods/backwards) between physical geography and what we might term ‘primitive’ denizens. These people, therefore, are so frightening because they are so intricately linked with the wildness of Nature. They are precisely so unnerving because they are *not* lost in the woods, but instead are at home – and this is seen as ‘unnatural’. They serve, therefore, as J. W. Williamson asserts, ‘as keep-away signs’:²⁸ they warn us emphatically *do not go into the woods*. When it comes to the second explanation for why we might fear human settlement in the forest – the idea that it is we who ‘Gothicise’ this landscape – there are again many reasons for us to be fearful. If we look again at the definitions of ‘wilderness’, we may see that there is a horror in this idea that it is immediately undone by our very presence. This brings us to an issue that is very central to debates within ecocriticism – the idea that humans today have no

²⁵ Van Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters’, p. 433.

²⁶ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 3.

²⁷ Robert Allen, ed., *The Penguin English Dictionary* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 56.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

place in Nature. Andrew Smith and William Hughes highlight one of the predominant causes for viewing Nature as Gothic as the fact that the word ‘Nature’, in the modern world, implies ‘estrangement rather than belonging’: we are now ‘fragmented’ from the natural world.²⁹ In this light, we may reconsider the story of Eden. We may view it not as a tale of serpentine and satanic monstrosity, but of *human* pollution of natural paradise. We were not made, it seems, for idyllic Nature. In the final section, wherein we have texts that cast humans as Nature’s despoilers, we are presented with a mirror once more. In these, we may find an ecological thread, as the image of humans corrupting and tainting Nature is of course all too accurate in the context of environmental destruction.

4.1 What Lies Beneath?: The Awful Secret of the Wood

When examining texts with human settlements amidst the Gothic forest, we must note the striking fact that one unusual image is found again and again – and this is the image of something that *lies beneath* the forest. In each of the texts in this chapter, we find there is something quite literally beneath the woods, which is always occluded and thoroughly ominous. Such imagery ties in with the more symbolic idea of what lies beneath our fears of the forest and with the suspicion that this setting harbours some ‘awful secret’. It relates, too, to this idea that the uncanny is something ‘that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light’.³⁰ In this section, I begin with three texts which introduce such ideas: *Twin Peaks*, *The Ceremonies*, and *Jug Face*. These texts demonstrate the idea that there is something unnerving to woodland communities precisely because something dwells beneath them. This is why we fear the woods: the ‘awful secret’ of the Gothic forest taints and corrupts the humans in its vicinity. Holland-Toll’s idea that communities in horror serve to reveal the sinister

²⁹ Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 2.

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 130.

foundations of human community – to expose ‘the skull beneath the skin’³¹ – is in these texts firmly brought to light, as we see explicitly what lurks in these underlying foundations.

Mark Frost and David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks* is a television series that is filled with intimations that there is an ‘awful secret’ indeed underlying the forest. The series ran from 1990-1, was followed by the filmic prequel *Fire, Walk With Me* (1992), and is set to continue in 2017. The original series is now widely considered something of a cult classic and has been credited with being ‘the first series’ to truly utilise ‘the television Gothic’.³² It is set in the fictional small town of Twin Peaks, amidst the forests of Washington State. It revolves around the mysterious death of one of its teenage girls, Laura Palmer (Sheryl Lee), and the effects of this death in the remaining community. The series begins with the introduction to this town of FBI agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan), who is sent to solve this murder mystery. This mystery, however, is not conventional: in the end, its explanation lies *beneath* the surrounding woods of Twin Peaks. It transpires that beneath these woods is a hellish domain, known as ‘The Black Lodge’. Its influence pervades the forest above and seeps, ominously, into the nearby community. The forest is shown, indeed, as a thoroughly dangerous site of settlement, which threatens to corrupt those who dwell within it.

Our contradictory notions when it comes to human settlement in the wilderness are firmly represented in the world of *Twin Peaks*. We are told of this secluded town that you must ‘travel thousands of miles, and apparently hundreds of centuries, to be here’.³³ Whilst it was set contemporaneously with its release, there is yet a sense throughout the series of an earlier era. As we have seen, we have positive and negative associations when it comes to the woods and antiquity – and both may be found within Twin Peaks. Indeed, more generally, the series

³¹ Holland-Toll, *As American as Mom*, p. 12.

³² Ledwon, ‘Twin Peaks and the Television Gothic’, p. 260.

³³ ‘Rest in Pain’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 26 April. 1990. Television.

examines in detail the forest as a *binary* space, which is at once an idyll and a nightmare. The wilderness lies at the very centre of this series. Michael Chion argues that ‘this gigantic, endless forest [...] instead of remaining as a backdrop, never stops reminding us of its existence through its noises and mysteries’.³⁴ ‘The setting’, he continues, ‘has never been so important as it is in *Twin Peaks*’.³⁵ The show is punctuated, constantly, by images of the forest, and even the interior scenes are dominated by the presence of wood. Early on, the descriptions of this setting are wholly vague: we are told, for example, that ‘there’s something very, very strange in these old woods’.³⁶ Gradually, however, as the series progresses, we learn more of its mysteries. We discover that beneath the forest’s surface exist three realms: The White Lodge, The Black Lodge, and the Red Room. Each of these, respectively, embodies the ‘good’, the ‘bad’, and the ‘in-between’. They may symbolically be read as various manifestations of the forest’s symbolism: as ‘heaven’, as ‘hell’, and as ‘purgatory’. Each holds its influence on the nearby community.

The White Lodge, though never seen, is described in some detail in the second series. It is, we are told, ‘a place of great goodness’, of ‘saccharine excess’. Here, ‘gentle fawns gambol amidst happy laughing spirits’ in this environment ‘filled with innocence and joy’.³⁷ In short, the description we are given is that of the Enchanted Forest. We may find its influence within Twin Peaks in the town’s more idyllic elements. Certainly, the community is quite enchanting, with its charming strangeness and antiquated simplicity. The people, here, seem indeed to ‘live deliberately’ and to ‘front only the essential facts of life’.³⁸ In this light, it is little wonder that Dale decides to remain in this secluded and ‘healthy’ alternative to modern

³⁴ Michel Chion, *David Lynch: Second Edition*, trans. Robert Julian (London: BFI Publishing, 2006), p. 99.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ ‘Rest in Pain’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 26 April. 1990. Television.

³⁷ ‘The Black Widow’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 12 January. 1991. Television.

³⁸ Thoreau, *Wälden*, p. 143.

urbanity.³⁹ We see the influence of the White Lodge, too, in those characters associated with the ‘good’ in Nature. The predominant examples of this are Deputy Hawk (Michael Horse), a Native American policeman, and ‘The Log Lady’, (Catherine Coulson), an outlandish older woman shown always to be cradling a log. Hawk, who is described as ‘that Native person’⁴⁰, is the authentic link to the Indians of the New World. Stereotypically, the ‘Indian’ is shown to be most in tune with the natural world. It is he, significantly, who knows the most of the realms beneath the forest, as he maintains a knowledge of Native American mythology.⁴¹ The Log Lady, as Michael Thomas Carroll argues, has ‘an intimate connection to the natural world’.⁴² This is embodied in the fact that she is always shown to be with her log, which she cradles like a small child. The image is one in which she comforts and cares for the tree that has been ‘wounded’ by humanity. Indeed, though we know little of the upcoming new series, it was intended that the Log Lady would speak on sustainable forestry – therein underlining her role as an agent of environmental protection.⁴³ Echoing the words of William Wordsworth and Henry David Thoreau, she instructs us to realise that ‘Nature is the great teacher’.⁴⁴

³⁹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 35.

⁴⁰ ‘Slaves and Masters’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 9 December. 1991. Television.

⁴¹ Hawk is certainly not the only link to themes of the forest in the New World, though he is the most straightforward. More ambiguously, we have the character of Johnny (Robert Davenport/Robert Bauer), a mentally disabled and mute adult who is shown always to be wearing an Indian headdress. Johnny is the son of the town’s tycoon, Ben Horne (Richard Beymer). Much of Ben’s storyline revolves around his dream of destroying a substantial area of the forest, in order to build ‘Ghostwood Estates’. Towards the end of the series, he becomes gradually aware of environmental issues and devotes himself to the protection of the forests’ endangered species – what he calls ‘the first scrubbing of a dirty conscience’. Johnny, throughout the series, is always in the background and his Native American costume is never discussed. He serves as an example of what Renée Bergland has called ‘the spectral native’: a wholly vague allusion to the Indian, which nonetheless evokes the New World’s troubled histories. We will see with the ‘monsters’ in Shyamalan’s *The Village* that again we have symbols of this ‘spectral native’. Sourced: Renée Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hannover: Dartmouth College University Press, 2000), p. 20.

⁴² Michael Thomas Carroll, ‘Agent Cooper’s Errand in the Wilderness: *Twin Peaks* and American Mythology’, in *Literature and Film Quarterly*, 1993, 21 (4), p. 287.

⁴³ The actress, however, has very recently died, and so it is uncertain if her character will be reprised. Accessed 07/10/2015. (<http://variety.com/2015/tv/news/catherine-coulson-log-lady-twin-peaks-dies-dead-1201604367/>)

⁴⁴ Thoreau described his motivations for entering the forest as wanting to ‘learn what it had to teach’, whilst Wordsworth in ‘The Tables Turned’ (1798) demands ‘let Nature be your teacher’. Sourced: ‘Masked Ball’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 15 December. 1990. Television; Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 143; William

In direct contrast to the White Lodge is, of course, the Black Lodge. Its existence explains the Gothic ambience to the woods throughout, which belies the beauty of this environment. Its presence haunts and infects Twin Peaks, meaning that the town, as Colin Odell and Michelle LeBlanc contend, has only a ‘veneer of wholesomeness’ [my emphasis].⁴⁵ Just as the White Lodge is ‘a place of great goodness’, the Black Lodge is ‘a place [...] of dark forces and vicious secrets’.⁴⁶ It is, quite simply, ‘the evil in the woods of Twin Peaks’.⁴⁷ Whilst the account of the White Lodge evoked the Enchanted Forest, this description of the Black Lodge evokes the *Gothic* forest. The Black Lodge is the ‘the shadow self’⁴⁸ and ‘opposite’⁴⁹ of the White Lodge. In accordance with ideas that the darkness of the forest ‘symbolises the unconscious’,⁵⁰ it is said that one encounters one’s own ‘shadow self’ within this setting. The ‘awful secret’, it seems, is that here one discovers one’s own darkest identity: what lies beneath, indeed. Moreover, the fact that the Black Lodge is always described in contrast to the White Lodge returns us this idea that the Gothic forest is reliant on its idyllic antithesis. It exists as a corruption and perversion of the Edenic image. We have much more of a sense in the series of the Black Lodge, than we do the White Lodge. This is due largely to its ominous discussion, but also to the fact that we ultimately see for ourselves its entrance. In the series’ conclusion, Dale seeks its location. He finds its entrance in the depths of the forest, which takes the form of what seems to be a hole or pit in the ground (*figure 4.2*). We do not actually see inside the Black Lodge⁵¹: we are shown only that it exists somewhere beneath the midst of the woods. Its

Wordsworth ‘Tables Turned’, in *A Choice of Wordsworth’s Verse*, ed. R.S. Thomas (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 34.

⁴⁵ Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc, *David Lynch* (Herts: Kamera Books, 2007), p. 11.

⁴⁶ ‘The Black Widow’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 12 January. 1991. Television.

⁴⁷ ‘Rest in Pain’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 26 April. 1990. Television.

⁴⁸ ‘Drive With a Dead Girl’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 17 November. 1990. Television.

⁴⁹ ‘The Black Widow’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 12 January. 1991. Television.

⁵⁰ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 401.

⁵¹ We are, however, shown the interior of the Red Room, the purgatorial space. The Red Room take the form of a psychedelic interior space, which is seemingly of human design.

image is withheld and this is so effective because it becomes then a vague and haunting symbol of ‘that awful secret’, which belies the wood.

Though we do not see inside the Black Lodge, we do however see its corrupting influence in the community. This is most obviously manifest in ‘Killer Bob’ (Frank Silva): a malefic being from this realm that is able to influence and possess human souls. It transpires, in the predominant ‘twist’ of the show, that Bob has been possessing Laura’s father Leland (Ray Wise), who is ultimately revealed as Laura’s killer. We learn that as a boy, Leland was wandering in the woods when he was first approached by the mysterious Bob. He then dreamt of this figure and in the dream ‘invited Bob inside’, therein enabling the possession.⁵² This back story illustrates two important elements: firstly, that in order to infiltrate the community, Bob had first to find a human who strayed into the forest, and secondly, that in order to possess his victim, he had to be invited in by the human mind. Bob, who stands for ‘the evil in the woods’, therefore fully demonstrates the psychological, as well as physical, dangers of this setting. It is important that his invitation is made in a dream, as this emphasises Bob’s role in the human unconscious. We return to this idea of ‘the terrors of the forest’⁵³ being bound to the human Id. We have then a further image of something hidden beneath, as we consider the Id symbolically concealed beneath the Ego. This is further emphasised in the very image of possession, which is of course a classic example of such concealment. Bob’s existence haunts the series throughout, and is consistently equated with the Gothic ambience of the surrounding forests. Immediately after every scene in which he is mentioned, we are shown images of the dark and stirring wilderness, and so are encouraged to equate the two. The more that we learn of Laura after her death (from her diaries and various recordings in therapy), the more it is apparent that she too merged her fears of Bob with her fears of the forest. On the day of her

⁵² ‘Arbitrary Law’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 1 December. 1990. Television.

⁵³ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 401.

death, which she anticipates, she says ‘I just know I’m gonna get lost in those woods tonight’.⁵⁴ In the film, when expressing her greatest anxieties, she hysterically screams ‘The trees! The trees!’,⁵⁵ with no further explanation. We eventually learn that Bob survives by *feeding* on human suffering (known in the Black Lodge as ‘garmonbozia’). He devours human ‘pain and sorrow’, which provide him with ‘nourishment’.⁵⁶ His fearsome gluttony means that this emissary of the Black Lodge, or the Gothic forest, embodies the *consuming* threats of this environment. Bob may interestingly be read in very different ways. He has been described, variously, as a ‘malevolent spirit’,⁵⁷ as a demonic entity’,⁵⁸ as a ‘cosmic parasite’,⁵⁹ and even as ‘entirely imaginary’.⁶⁰ Most importantly, we are presented in the series with two antithetical explanations of this entity. In the first, we are to read him literally, as an entirely supernatural embodiment of ‘the evil in the woods’. In the second, which is suggested most strongly in *Fire, Walk With Me*,⁶¹ he is a *symbol* of the basest instincts in humanity: a psychological construct and mere *projection* of human cruelty and violence. He stands, as Todd McGowan argues, as a hideous reflection of the ‘hostile reality’⁶² of society – the ‘the skull beneath the skin’⁶³ indeed, of human propriety. Whilst we are told, on the one hand, he is ‘the evil in the woods’, we are told also that he is ‘the evil that *men* do’.⁶⁴ In this light, then, it is implied that the horror that belies this forest is *human* iniquity. The series leaves it wholly ambiguous as to which interpretation we are to believe. One way or another, we must conclude that Bob signifies and

⁵⁴ ‘Traces to Nowhere’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 12 April. 1990. Television.

⁵⁵ *Fire, Walk With Me*. Dir. David Lynch. CIBY Pictures, 1992. DVD.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Scott Meslow, Accessed 08/09/2013. (<http://theweek.com/article/index/238491/twin-peaks-the-definitive-plan-to-continue-the-series>).

⁵⁸ Christy Desmet, ‘The Canonisation of Laura Palmer’, in *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*, ed. David Lavery, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995) p. 108.

⁵⁹ Lenora Ledwon, ‘Twin Peaks and the Television Gothic’, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 1993, 21 (4), pp. 260-70; p. 276.

⁶⁰ Chion, *David Lynch*, p. 100.

⁶¹ In the film, Laura is shown to realise that it Leland, her father, who is her tormenter. Upon seeing her recognition, he delivers the ominous line: ‘I always thought you knew it was me’.

⁶² Todd McGowan, *The Impossible David Lynch* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 141.

⁶³ Holland-Toll, *As American as Mom*, p. 12.

⁶⁴ ‘Arbitrary Law’. *Twin Peaks*. Lynch/Frost Productions. USA. 1 December. 1990. Television.

reflects whatever it is that underlies our *fears* of dwelling so close to the forest: be it of the wilderness or be it of ourselves. This is solidified in the final image of the series, as Dale returns from the Black Lodge and surveys himself calmly in the mirror. The camera slowly turns to reveal Bob in the reflection. Whether it is supernaturally, or psychologically, Dale has been turned by something in the forest. The mirror reflects what may be seen as the primeval environment, or the primitive man, corrupting from beneath.

Much like *Twin Peaks*, *The Ceremonies* is another text that centres on human settlement in the wilderness and themes of what may lie hidden beneath this environment. Here, the image of something monstrous that lurks beneath the surface is taken to the extreme: it is ultimately revealed that the earth itself is merely a gargantuan and monstrous entity – and that the forest holds the key to its release. Though the novel is highly revered and Klein considered a ‘master of the genre’,⁶⁵ he has written surprisingly little and even less has been written about him. It has been widely noted, however, that he was greatly influenced by the writings of Arthur Machen (1863-1947): the man who penned the phrase ‘that awful secret of the wood’.⁶⁶ Certainly, *The Ceremonies* may be read as taking Machen’s ominously referenced but never revealed ‘awful secret of the wood’ as its central subject.

The outline of the story in *The Ceremonies* first appeared in a short story entitled ‘The Events at Porothe Farm’ in 1972. Over a decade later, it was considerably expanded into the near-600 page novel – which here is my main focus.⁶⁷ In essence, the story centres on a young academic named Jeremy Friers, who visits an isolated community on the edge of the forests outside of New York, in order to engage with his Gothic studies. Here, in the fictional and devoutly religious setting of Gilead, he stays with a married couple named Deborah and Sarr

⁶⁵ Steven J. Mariconda, ‘The Hints and Portends of T.E.D. Klein’, *Studies in Weird Fiction*, Vol. 1 (Summer, 1986), p. 28.

⁶⁶ Machen, ‘The Great God Pan’, p. 106.

⁶⁷ The odd quote is taken from the short story, however, as the two works may be considered companion pieces.

Poroth. He stays in a small cabin at the edge of their garden, immediately beside the forest: a situation almost identical to Thoreau's during his writing of *Walden*. He is later visited there by his girlfriend Carol, who is meanwhile employed by a man named Rosie, who has her researching the dark origins of our everyday games and rituals. It transpires that Rosie is in league with mysterious forces in the woods and requires both Jeremy and Carol for an elaborate series of ceremonies. His ultimate aim is to sacrifice this couple in the woods, which will result then in awakening the primordial monster which resides beneath them. The Poroths are possessed and ultimately killed, but Jeremy and Carol survive. The ceremonies are interrupted and so the monster slumbers on, temporarily undisturbed. However, even as our protagonists return to the city, there is a tangible sense of the chaos that resides and awaits underneath our existence.

Throughout the novel, the forest is a foreboding and ominous presence indeed. Early on, it is announced that the most 'promising' subject of study in the Gothic is 'Setting as character'⁶⁸ – we are alerted from the outset to its centrality. It is little wonder then that Steven J. Mariconda has deemed Klein a 'specialist in atmospheric tension' and an author who believes 'horror is setting'.⁶⁹ Gilead, we are told, is 'isolated behind the forests'.⁷⁰ It is an example of 'true wilderness'.⁷¹ It is a site of antiquity, as here the cities are considered 'wicked' and 'foul', whilst "'progress'" is thought to be a 'dirty word'.⁷² Though Jeremy, our outsider from the city, is initially uneasy with the ways of this wilderness community, they earn his reverence. These people conform to the requisites of what Bernice M. Murphy has called 'the "good" backwoods folk': they are self-sufficient, God-fearing, and close to Nature.⁷³ Their religion, though not

⁶⁸ Mariconda, 'The Hints and Portends of T.E.D. Klein', p. 18.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 20; p. 23.

⁷⁰ T. E. D. Klein, 'The Events at Poroth Farm', in *American Supernatural Tales*, ed. S.T. Joshi (New York: Penguin, 2007), p. 312.

⁷¹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

⁷² Klein, 'The Events at Poroth Farm', p. 167.

⁷³ Murphy, *The Rural Gothic*, p. 149.

exactly skewered, carries hints of something more sinister beneath. In its various ceremonies, it carries traces of the more violent rites of earlier religions. We are made aware on several occasions of Christianity's descendance from Paganism. Though the community live amidst the wilderness, they endeavour to keep religion distinct from their surroundings: they worship in a church, or in people's homes, and never in the woods. In stark and deliberate contrast, we have Rosie's much more sinister religion. His is explicitly Pagan in origin and is indivisibly bound to the forest environment. His devotion is born of the fact that he has been claimed by the forest. We learn that much like the young Leland, Rosie was wandering as a boy through the woods when something took hold of his soul and 'twisted' it⁷⁴ – and made of him a devout servant. Thereafter, Rosie's 'church' was a secluded part of the woods, named McKinney's Neck, and his 'god' was the monstrous entity that lay beneath it. McKinney's Neck takes its name from the Indian word 'Maquineanok', which means 'place of burning'. The language is evocative of Hell, therein underlining the forest as an *antichristian* setting. McKinney's Neck is greatly feared by the locals, who believe it to be haunted. It is presented as the origin of any evil in the woods and in this way is an equivalent to the Black Lodge in *Twin Peaks*. As Rosie progresses with his various ceremonies designed to awake the beast beneath, a mound of earth arises in McKinney's Neck and continues, gradually, to increase in size. The image is striking and one that firmly encapsulates this tension that there is 'something' hidden beneath the forest, which may at any time emerge. It is to this site that Rosie in the end brings his intended sacrifices. Though he is ultimately unsuccessful, there is nonetheless the horrifying intention of *feeding* human sacrifices to this environment. We have, again, the image of the forest as a *consuming* threat. Whatever is hidden beneath its surface voraciously threatens our own demise.

⁷⁴ Klein, 'The Events at Poroth Farm', p. 10.

Jeremy's motivation for leaving the city and heading into the wilderness is the fact that he imagines he will escape all distractions and engage fully in his studies. His desires demonstrate indeed this idea that we have an anthropocentric relationship to the wilderness: we imagine that it exists to fulfil some 'special function' for humankind.⁷⁵ Though he notes, immediately, that Gilead is 'healthy' (thus implying that New York is 'sick'⁷⁶) he is also aware from the outset that *something* belies this idyllic environment. He is accommodated by the Poroths in a small cabin at the edge of their land, immediately adjacent to the expansive wilderness.⁷⁷ He immediately feels that 'it *isn't right* to build so close to the woods' [my emphasis].⁷⁸ In addition, he begins to quickly think in terms of 'man vs. Nature', echoing this idea that civilisation is defined *against* the forests. He describes the cabin as 'choked' by ivy and vines and the surrounding trees as 'pressing in'⁷⁹ on all sides (a visual image that recalls the trees in *The Willows*). We are told he murders the insects and spiders in the cabin with insecticide, but is haunted by a rhyme he heard in his childhood: 'If you wish to live and thrive, let the spider walk alive'.⁸⁰ This rhyme, along with the description of the *murder* of these small creatures carries strong eco-centric themes. Dana Phillips has interestingly argued that 'the man with the axe is not very different from the man with the insecticide [...] both men are engaged in a restructuring and redefinition of the natural world and the creatures within it'.⁸¹ We later have subtle themes of Nature's revenge as Jeremy is weakened when his food is laced with his own insecticide. The fact that he is fully aware of the warning in this rhyme, which is suddenly

⁷⁵ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

⁷⁶ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 35.

⁷⁷ The set-up is remarkably similar to Thoreau's in his writing of *Walden*.

⁷⁸ Klein, 'The Events at Poroth Farm', p. 26.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 167.

⁸¹ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America*, p. 81.

remembered within this setting, demonstrates again that ‘myth is the discourse we need in extremity’⁸² and naturally ‘stirs’ when we are in the wilderness’.⁸³

Indeed, throughout the novel the relationship between myth and wilderness of key significance. We are told that both Jeremy and Carol, our protagonists from the city, have been raised in ‘a world of universal scepticism’.⁸⁴ Thus, they each (at least at first) view the wilderness as unknown and foreign and as essentially distinct from themselves. To aid in his mysterious ceremonies, however, Rosie requires them to be intimate with Nature. In order to achieve this, he requires that they become more intimate with *mythology*. He employs Carol to research the more sinister origins of our continuing games and rituals: to uncover the myth that lies beneath much of our modernity. Meanwhile, he selects Jeremy precisely because of his penchant for Gothic literature. The more that Jeremy reads, the closer he becomes to the surrounding wilderness.⁸⁵ The Gothic is shown to function *as mythology*. Both Carol and Jeremy are consumed by these intellectual pursuits, which start to overtake them. Carol finds herself dancing wildly amidst some trees, whilst Jeremy abandons the safety of the inside to wander exposed in the night: each, unwittingly, is engaging in ancient rituals and behave as though possessed. Such themes are accentuated later on in the novel, as each of the Poroths are literally possessed by the ambiguous forces in the forest. As in *Twin Peaks*, the image of possession serves to underline the pervasive theme of what lies beneath.

Unlike Machen, Klein does not withhold ‘the awful secret’ of the woods. We *do* learn what it is that lies beneath the forest and provokes such terror. It is revealed that there is a

⁸² Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 36.

⁸³ Campbell and Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, p. 68.

⁸⁴ Klein, ‘The Events at Porothe Farm’, p. 314.

⁸⁵ These texts provide an interesting meta-fictional element and something of a commentary on the main events in the novel. For example, early on he reads *Dracula* (1897), which evokes the strangeness and isolation for a lone man in the forested landscape, and reads ‘Green Tea’ (1945) – which tells of a diabolical monkey – shortly before the Porothe family cat is possessed.

monstrous entity that is hidden within its ‘egg of earth’.⁸⁶ This ‘earth’ is *the* Earth: we realise, as Mariconda summarises, that within our own planet, there is ‘something unknown, gestating inside’.⁸⁷ It is very nearly awoken at the end of the novel and as it stirs, its influence increases within the community. The animals begin to behave strangely and their produce becomes inedible. Most significantly, however, the women in Gilead who are with-child give birth to monstrous children. The infants are born with claws instead of nails: with predatory elements of nonhuman Nature. The young are quickly buried beneath the earth and out of sight – an image, once again, of what may lie hidden beneath this wilderness society. It is significant that though this monster is beneath *all* the Earth’s surface, it may only be released from beneath the *forest*. It is in this environment that the sacrifices must be given and the ceremonies performed. The forest, then, may be seen to resemble the *mouth* of Hell. It is this mouth that must be fed and this mouth from which all chaos will ensue. It is a thoroughly entropic image and example of the forest as a consuming threat. This image of the monster beneath the forest – beneath the Earth – is firmly ecocentric. Human life is rendered insignificant indeed, as we are revealed, in line the writings of D. W. Meinig, as ‘mere scratchings on the skin of Mother Earth’.⁸⁸ Here, the ‘awful secret’ that belies the forest is our own vulnerability amidst a Nature that we do not understand.

A further text in which we again encounter a specifically supernatural ‘secret’ quite literally underlying the forest is in Chad Crawford Kinkle’s film *Jug Face* (2013). Here, again, Nature conceals a sort of monstrous deity, which in this film takes the form of a mysterious pit deep in the forest. The dangers of living amidst the wilderness are once again foregrounded. The premise of *Jug Face* is certainly quite innovative. Set in the rural Tennessee forests, it

⁸⁶ Klein, ‘The Events at Porothe Farm’, p. 533.

⁸⁷ Mariconda, ‘The Hints and Portends of T.E.D. Klein’, p. 27.

⁸⁸ D. W. Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 34.

follows what Chris Hallock has called the ‘perverse religion’⁸⁹ of its inhabitants. These people are bound by fearful reverence to a naturally formed pit in the woods, which they treat as their God. As in ‘The Transfer’, this fearsome forest entity is fed with human sacrifices. In return, it ensures the health of its disciples. The sacrifices are selected from within the community by an ordained ‘seer’, who is temporarily possessed by The Pit and guided to create on clay jugs the physical likeness of the intended victims. Those who are chosen must willingly surrender, or become instead one of ‘the shunned’, bound to the wilderness as unending purgatory. The story unfolds as our protagonist, Ada (Lauren Ashley Carter)⁹⁰ discovers that she is next to be killed. Terrified, she hides her ‘jug face’, which leads The Pit to mercilessly kill at random, until she surrenders to her fate.

In an interview about the film, its producer Andrew van Houten suggested that much of the fearsome ambience of *Jug Face* stems from the fact that ‘so much of our culture now lives in the cities or suburbs’ and so the idea of woodland settlement is simply ‘unknown’.⁹¹ Such an idea is neatly illustrated in the film when a man a town some miles beyond the community resolutely says: ‘there’s some weird shit going on out there in the woods and we don’t want anything to do with it’. Though he has no evidence of the fact that his suspicions are well-founded, he knows instinctively – much like Jeremy in *The Ceremonies* – that there is *something* to be feared within this environment, which is best kept hidden. The members of this community certainly conform to some of our more negative stereotypes of modern-day ‘forest-dwellers’. ‘Hillbillies, rednecks, backwoods folk, call them what you will’, writes Kevin Matthews, ‘these people make up the cast of characters in *Jug Face*’.⁹² Importantly, they

⁸⁹ Chris Hallock, ‘*Jug Face* Film Review’, Site: <http://diaboliquemagazine.com/jug-face-film-review/> (Date accessed: 04.08.2014).

⁹⁰ Lauren Ashley Carter also portrays Peggy in *The Woman*.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Parker, ‘*Jug Face* (2013): An interview with writer/director Chad Crawford Kinkle and producer Andrew van den Houten’, *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, Vol. 13 (Summer 2014), p. 156.

⁹² Kevin Matthews, ‘*Jug Face*’, Site: <http://flickfeast.co.uk/reviews/film-reviews/jug-face-2013/> (Date accessed: 02.01.2014)

firmly demonstrate the fearsome consequences of an intimacy between human and nonhuman Nature, as they are thoroughly governed by the wilderness which surrounds them. These people not only know the ‘awful secret’ which belies the forest, but have sought it out, so it might be worshipped as a god.



Fig. 4.2, The Pit in Jug Face (2013).

Fig. 4.3, The Entrance to the Black Lodge in Twin Peaks (1990-1)

The Pit is much as its name suggests: its form is merely a pit in the earth in the centre of the woods. It lies literally *beneath* the forest. In appearance, it is very similar to the entrance to the Black Lodge (*compare figures 4.2 and 4.3*). Interestingly, the opening credits to the film play over a short animation, which serves as an origin myth for this mysterious pit. Here, we learn that this wilderness community originated in times of early settlement in the New World, when the Puritans stumbled across The Pit's significance. In interview, Kinkle has said that when conceiving the story, he always imagined that before the arrival of European settlers, the

Indians had deliberately avoided these depths of the woods, because they *knew* of The Pit's danger and influence.⁹³ It is interesting to note, then, that in each of the three texts in this section we have examples of what we might term 'taboo Indian land' (the Black Lodge, McKinney's Neck and The Pit) in the forest. Certainly, this plays into ideas of what lies beneath – and most especially in an American context, wherein it has been argued by Michael Rogin that 'American society is built on Indian graves'.⁹⁴ This allusion to early Puritans is significant, too, not only because it evokes an infamous example of humans struggling amidst the forest, but because it immediately brings to mind Puritan understandings of Nathaniel Hawthorne called the 'howling wilderness' of the New World.⁹⁵ We return to the fact, as Tom J. Hillard noted, that the New World Puritans are fascinating in the context of fear and Nature, of ecophobia.⁹⁶ As I've already discussed, the Puritans believed that God's pleasure or displeasure could be divined from manifest *signs* in the natural world. *Jug Face* may be seen to literalise such fears, as here it is the very environment that rewards and punishes those it deems as worthy, or those that have sinned. Indeed, The Pit is a horrifying substitute for the Puritan God. This is made explicit in the animation when the original community destroy their church and take their priest to be killed and bled at The Pit. They destroy all relics and signs of Christianity and embrace instead this forest god. The forest, most extremely, is an antichristian space. The language used to describe The Pit underlines the fact that it has usurped the role of the Christian God. We are told, for example, that 'The Pit gives and the Pit takes away', echoing the words in the Book of Job: 'the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away' (1:21). In addition, however, The Pit is simultaneously evocative of *Hell*, much in line with the infamous line from *Antichrist*: 'Nature is Satan's church'. It is key to note that Hell is often envisaged as lying *beneath* the earth and

⁹³ Parker, '*Jug Face* (2013): An interview with writer/director Chad Crawford Kinkle and producer Andrew van den Houten', p. 156.

⁹⁴ Michael Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the Indian* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1991), p. 5.

⁹⁵ Murphy, *The Rural Gothic*, p. 86.

⁹⁶ Hillard, 'From Salem', p. 106.

that there are several instances in the Bible wherein Hell is likened specifically to *a pit* (The Book of Job [33:18], The Revelation of St John the Divine [9:1], etc.) The recurrent imagery of what lies beneath leads us indeed to what Holland-Toll terms ‘the skull beneath the skin’ of human community.

What is ultimately so terrifying about The Pit – about this horrible secret beneath the forest – is that it reveals the primitive beneath the civilised. Here, we see that the primitive setting creates, indeed, the primitive human. Religion, as William Blizek argues, is shown ‘at its most basic level’;⁹⁷ as what is essentially a covenant that is born of fear.⁹⁸ Moreover, it exists as Girard’s *external* decree for human violence. The Pit, in the role of a monstrous god, selects the sacrifices, therein ensuring the harmony amidst the wider community as its desire for violence is simultaneously sated and denied. As Girard neatly summarises: ‘religion shelters us from violence, just as violence seeks shelter in religion’.⁹⁹ We will see in many of these texts of human settlement in the woods the pervading theme of sacrifice. Girard has famously argued that sacrifice exists in primitive (pre-lawful) societies in order to deny the fact that humans are inherently violent creatures, and to ensure the continuance of communal harmony. It is fitting then, that this theme of sacrifice is so prevalent in our texts in the forest setting. If the forest exists as a ‘lawless’ space, as *against* civilisation, then it is imagined as primitive – and so here we encounter our more primitive natures. If sacrifice is a primitive and elaborate form of denial, then it makes sense that this theme recurs of some ‘awful secret’ that lies hidden beneath this primitive setting. This is encapsulated in the final image of *Jug Face*, wherein we see the collection of jug faces accrued over the years. Each stands for a human sacrifice and so the overwhelming abundance demonstrates the long history of human violence. We must question, in fact, if what lies beneath these woods is not simply the demands of The Pit, but a *human*

⁹⁷ William Blizek, ‘Jug Face Review’, *Journal of Religion and Film*, Volume 17 (April 2013), p. 3.

⁹⁸ Cowan, *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen*, p. 51.

⁹⁹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 26.

voracity for bloodshed. This primitive instinct, we fear, belies modern civilisation; we fear then the primitive environment of the forest, as we suspect that here this ‘awful secret’ may be revealed and awoken. Such fears of primitive or savage desires of the human in the forest lead us to our next section. Here we examine that classic ‘savage’ of the wilderness: the cannibal.

4.2 You Are What You Eat and We Are What We Are: Cannibals in the Woods

Of all the negative traits we assign to the backwoods ‘monster’, cannibalism is one of the most incriminatory. From such classics as *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) to the more recent *Wrong Turn* franchise (2003-2014),¹⁰⁰ there is a tradition in horror of casting these figures as denizens of the wilderness. They are traditionally associated, as Carter Soles contends, ‘with that crushing feeling of eco-paranoia’.¹⁰¹ Whilst, as Brian Marriner notes, ‘there is no *natural* aversion to eating human flesh’¹⁰² – indeed it might be considered utilitarian, or even ‘green’¹⁰³ – it is something we associate immediately with monstrosity. Thus, much like the monsters of Chapter Three, our woodland cannibals serve as extensions of the *consuming* threats of the forest. However, because they are indisputably human, there is less of a distinct division between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This is underlined by the fact that those who are unlucky enough to be eaten by cannibals quite literally become a part of those who have imbibed them. Humans are cast, simultaneously, as meat *and* monster. In this former role, there is no division between us and the animals we eat, as we are presented with what might be seen as a more ecocentric

¹⁰⁰ Incidentally, it is interesting to note the titles of these two texts, as the former intimates that Nature is *watching*, whilst the latter announces immediately the ‘wrongness’ of the wilderness and the idea that one is always lost when within it.

¹⁰¹ Carter Soles, ‘Sympathy for the Devil: The Cannibalistic Hillbilly’, in Stephen Rust, Salma Monali and Sean Cubitt, *Ecocinema Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2013). p. 235.

¹⁰² Brian Marriner, *Cannibalism: The Last Taboo!* (Random House eBooks, 2011), p. 85.

¹⁰³ In 1729, Jonathan Swift wrote the satirical essay ‘A Modest Proposal’, in which it is suggested that poor children be sold as food to the wealthy, therein solving the issue of burdened parents and simultaneously providing valuable sustenance. The same ideas might be twisted to an ecocritical context, as were to eat one another, we would address issues of overpopulation and food distribution.

viewpoint. On the other hand, as we are cast as the voracious monster, we are shown elements in ourselves we might rather deny. ‘Cannibalism’, writes Holland-Toll, ‘reveals the essentially animalistic nature of society’.¹⁰⁴

There are firm associations between cannibals and the forest. Many of these derive from the histories of the New World¹⁰⁵. Roderick Frazier Nash argues that of all of the fears held by the settlers in regard to the natives, suspicions of cannibalism were ‘the most feared of all’.¹⁰⁶ ‘Indians’, as George Franklin Feldman contends, were seen as ‘natural’, ‘primitive’, resolutely ‘unchristian’ – and ‘*little more than beasts of the forest*’ [my emphasis].¹⁰⁷ In early American captivity narratives, there are several references to cannibalism amongst these natives. In Mary Rowlandson’s infamous account, she describes, quite lyrically, ‘the Indians gaping [...] to devour us’.¹⁰⁸ Significantly, Native Americans had their own mythologies when it came to anthropophagy. They believed, as James H. Merrell contends, that ‘*the forest* created cannibals in the first place’ [my emphasis].¹⁰⁹ To Natives and ‘intruders’ alike, cannibalism was bound to an unease with the wilderness.

Peggy Reeves Sanday differentiates between the different potential motivations for cannibalism. Two of her main ideas that are of relevance here are what she terms ‘the materialist hypothesis’, which is primarily survivalist, and ‘the cultural hypothesis’, which

¹⁰⁴ Holland-Toll, *As American as Mom*, p. 88.

¹⁰⁵ Jeff Berglund notes that the origin of the word ‘cannibal’ came from when Columbus slurred the name from the Indians, which was ‘Caribbean Indian’. Sourced: Jeff Berglund, *Cannibal Fictions: American Explorations of Colonialism, Race, Gender and Sexuality* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ George Franklin Feldman, *Cannibalism, Headhunting and Human Sacrifice in North America: A History Forgotten* (Pennsylvania: Alan C. Hood and Co. Inc., 2008), p. xiii.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together with the Faithfulness of His Promise Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), in Katherine M. Rogers, ed., *The Meridian Anthology of Early American Women Writers, from Anne Bradstreet to Louisa May Alcott, 1650-1865* (New York: Meridian, 1991), p. 55.

¹⁰⁹ James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiations on the Pennsylvanian Frontier* (London: W. W. Norton and Company), p. 26. The infamous Wendigo, a monster traditionally associated with cannibalism, is a creature of the Algonquian imagination.

involves a spiritual or cultural cause.¹¹⁰ In the texts below, the first two align with the ‘materialist hypothesis’, and the second two with ‘the cultural hypothesis’. Jennifer Brown argues that, broadly speaking, we may draw from our cannibal fictions two possible conclusions. Though she does not discuss them in an ecocritical context, they may readily be viewed in these terms. The first is to deem the environment as ‘backward’ and ‘contagious’: it may reveal within us the ‘true reality’ that ‘we are all cannibal savages within’.¹¹¹ We have a textbook example of Estok’s ecophobia, as the surroundings are cast as ‘contagious’ and we have the intimation once again that the primitive setting creates the primitive human. Alternatively, she continues, we may realise that ‘those who scorn poverty’ and ‘abuse natural resources’ are the ‘real monsters’ after all¹¹² – therein situating the cannibals as instruments of eco-revenge. In the first conclusion, the fear is of Nature and its influence, whilst in the second the fear is of Nature’s contamination by humanity. In the following texts, I examine the significance of cannibalism in the context of the ecoGothic and the ways in which this relates to our understandings of wilderness communities. I begin with two older novels that show woodland cannibals as more traditionally wild and monstrous, then move on to two examples in contemporary film, wherein these figures are comparatively humanised.

In Jack Ketchum’s *Off Season* and Richard Layman’s *The Woods Are Dark*, we align firmly with the city ‘intruders’, whilst the cannibalistic woodland denizens are firmly monstrous. In each of these texts, the forest is shown to be an unsuitable site of human habitation, reserved only for savagery and the wholly uncivilised. The cannibals, in each of these novels, seem entirely distinct from those who have come from the cities, but in the end are shown to be more alike than we might like to imagine.

¹¹⁰ Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. x.

¹¹¹ Jennifer Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 140.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Off Season is essentially a home invasion narrative, in which primitive humans who dwell in the forest attack and prey on visitors from the city. The novel follows a young woman named Carla, who rents a secluded house on the edge of the woods in Washington County, in order to escape from urbanity. Several of her city friends soon come to visit and the house is almost immediately attacked by a clan of woodland ‘savages’. It transpires that the assailants are intent on consuming the visitors and ultimately bring those still alive to their woodland dwelling to be shared amongst their little community. In the end, the police arrive at the scene and massacre the cannibals. In their frenzy, however, they mistakenly murder a child who does not belong to the clan, but instead was one of their captives. The distinction between savage and civilised is brought thoroughly into question.

From the very outset, the forest is cast as threatening and it retains a ‘palpable presence’ throughout the text.¹¹³ The novel begins with a woman being chased through the woods by a group of cannibals, who are firmly aligned with their natural surroundings. They are armed with branches, which they use as weapons and are ‘extensions’¹¹⁴ of the forest that surrounds them. This connection between the woods and those who live within them is continued throughout the text, as we are told that ‘*like the trees*’ [my emphasis], these denizens look ‘stunted, almost stillborn, as if years of immobility had thinned their seed’.¹¹⁵ Settlement in the forest is tied from the outset to fears of stagnation and a dearth of evolution. The novel’s opening is significant because it provides a stark contrast with Carla’s idyllic ideas about the wilderness. She goes to the woods explicitly in order to escape the city, imagining indeed that it will serve some ‘special function’¹¹⁶ as something of an antidote to modernity. The reader is aware, following the novel’s introduction, that it is likely this image will soon be twisted into

¹¹³ Jack Ketchum, *Off Season* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 1980), p. 72.

¹¹⁴ Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film*, p. 134.

¹¹⁵ Ketchum, *Off Season*, p. 67.

¹¹⁶ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

a nightmare. Carla describes her expectations of her woodland break in the following terms: ‘log fantasy #620A [...] subsection, Pioneer Spirit’.¹¹⁷ In addition to explicitly labelling the ideal as a ‘fantasy’, she alludes with the words ‘Pioneer Spirit’ to the American frontier¹¹⁸. She aligns herself, unwittingly, with the European settlers, therein creating a vacancy for the part of the dreaded Indians. This is filled, symbolically, by the woodland cannibals, who serve, indeed, as ‘beasts of the forest’¹¹⁹. In their abduction of the city intruders, we have what might be read, in one light, as an Indian captivity narrative. We are told that these savages, much like the Indians, ‘know the woods’.¹²⁰ Their knowledge of this terrain and fact that they view it, ‘unnaturally’, as ‘home’ is a marker of their monstrosity, as they are presented as ‘inhuman’.¹²¹ This is underlined by the fact that they are governed by nothing beyond instinctual drives. There is no sense of community between them and even when several of their kind are killed, we are told that those who remain ‘gave no real thought to their losses’.¹²² They are wholly negative embodiments of our stereotypes of those that live in the woods.

There is little ambiguity to the fact that the visitors are attacked simply because of their proximity to the forest. The fact that the house is secluded from wider civilisation and is situated at the edge of the woods means that it is vulnerable. ‘Place’, when so directly adjacent to ‘Space’, is insecure. When the house is attacked, there is a firm sense of the invasion of the *inside* by the dangers of the *outside*. The visitors that survive are forcibly removed from the securities of ‘Place’ and taken by the cannibals into the ‘Space’ of the wilderness. The dwelling, here, is merely a cave and so is evocative of the most extreme regression. There is no evidence

¹¹⁷ Ketchum, *Off Season*, p. 15.

¹¹⁸ There is a further reference to the history of the frontier as the first man to witness the cannibal clan is named Michael *Donner* – a likely allusion to the infamous Donner Party who resorted to cannibalism in order to survive.

¹¹⁹ Feldman, *Cannibalism, Headhunting and Human Sacrifice in North America*, p. xiii.

¹²⁰ Ketchum, *Off Season*, p. 163.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹²² Ketchum, *Off Season*, p. 188.

at all of a 'post-enlightenment' world.¹²³ It is significant, then, that the story's conclusion takes place in this setting.

In the end, the police are summoned to the home of the cannibals and a bloody battle ensues between the savages and the civilised. In this setting, the police, along with the surviving visitors, are overtaken by a 'mad joy' and massacre the savages in what is described as 'an execution'.¹²⁴ In this frenzy wherein the Ids have full reign, the police mistake an unknown child as one of the cannibals, which results in his death. His murder is greatly significant as it reveals that they are unable to distinguish between the civilised 'us' and the monstrous 'them'. Indeed, amidst this violence, such a distinction does not exist. With this ending, the environment is shown as 'contagious' indeed, whilst humans are revealed as 'all savages within'.¹²⁵ The only clear distinction that remains between the 'civilised' and the 'wild' is ultimately geographical. This is reflected in the novel's 'happy ending', as the woodland dwelling is destroyed and the 'good' characters abandon the wilderness and return to the cities.

Whilst in *The Woods Are Dark* we again have dehumanised cannibals and sympathetic city folk, it is nonetheless a more complex text in its depictions of both the forest and its inhabitants. From its very title, the centrality and 'darkness' of the forest setting is announced from the outset. The novel tells the story of two sets of people – one family and then two female friends – who make the mistake of driving through a remote community on the edge of the wilderness. The townsfolk seem initially harmless, but soon turn on the visitors, whom they bring to the forest and bind to what are known, quite simply, as 'The Killing Trees'. Here the victims await the monstrous 'Krulls': a race of feral and vicious cannibals. However, one of the townsmen, John Robbins, pities one of the girls and so returns in the night to release the

¹²³ Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, p. 200.

¹²⁴ Ketchum, *Off Season*, pp. 227, 242.

¹²⁵ Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film*, p. 140.

sacrifices. What ensues, as one character neatly summarises, is ‘a game of hide and seek in the woods with the bogeymen’.¹²⁶

What is especially interesting about Layman’s text is the fact that it presents us with several different ‘types’ of community, each of which is predominantly characterised by its relative proximity to the forest. Firstly, we have those from the cities, who are severed from wider civilisation and find themselves – entirely unintentionally – in the midst of the wilderness. It is these – who have no intention of visiting, let alone settling in the woods – with whom we align. We then have the townsfolk, who live at the edges of the forest. These people are intimately associated with the surrounding wilderness, as they have made a covenant with those within it. In return for bringing monthly sacrifices to the Krulls, those in the town remain unharmed, whilst the Krulls themselves remain strictly in the forest. The sacrifices are always outsiders, meaning that the harmony of each of these woodland communities remains intact. In fact, we are told in no uncertain terms that this system results in an existence that is more desirable than many of us experience in modernity: ‘out there’, says one of the townsmen, discussing urbanity, ‘is full of maniacs’.¹²⁷ ‘Out there’, he continues, ‘nobody’s safe, but here you can walk around without getting snatched or raped or your brains blown out – you don’t have to lock your doors at night to keep all the freaks out’.¹²⁸ The ‘freaks’, in line with ‘standard monstrous geography’ are firmly relegated to the woods. In this light, with the overall reduction in crime, the primitive system of sacrifice seems in some ways superior to the laws of modern civilisation – an idea we will return to when we come to discuss *The Village*.¹²⁹ The forest, in line with the ‘standard monstrous geography’¹³⁰ of the previous chapter, serves as quarantine

¹²⁶ Richard Layman, *The Woods Are Dark* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 1991), p. 141.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 94.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 95.

¹²⁹ It is interesting to note, too, James DeMonaco’s 2013 film *The Purge*. The concept here is that for one day of the year all violent crime is legal. Though this results in a yearly massacre, the overall crime rate is startlingly reduced. *The Purge*. Dir. James DeMonaco. USA. Universal Pictures, 2013. Film.

¹³⁰ Duzer, ‘*Hic Sunt Dracones*’, p. 433.

for the ‘freaks’ of society, as they are here understood. The price of their exclusion – the deaths of a few strangers from the city – seems ultimately quite reasonable. Moreover, the fact that it is the Krulls and not the town that desire this sacrifice is in line with Girard, as the demand for violence amidst the community must be (at least seemingly) ‘imposed from without’¹³¹, so that the community in its majority remains morally unstained. However, to the city visitors and assumedly the reader, this secluded town is just as monstrous as the man-eating community inside the forest.

The Krulls, who live in the very centre of the woods, are an extreme example of ‘uncivilised’ humanity. As the wildest humans in the text – they are, we are told, entirely ‘at one with nature’ – they are the community with which we least identify.¹³² Throughout the majority of the novel, they are almost utterly dehumanised. Their collective name, ‘the gibber of their strange language’, and of course their outlandish diet, suggests they are an entirely separate species.¹³³ Yet, we discover towards the end of the novel that they in fact have formed a surprisingly evolved community, which in some ways echoes our own – a ‘carnival house mirror’ indeed.¹³⁴ Solely from the materials in the forest, they have built a small settlement: a crude imitation of ‘Place’, constructed entirely from elements of ‘Space’. They are symbolic of an earlier ‘us’ and our more primitive potentialities. This is demonstrated by the fact that one of the girls from the city, Cordie, must choose whether to be eaten by the Krulls or to become one of them. She determines to survive, thus illustrating Brown’s conclusion that ‘we are all cannibal savages within’.¹³⁵ The Krull community is quite complex and is replete with its own structures of hierarchy and religion. At its head is a man named Grar, who is revealed, in the end, to be none other than August Hayer, the mayor of the town. The two wilderness

¹³¹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 15.

¹³² Layman, *The Woods Are Dark*, p. 173.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹³⁴ Holland-Toll, *As American as Mom*, p. 12.

¹³⁵ Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film*, p. 140.

communities, therefore, are each headed by the *same man*, therein revealing that there is ultimately little difference between settlement within, or beside the forest: each follows the same set of ‘rules’, as determined by the wilderness.¹³⁶ Just as the townspeople (with the exception of the mayor) will not enter the forest, the Krulls will not enter a certain section within the forest. This area belongs to a mysterious, yet human figure, whom they term simply ‘the Devil’.¹³⁷ His dwelling is known as ‘the house of the devil’¹³⁸, and is surrounded by the speared heads of Krulls and townsmen alike (the imagery, incidentally, recalls the cottage of Baba Yaga).¹³⁹ In addition to this ‘Devil’, the Krulls have their very own ‘God’: a supernatural and ‘snakelike’¹⁴⁰ monster that lies hidden in a pit within their community.¹⁴¹ Much like The Pit we saw in *Jug Face*, we have again the image of something lurking beneath the forest. Just as the townsmen have made a covenant with the Krulls, so too have these cannibals formed a covenant with this monstrous deity. They, too, must provide the forest with sacrifices: they exist, we are told, ‘in order to feed it’ and ‘to keep it happy’.¹⁴² The voracious cannibals feeding a veritable ‘mouth’ in the woods is an image indeed of the forest’s *consuming* threats. This is underlined by the novel’s ending, as the ‘godlike’ creature escapes from its pit and destroys everything it encounters. The survivors that remain of the intended sacrifices flee the forest and return to the cities, leaving the forest – and its denizens – in chaos behind them. Much like in *Off Season*, this return to the city is our implicit ‘happy ending’, as the forest is abandoned. It

¹³⁶ Layman, *The Woods Are Dark*, p. 95.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

¹³⁹ Baba Yaga is an infamous witch in Russian fairy tales, and was discussed in Chapter Three. Her cottage is stood on chicken legs and roams the forest, but when it is stationary, it is surrounded by human heads that have been mounted on spears.

¹⁴⁰ Layman, *The Woods Are Dark*, p. 179.

¹⁴¹ The fact that this monster is described as ‘snakelike’ is interesting if we return to the story of the Eden and the idea that monsters are frequently linked with the Devil. Here, then, if the forest is a perverse Eden, it is poetic to envisage this monster as *the* snake that brought about the corruption of Eden.

¹⁴² Layman, *The Woods Are Dark*, p. 167.

is those that have willingly settled within, or beside the woods that are ultimately subject to its voracity. We are warned, indeed, of the dangers of the forest as a site of human habitation.

In both *The Woman* and *We Are What We Are*, two modern films with woodland anthropophagy, we have much more sympathetic portrayals of cannibalism. Correspondingly, the forests in these texts, whilst undeniably Gothic, are not simplistically ‘evil’ sites of human habitation. Instead, they embody some of our more idyllic ideas about the wilderness, as well as our anxieties. The two texts centre on small and isolated backwoods families, each of which reside on the edge of expansive forests. In both texts, we have distinct themes of the American New World: in *The Woman*, we have a man who stands as the vindicated colonialist, and The Woman who represents the subjugated wilderness, whilst in *We Are What We Are* we are explicitly told that these cannibals are descendants of cannibals in the New World. We return to themes of ecofeminism as our sympathies align exclusively with the women of these texts and each film ends, interestingly, with the formation of a matriarchal forest community which settles, by choice, in the midst of the woods.

The Woman,¹⁴³ essentially, is an inverted captivity narrative. In place of the more traditional tales of ‘civilised’ individuals, snatched from society and taken hostage by savages (as with Mary Rowlandson), we have instead the ‘savage’ as victim. The eponymous Woman (Pollyanna McIntosh), unnamed throughout the text, is forcibly removed from the woodland setting and imprisoned inside the family home, with the intention that she will be *made* to be ‘civilised’. Throughout the text, she is firmly aligned with the wilderness – indeed, the main reason she is viewed as ‘savage’ or ‘wild’ is because the forest is her natural home. She is, as John Towlson argues, ‘at one with nature’,¹⁴⁴ much like the Krulls. This is a film, as Sean

¹⁴³ The film is generally viewed as an independent text and here I discuss it as such. However, it in fact continues the story of a flesh-eating clan as detailed in Jack Ketchum’s novel *Offspring* (2009), wherein The Woman is its final survivor.

¹⁴⁴ John Towlson, *Subversive Horror Cinema: Countercultural Messages of Films from Frankenstein to the Present* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2014), p. 218.

Bridgers contends, of ‘man vs. nature’, in which humanity is cast as firmly male, whilst Nature is aligned explicitly with woman.¹⁴⁵ We have, therefore, firm themes of ecofeminism (anthropocentrism and androcentrism equate) throughout. As the man strives to bring The Woman to submission, he illustrates Eleanor Windsor Leach’s idea that ‘Nature threatens masculine identity’.¹⁴⁶ Accordingly, when The Woman ultimately delivers her bloody retribution – killing the male tormenters and the women complicit in misogyny – she embodies an explicitly *ecofeminist* revenge. In the end, when she returns to the woods, this setting is presented – disturbingly – as a viable and more desirable alternative to modern civilisation.

The film begins and ends in the New England woods. In the very first scene, we are introduced to The Woman (Pollyanna McIntosh), who is living wild in the forest. Significantly, the viewer is encouraged from the outset to compare her to wolves. The camera overlays her face with that of the animal, suggesting something of a shared identity between the two. As we saw in Chapter Three, the wolf is a quintessential symbol of our ambivalence when it comes to the wilderness: embodying, simultaneously, its horrors and ideals.¹⁴⁷ So it is, too, with the figure of The Woman. We are shown her sleeping in the woods, in a foetal-like position, in an image that suggests the ‘womb’ of the forest. As this is coupled with her dream (or memory)¹⁴⁸ of being raised by wolves, we are encouraged to view her, indeed, as a child of the wilderness.

The Woman is first discovered in her natural habitat by a man named Chris Cleek (Sean Bridgers), whilst he is out hunting recreationally. This man is our first example of a ‘civilised’ human and he presents an immediate and extreme contrast to The Woman. Whilst she is wild, dirty, and at home in the woods, he is civilised, neat, and clearly a guest in this setting. It

¹⁴⁵ Sean Bridgers. Special Features. *The Purge*. Dir. Lucky McKee. Bloody Disgusting, 2011. Film.

¹⁴⁶ Eleanor Windsor Leach, quoted in Suzanne L. Roberts, *The ecoGothic*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁷ In Chapter Three, we discussed the wolf as a symbol, simultaneously, of the savagery of the wilderness, but also its wonder and excitement.

¹⁴⁸ In the film, we have no intimation of her origins. She has no language and her attire is comprised of camping materials, presumably acquired from some of her unfortunate victims.

transpires that he is a lawyer that specialises in ‘Assets Protection’ and the buying and selling of land. This is significant firstly because if law, as Girard attests, is what defines ‘non-primitive’ societies, then he – in theory – is extremely civilised. Moreover, his work reflects the idea that humanity can somehow *own* the landscape. Much in accordance with Adam in Genesis, he is convinced of his entitlement to dominion over Nature and dominion over woman. This is underlined by the fact that when he first sees The Woman, he assumes the role of the human hunter, and she the role of the hunted animal. Whilst the fact that she is a cannibal means that she is no stranger to the role of predator, her diet, in Sanday’s terms, is purely ‘materialist’.¹⁴⁹ The man, however, has no motivations to hunt beyond cruelty and entertainment. The viewer is shown, explicitly, that the man imagines the woman in sexual terms:¹⁵⁰ we are reminded of Annette Kolodny’s argument that in Western depictions of wilderness, the landscape is frequently ‘feminised’, thus ‘becoming the object for the projection of Euro-American fantasies of erotic discovery,’ with connotations of ‘rape’.¹⁵¹ Here, such ideas are firmly literalised, as he ensnares the wildwoman – believing, much like Nature, that she may be owned, exploited, and brought to submission.

The Woman is brought, against her will, out of the forest and into the family home. She is chained up in the cellar and introduced to the man’s family, which is comprised of his timid wife Belle (Angela Bettis), the equally timid daughter, Peggy (Lauren Ashley Carter), the sadistic son, Brian (Zach Rand), and the littlest child, Darlin’ (Shyla Molhusan). They adhere to several of our negative associations of the backwoods family, most notably in the fact that Peggy is impregnated by her biological father. The Woman’s imprisonment is presented to the family in terms of charity: ‘we’re going to help her’, says Chris, ‘we’re going to free her from her baser instincts’. He continues: ‘we can’t have people running around the woods thinking

¹⁴⁹ Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, p. x.

¹⁵⁰ We see, in his mind’s eye, that he imagines her breasts exposed.

¹⁵¹ Ingram, *Green Screen*, p. 36.

they're animals – it's just not safe'. We are presented with a crude example of colonial arrogance, as the man assumes that the 'savage' is in need of rescue. The fact that The Woman is found in the woods of New England, whilst the family are settled just at its edge, underlines the potential analogy between settlers and Natives in the New World. It is fitting, then, that the 'aid' she is given is in fact exploitation. Moreover, as she is literally raped by the man, and sexually abused by the son, we have a symbolic manifestation of Carolyn Merchant's description of the destruction of the natural world, as the 'rape of nature'.¹⁵² It is significant that in his endeavour to civilise The Woman, the very first change that the man enforces is her geographical setting. As we are told, in no uncertain terms, that it's just 'not safe' to have 'people running around the woods thinking they're animals', the implication is that people who *live* in the woods are consequently bestial. She is told, repeatedly, that her cannibalism is 'not civilised behaviour' and is introduced to a more traditional American diet. Meanwhile, she is forcibly cleaned and fitted into modern dress, all with the intention of creating a 'fine' and 'civilised woman'.

Of course, the film is laden, intentionally, with a multitude of ironies. The most obvious of these is the fact that the 'savage' from the wilderness is revealed as infinitely more 'civilised' than those who set out to have her 'enlightened'. The arrogant claim that 'it's just not safe' to have 'people running around the woods thinking they're animals' might be turned on its head in regard to the men of this tale: 'it's just not safe', we might conclude, 'having animals running around society, thinking that they're civilised'. The Woman from the woods harms only her oppressors and in order to survive, whilst the men from the town are capricious and sadistic in their needless violence. The idea that those who live in the woods are inherently more monstrous than those in more crowded areas is here suggested as a fallacy. This is solidified by what might be considered the 'twist' of the film: the revelation that the Cleeks, secretly,

¹⁵² Merchant, *Reinventing Eden*, p. 91.

have an additional child, whom they keep locked up with their animals. This daughter, named ‘Socket’, is seriously disfigured and totally blind. In direct contrast to The Woman, who is forced from the outside to the inside in order to be civilised, Socket is exiled from the family home and *made wild* by her creators. She is entirely dehumanised and treated as an animal, therein creating a distinction and a dualism between the ‘civilised’ family and inhuman Nature, to which they decide she belongs.

The final irony is to be found in the film’s conclusion. Once The Woman has killed everyone complicit in her violent subjugation,¹⁵³ she is followed by Peggy (who is with child), Darlin’, and Socket into the wilderness. This setting, interestingly, is presented then in an animated sequence, evocative of a fairy tale. Here, The Woman is comprised of a skull and various elements of the forest, revealing that the women, quite literally, are now with Mother Nature. In this matriarchal little community, we have a parody of the traditional family: two adults, two children and (in the form of Socket) the household ‘dog’. We have a combination of Brown’s two conclusions, as there is the intimation that we ‘are all savages within’, as Peggy and Darlin’ *become* woodland cannibals, whilst simultaneously we conclude that the ‘civilised’ are the ‘real monsters’¹⁵⁴ after all. The forest, then, is presented as a setting for an ecofeminist haven, as an escape and alternative to the cruelty of modernity. The assumption that the presence of cannibals within this setting will render it Gothic is brought firmly into question, as it is civilisation that is portrayed as monstrous. The forest is shown as a suitable site for human habitation, but is shown also to be extremely selective. We have a text, indeed, in which

¹⁵³ In addition to killing Chris and Brian, she murders the women she believes to be complicit in misogyny. This includes Belle and also a young teacher named Miss Raton (Carlee Baker), who believes young girls who are ‘very pretty’ should be ‘flaunting it’. Miss Raton expressed her views to an unnamed janitor at Peggy’s school, who lasciviously agrees. In the credits, this minor male character is given a name: ‘Mr Wolf’. This small detail is significant as it presents this typical monster of the forest as a member of society, removed from the woodland.

¹⁵⁴ Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film*, p. 140.

wider civilisation is portrayed as ‘sick’, whilst ‘primitive’ humans – even cannibals – are the comparatively ‘healthy’¹⁵⁵ ones.

Jim Mickle’s *We Are What We Are* shares several similarities with *The Woman*. Again, we have female cannibals presented sympathetically and the forest initially in Gothic terms, but then ultimately as something of a sanctuary. The focus, once again, is on a dysfunctional backwoods family, though this time it is the family themselves that are the cannibals. Unlike with *The Woman*, the diet here is not simply ‘survivalist’, but is distinctly ‘cultural’¹⁵⁶, as it is heavily ritualised and contextualised in religion. Inspired by the Mexican film *Somos lo que hay* (Jorge Michel Grau: 2010), the film is described by Mickle as more of a ‘companion piece’¹⁵⁷ to the original film, than an actual remake. The most significant change, in the context of this work, is the transition of the tale from urban Mexico to rural America. As Lisa Mullen argues, this change in setting severely alters the tone of the film: in place of a fable of urban survival, we have a text that is ‘steeped’ in the ‘backwoods-Gothic’.¹⁵⁸ Consequently, it carries resounding themes of early settlement in the New World, therein evoking the turbulent history between Americans and the wilderness.

The film follows the story of the Parker family, who live on the edge of an immense forest. In the opening scene, the mother (Kassie dePaiva) dies of a mysterious disease, leaving behind her the father, Frank (Bill Sage), and their three children: Iris (Ambyr Childers), Rose (Julia Garner), and Rory (Jack Gore). Much like the Cleeks, the Parkers are only very tenuously a part of their wider community, and in reality are extremely insular and secretive. This is due, of course, to their illegal proclivities and the various secrets they quite literally bury in the woods. They, too, have a woman chained in the basement, but she is not there to be civilised –

¹⁵⁵ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 35.

¹⁵⁶ Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, p. x

¹⁵⁷ Jim Mickle, quoted in Lisa Mullen, ‘We Are What We Are’, November 2013, *Sight and Sound* Vol. 23, Issue 11, p. 92.

¹⁵⁸ Lisa Mullen, ‘We Are What We Are’, November 2013, *Sight and Sound* Vol. 23, Issue 11, p. 92.

instead, she exists only to be sacrificed and eaten. Very early on, she is glimpsed by Rory, who mutters in terror ‘I’ve seen the monster’. We are alerted, therefore, from the very beginning, to the fact that our more traditional ideas of ‘us’ and ‘them’ – when it comes to cannibals and victims – will likely be reversed.

From the very outset of the film, we are made aware of Nature’s ominous presence, as there is a torrential rainstorm that continues throughout the film. It creates a constant deluge, which carries various elements of forest debris out of the woods and down into the town. This includes a collection of bones, which turn out to be human. It transpires that over the years, the Parkers have been burying the remains of their meals in the forest, hidden – until now – from the wider society. We have, in this striking image of revelation, a literal example of the uncanny, as defined as something that ‘ought to have remained [...] secret and hidden, but has come to light’.¹⁵⁹ We have a further image of the secrets that belie the forest. Moreover, the image underlines the idea of the forest as a site of the *past*, concealing our various ancestry. In addition, it merges the threats of human cannibalism with the *consuming* threats of the forest, as in one scene a jawbone, replete with its teeth, is found embedded in the trunk of a tree. The fact that the Parkers rely on the forest to conceal the evidence of their cannibalism is certainly significant. It is no coincidence that they live beside this setting, as it is an essential element in the facilitation of their culinary delights. Moreover, as the story unfolds, we learn that their anthropophagous culture was quite literally born of the forests in the New World. The Parkers are descended from a group of cannibals in the 1720’s, known only as ‘The First’. They have inherited a diary from these originals, which details their conversion to human flesh and serves as something of a Bible. We are constantly reminded of these origins, as the film is punctuated with readings from this tome, thus establishing an explicit link between the past and the present.

¹⁵⁹ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, discussed in Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Books, 1919, 2003), p. 130.

The woods here are the very *same* woods of the New World. This is further emphasised by the family's appearance, as they have, as David Rooney suggests, 'the pioneer look',¹⁶⁰ whilst their general existence is in many ways quite puritanical.¹⁶¹ In the various readings of the diary, we witness the settlers' emotional transition from viewing the wilderness initially as an idyll, to seeing it ultimately as a nightmare. At first, it is 'rich with serenity': 'it is a land that knows not the industry of man'. It is initially, therefore, precisely so serene *because* it is apart from humankind. And yet, this is quickly revealed to in fact be frightening, as the narrator declares: 'I fear we have not yet seen the whole of Nature's cruelty'. It is such 'cruelty' in the natural world – it fails to provide them with sustenance – that drives them towards cannibalism: such savagery is due explicitly to the wilderness in this allegory of ecophobia.

Whilst we learn that the cannibalism of 'The First' was born of a need of survival, therein conforming to Sanday's 'materialist' hypothesis, there is no logical necessity for its continuation. The Parkers *choose* to dwell by this forest and exist on this diet, therein conforming, instead, to the 'cultural' hypothesis. Moreover, their way of life has assumed a *religious* significance. The first line of the film can be seen to declare a motivation for the violence: 'it is for God's love'. However, as we have seen in many of the texts examined throughout this work, elements of Christianity become 'twisted' in the setting of the forest. In place of the Bible, we have the Diary of The First, whilst the act of cannibalism is viewed as inherently sacred – it is merely an exaggeration of the Christian Eucharist.¹⁶² The Parkers' various religious customs may be seen as corruptions of Christian ceremonies. For example, they fast for many days before their cannibal feast, which is known as 'Lambsday' – a twisted analogy of the fasting during Lent, which ends, traditionally, in the Feast of the Ascension. The

¹⁶⁰ David Rooney, 'Sundance Review: We Are What We Are', <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/we-are-what-we-are-415662> (Accessed: 02.06.2014)

¹⁶¹ They are extremely religious and the daughters are forbidden to associate with gentlemen.

¹⁶² With the Eucharist, it is said that one consumes the body of Christ: a ritual, if taken literally, which is an act of cannibalism.

ritualised cannibalism is a part of a covenant at the centre of this forest religion. Should they bring it to an end, they will ‘get sick and die, one by one’. (This is the same consequence that is threatened in *Jug Face*). Ironically, however, it transpires that the mother’s death is due to Kuru disease, which is caused by the consumption of human tissue. Moreover, as the film goes on, the father begins to exhibit its symptoms. By mythologising their cannibalistic rituals, the Parkers become exempt from any moral blame. The violence, in accordance with Girard, is a ‘divine decree’ that is ‘imposed from without’, as they merely enact ‘God’s will’. However, this too is undermined, as in one quick, but greatly significant scene, it is firmly intimated that Frank kills a woman that he meets by chance.¹⁶³ She is neither ritually sacrificed, nor even consumed – suggesting that his violence stems, in fact, from his own secular and beastly volition.

In the end, the girls learn of their father’s iniquity, and so murder him. They abandon the home and flee with their brother into the wilderness. The ‘twist’, however, is that their ‘new’ existence will be frighteningly similar to what they have known. They take with them the Diary of The First, intimating the continuation of their monstrous forest religion. As with *The Woman*, we are left with a matriarchal new ‘family’ of cannibals. Iris and Rose take the part of the parents, with Rory as their child. What is so frightening is the *inevitability* to it all. These children have a choice to potentially abandon their violent history – in modernity, theoretically, we may choose to be ‘out of the woods’ – and yet they do not. They retreat, instead, further into the wilderness. The wording of the title, then, becomes especially significant. They are what they are – and there is no denying our more primitive origins.

When it comes to our fears of humans settling in the woods, cannibals serve as warnings indeed. They evoke New World anxieties of the unknown ‘savages’, or ‘beasts of the forest’,

¹⁶³ It is interesting to note that this woman is bedecked in a red-hooded coat and so visually alludes to the tale of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, therefore casting Frank Parker, who is already our monster, in the role of the Wolf.

as embody some of the imagined results of the primitivism that may be revealed in this setting. The forest, therefore, is shown to be frightening because of what it awakens within us. The texts discussed above demonstrate that the cannibal is, as Marc Jancovich attests, a ‘mutable monster’¹⁶⁴ that may illustrate a variety of messages. In *Off Season* and *The Woods Are Dark*, the nameless cannibals and hideous Krulls are essentially quite uncomplicated ‘monsters’ of the forest. In the conclusions to these texts, the cannibals are widely destroyed, the forest is abandoned as unsuitable site of human habitation indeed, and the ‘happy endings’ take the form of a return to the city. In each, however, the distinction between ‘savage’ and ‘civilised’ is brought firmly into question as the ‘cannibalism’ reveals, indeed, ‘the essentially animalistic nature of society’.¹⁶⁵ In *The Woman* and *We Are What We Are*, we have more complex depictions of cannibals, as here we have no outsiders from the city, and only the ‘savages’ themselves with whom to align. The forest in each of these texts is presented ultimately as a sanctuary and as a viable alternative to modern civilisation. In all these texts however, the woodland cannibals have one thing in common, as they are each extensions of the *consuming* threats of the forest. They represent, therefore, a frightening intimacy with Nature.

In the texts examined so far, we have seen the forest cast as a Gothic locale which influences the humans that dwell within it. I transition now, in the final section, to forests which are only *rendered* Gothic by the humans within them.

¹⁶⁴ Marc Jancovich, ‘Foreword’ in Jennifer Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. x.

¹⁶⁵ Holland-Toll, *As American as Mom*, p. 88.

4.3 The Death of Nature: Constructed Wilderness

‘For the first time in human history, no true wilderness any longer exists’.

— Peter Barry.¹⁶⁶

In these final texts of this thesis, we encounter Gothic forests that are only *made* Gothic by our presence within them. These texts illustrate the essential paradox of ‘wilderness’, as a setting defined by our absence. These forests, therefore, in which humans are present are revealed, to varying degrees, as ‘constructed’ by humankind, and consequently as ‘inauthentic’. This is fitting when considering our contradictory ideas on ‘untouched’ Nature. The wilderness, as we construe it, as Dana Phillips contends, is ultimately and inevitably ‘imaginary’.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, these ideas of ‘constructed’ wilderness are especially relevant in a time when ‘no true wilderness any longer exists’ and we have a ubiquity of texts addressing the subject of the ‘Death of Nature’. The texts I examine here are Lucile Hadžihalilović’s *Innocence*, M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Village*, Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* and Drew Goddard’s *The Cabin in the Woods*. Each of these engages with themes of ‘constructed’ wilderness and the idea that we are now thoroughly ‘fragmented’¹⁶⁸ from the natural world. Moreover, they examine the idea that the forest is *made* Gothic only by our interference and intrusion. These texts examine such ideas in very different ways. The first two are concerned with our severance from Nature and in these we find a recreated ‘closeness’ between humans and the forest. Here, the woods are intended as paradise, as humans are cast as ‘forest-dwellers’ once again. However, these veritable Edens are ultimately Gothic at the core and are revealed, in the end,

¹⁶⁶ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

¹⁶⁷ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. 233.

¹⁶⁸ Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 2.

to be what John Baudrillard has described as ‘artificial paradises’.¹⁶⁹ In the final two texts, conversely, we have forests that are explicitly designed as Gothic environments. These settings are entirely controlled by humans – who have assumed the role of the gods – and are construed as environments in which to die.

i. Paradise Lost: *Innocence* and *The Village*

The areas that are now legally classified as ‘wilderness’ are ordinarily strictly demarcated and physically enclosed by human-made structures. The idea of enclosed or imprisoned wilderness is one that resounds throughout the remaining texts in this thesis. In *Innocence* and *The Village* we have two texts in which the woodland settings are construed very much in the terms of endangered reservations. In accordance with the ecologist Andrew Ross’ account of national parks, they are places where ‘nature is locked up tight’.¹⁷⁰ John Baudrillard has written extensively on the inauthenticity – or ‘hyperreality’ – of our ‘overprotected nature reserves’¹⁷¹. He argues that they are, essentially, ‘artificial paradises’¹⁷². This is certainly something we find in the worlds of these two texts. In each, the forest is re-established as the idyllic site of human habitation (its denizens are ‘getting back to Nature’ indeed) but this is ultimately revealed as an impossibility. Each text engages with the ‘cultural proclivity’, as outlined by Frederick Jackson Turner, to regard scarcely settled landscapes as inherently ‘sacred’.¹⁷³ Ultimately, however, the more seductive qualities of these misleadingly ‘wild’ communities are demeaned by their artificiality and rendered firmly Gothic.

¹⁶⁹ Baudrillard, *America*, p. 8.

¹⁷⁰ Andrew Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature’s Debt to Society* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 123.

¹⁷¹ Baudrillard, *America*, p. 8.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Frederick Jackson Turner, quoted in John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion and the Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 6.

Lucile Hadžihalilović's *Innocence* is a text that plays firmly into our contradictory ideas when it comes to our notions of 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' wilderness. This French film is adapted from the German novella *Mine-Haha; Or, On The Bodily Education of Young Girls* (1903) by Frank Wedekind. Renowned more for his dramas (such as *Spring Awakening* [1906]), Wedekind's prose stories, as Sol Gittleman contends, have received 'hardly any critical attention'.¹⁷⁴ *Mine-Haha* is his single novel fragment¹⁷⁵ and, like much of his work, has been seen as quite controversial. It is, as Marianne Faithful has said, 'perversely erotic and freaky and anti-society'.¹⁷⁶ Hadžihalilović's vision, which is in many ways very faithful to Wedekind's text, may also be viewed in such terms.

The film engages thoroughly with both our idyllic and nightmarish constructions of the wilderness. On the one hand, it presents us with a veritable Eden – a forest of magic, freedom, and enchantment – that serves, indeed, as an 'antidote' to modernity. Yet, simultaneously, this same forest is revealed as a sinister site of imprisonment – and, ultimately, as inauthentic. The film expresses, ominously, the essential paradox in our desire for the very wilderness that we define as necessarily 'untrammelled by man' and reliant on human absence.¹⁷⁷ It darkly illustrates the theory that the forest is made a Gothic setting only when we are in it.

Innocence tells the story of an all-girls school in the midst of a forest.¹⁷⁸ Isolated from civilisation, it seems – at least at first – that these children are almost entirely without adult care or influence. Nonetheless, they are far from 'wild' as they are subject to what is in some ways a very strict education. They are schooled only in ballet and biology and are otherwise

¹⁷⁴ Sol Gittleman, *Frank Wedekind* (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 120.

¹⁷⁵ Ward B. Lewis, *The Ironic Dissident: Frank Wedekind in the View of his Critics* (Columbia: Camden House, 1997), p. 137.

¹⁷⁶ Marianne Faithful, quoted on the cover of Frank Wedekind's *Mine-Haha: Or, On the Bodily Education of Young Girls* (London: Hesperus Press Ltd., 2010). PAGE ????????

¹⁷⁷ Dodd, 'Wilderness Act' (1964).

¹⁷⁸ In this regard, comparisons can be made with *Suspiria* and *The Woods*, though in this text, importantly, there is no supernatural element.

instructed to spend their time playing in the woods. The woods surrounding the school are segmented from the surrounding wilderness, as a high wall determines its perimeters. Each year, the youngest children (aged around 5 or 6) arrive, mysteriously, in tiny coffins. They are then forbidden to leave the grounds until several years later, when – if they have been thoroughly obedient – they are escorted away into the unknown by adult women. In their final years in the school, the eldest girls (aged around 11 - 13) mysteriously disappear into the woods each night. In the end, it transpires that these nightly excursions are to an underground theatre that lies covertly beneath the forest. Here, the children dance for an audience of adults, who are shown only as silhouetted strangers. The disquieting twist to the tale is that these unknown adults from outside the forest have designed and financed this little world of ‘innocence’, thus forming a covenant with a version of ‘Nature’ that they themselves have contrived. The ‘special function’¹⁷⁹ of this wilderness community is to entertain and feed the desires of the modern world.

The forest environment, throughout the film, lies at the very centre of *Innocence*. Hadžihalilović has stressed the original story’s ‘strong connection to nature’¹⁸⁰ and this is something that resounds throughout the themes and cinematography in her revision. From the outset, the forest is presented as a dualistic space: it is simultaneously enchanting and frightening and it is, at once, both a paradise and a prison. In one light, in accordance with the title, it is a site of innocence, wherein this idea is intrinsically bound to untouched Nature and our romanticisms of childhood. Here, we see what seems an idyllic – and *natural* – return to origins, as children are ‘forest-dwellers’¹⁸¹ once more. Thoreau’s sentiment that the wilderness has something to ‘teach’¹⁸² us, along with William Wordsworth’s instruction, ‘let nature be

¹⁷⁹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Interview with Lucile Hadžihalilović’, Special Features, *Innocence*. Dir. Lucile Hadžihalilović. France. Mars Distribution, 2004.

¹⁸¹ Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p. 29.

¹⁸² Thoreau, *Wälden*, p. 143

your teacher',¹⁸³ is here interpreted literally, as one's very existence in this setting is deemed an education. The girls become imbricated with their physical surroundings, and seem, indeed, 'at one with Nature'. In Wedekind's text, he describes how some of the girls imagine that they are descended from the woods, and envisage the trees as naked as they themselves are increasingly exploited. The text, certainly, contextualises Nature 'beyond the Wordsworthian tradition',¹⁸⁴ as these woods are every bit as sinister as they are idyllic. This is due primarily to the fact that this wilderness, along with its children, is not in fact 'wild', but instead is quite literally walled in by human structures. This sense of imprisonment is emphasised throughout the film, which is filled with images of entrapment, such as the recurrent symbolism of insects in cages. The children, though largely unaware of the fact, are literally prisoners, unable to leave this setting of their own volition. They are examples of enforced and ignorant innocence: they are only able to exist as *seemingly* authentic 'forest-dwellers' *because* they are unaware of modernity. Nature, too, is equally confined. The forest around the school, though untended, is significantly named 'The Park' – which of course has connotations of human-'owned' wilderness and national parks and reservations. The ecologist Andrew Ross has written interestingly on the arguably 'inauthentic' nature of national parks, noting that these are spaces with 'strictly policed territories' in which 'nature is locked up tight'.¹⁸⁵ The children, then, become in this context the 'endangered animals' within this setting. They are not, however, indigenous to this habitat. They are not born in the forest, but are brought to this setting and taught to forget everything but the forest, which they are told, repeatedly, is their natural 'home'. 'Space', here, is forced to function as 'Place'.

In accordance with this idea that the children serve as the 'endangered animals' of The Park, the adults who pay to come and see them may easily be seen as attendants at a zoo.

¹⁸³ Wordsworth 'Tables Turned', p. 34.

¹⁸⁴ Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁵ Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, p. 123.

Indeed, Wedekind noted the inspiration for the story to come from observing the audience of a dancing child. He described the ‘bawling reaction’ of the audience as ‘like being in a zoo when the meat appears in front of the cages’.¹⁸⁶ In the context of ‘inauthentic’ wilderness, it is significant that those such as Umberto Eco have described zoos as prime examples of the ‘hyperreal’¹⁸⁷ (something simulated so convincingly that it seems entirely real). Indeed, the mysterious audience in *Innocence* who pay to see ‘Nature’ in fact see something that is thoroughly mediated. This is emphasised by the fact by the girls wear *costumes* denoting Nature (they are dressed as butterflies, flowers, etc.), whilst what the adults are watching is quite literally *staged*. Significantly, the introduction of these voyeuristic adults who demand such performance is exactly what contaminates and degrades the ‘innocence’ of this world. The forest is *made Gothic* by their intrusion, as they bring with them themes of corruption, consumption, and threatening sexualities. The way in which these adults enter this natural world of ‘innocence’ is important. They do not actually ‘trammel’ the wilderness, but instead furtively arrive just beneath it, via a secret underground train. This image of the train that travels from the city and *into* the wilderness is strikingly sexual and serves as an allegory of humankind’s ‘rape of Nature’. We again have this image of something *belying* the forest, and here this audience presents urban humanity as the source of terror and corruption underlying the forest. This silhouetted audience, as Michael Joshua Rowan contends, is ‘disturbingly abstracted’.¹⁸⁸ the fact that we cannot see these adults from outside the forest underlines the implicit suggestion that they are, in fact, *us*. We are forced to realise that we, too, have engaged in the voyeurism of enjoying the ‘enchantment’ of viewing these children run ‘wild’ in the forest. It is then especially sinister to realise that these children – these images of our imagined ‘innocence’ of Nature – serve as *symbolic sacrifices*, as they are manufactured, indeed, to

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Philip Ward, ‘Introduction’, Frank Wedekind, *Mine-Haha: Or, On the Bodily Education of Young Girls* (London: Hesperus Press Ltd., 2010), p. vii.

¹⁸⁷ Quoted in Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America*, p. 20.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Joshua Rowan, ‘Innocence’, *Cineaste*, Spring 2006, Volume 31, Issue 2, p. 60.

perform a ‘special function’¹⁸⁹ for humankind. The fact that there is an implicit element of the sexual exploitation of these children, who serve as symbolic extensions of the setting, provides an interesting (if extreme) analogy of our treatment of Nature: the wilderness is shown as utterly vulnerable to human desires and avarice. The fact, furthermore, that the children emerge in this setting out of tiny coffins is suggestive of the idea that in confining Nature – keeping it ‘locked up tight’¹⁹⁰ – we are, in a sense, ‘killing it’, and therein contributing to this modern notion of the imminent (or existent) ‘death of Nature’. Finally, with this idea that with adult intrusion and interference the forest *becomes* a Gothic setting, we have a commentary on the place of humans in Nature today. As the audience destroys any sense of the wilderness as idyll, the resounding moral is that this is an environment in which we are unwelcome – and moreover, one that is immediately corrupted by our very presence. Nature, in accordance with Smith and Hughes, is Gothic indeed as we are shown as thoroughly ‘fragmented’¹⁹¹ from the natural world. We simply *cannot* be a part of its ‘innocence’.

The ending to the film is quite ambiguous. We follow one of the older girls, Bianca (Bérangère Haubruge), as she is finally escorted out of the forest. She is taken to the underground train, which brings her into a city. Here, she is brought to a large fountain, in which she is left to play. Soon enough, she discovers within it a boy of around her own age. The two smile and begin to play together and the credits ensue. Ostensibly, we have our ‘happy ending’. The girl has escaped the forest prison and is brought to live – we assume happily – amidst civilisation. However, there is a strange and unsettling tone to this ending, which leaves us uneasy. There is arguably an ecofeminist thread to be found here, as whilst the girl has been thoroughly aligned with Nature, the boy seems only to exist in the urban setting. Thus, as she is led towards him, we have the sense once again (though it is less sinister than with the

¹⁸⁹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

¹⁹⁰ Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, p. 123.

¹⁹¹ Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 2.

audience of adults) that she is being ‘gifted’ or ‘sacrificed’ to a patriarchal urbanity. Moreover, as the woods are left behind and she is relocated to the city, she enacts the transition from ‘forest dweller’ to ‘apartment-house dweller’¹⁹² and there is the sense, indeed, of something to be mourned. There is the sorrowful implication that the girl’s connection to Nature, along with her childhood, has been irrevocably lost.

The text thoroughly engages with our contradictory notions of wilderness as the forest is shown, simultaneously, as an idyll and a nightmare. The film ultimately illustrates, in accordance with Barry’s assertion that ‘no true wilderness any longer exists’,¹⁹³ that the idea of ‘untouched’ Nature is necessarily a myth. When we do encounter it, Hadžihalilović suggests, it is inevitably to some degree ‘constructed’ and ‘artificial’. The imagery in the film of children living and playing in the woods – ‘natural’ humans in a ‘natural’ setting – is seductive, but false. The lives of these children, along with the Nature that surrounds them, are designed and subsidised by adults in the city. The children do not *choose* to be here, but are presumably torn from their families and placed in this setting – much like the animals we select for ‘rewilding’ in our various reservations. They are not in fact ‘wild’, but imprisoned. Interestingly, too, though they dwell in this setting, it is only *temporarily*. As they reach physical maturation, they are taken to the cities: there is still the sense that humans, ultimately, belong amidst wider civilisation, whilst the forest, essentially, is a site of transience. The wilderness is shown as something that is immediately sullied by our presence – it *becomes* Gothic with the intrusion and interference of human civilisation. Interestingly, this is something that the architects of The Park seemed to have in mind with the construction of the railway, which allows a covert entry into the wilderness, which strictly speaking, remains untouched. There is an awareness, then, that modernity is in some sense ‘dirty’ and that ‘innocence’ can

¹⁹² Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p. 29.

¹⁹³ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

only exist if separate from its immediate influence. It is thus *manufactured* away from civilisation, where it is kept at a distance and ‘locked up tight’.¹⁹⁴ It is nurtured, solely, for anthropocentric motivations, as it exists to serve a ‘special function’¹⁹⁵ indeed for human civilisation. It is humankind, and not the forest, that is here to be feared: civilisation ensures that the woods are devoid of innocence.

M. Night Shyamalan’s *The Village* shares several thematic similarities with *Innocence*. We have again an enclosed and ‘constructed’ wilderness that has been humanly designed. It serves, much like *The Park*, as yet another example of Baudrillard’s ‘artificial paradises’¹⁹⁶. It seems at first thoroughly natural and idyllic – it is, as Raffaella Baccolini argues, ‘beautiful and golden’¹⁹⁷ – but is revealed, ultimately, as a synthetic and fraudulent creation.

Shyamalan had originally intended the film to be entitled ‘The Woods’, but was forced to rename it, following the release of Lucky McKee’s film of the same name (discussed in Chapter Three). This original intention, however, is indicative of the story’s centrality of setting. Indeed, the relationship between humankind and the wilderness lies at the very heart of *The Village*. The film tells the story of a small village in the midst of the Pennsylvanian woods. It is set, ostensibly, in the nineteenth century, though its general milieu is evocative of settlement in the New World. The villagers live in terror of the surrounding woodland, which they believe is home to a myriad of sentient and territorial monsters. They have struck a covenant with these creatures: if they remain strictly within the bounds of the village, then the monsters, in turn, remain strictly in the forest. The impetus for the story occurs when the harmony of this community is suddenly disrupted by internal violence. A man named

¹⁹⁴ Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, p. 123.

¹⁹⁵ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

¹⁹⁶ Baudrillard, *America*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁷ Raffaella Baccolini, ‘Dystopian Fears, Utopian Nightmares? Reflections on M. Knight Shyamalan’s *The Village*’ http://www.mediazioni.sitlec.unibo.it/images/stories/PDF_folder/document-pdf/2006/dossier2006/Village/2%20baccolini.pdf (Date Accessed: 22.06.2011).

Noah (Adrian Brody) endeavours to kill a man named Lucius (Joaquin Phoenix), who has become engaged to a blind woman named Ivy (Bryce Dallas Howard), who is loved by both. Lucius is seriously wounded and so Ivy begs to break the covenant, so that she might traverse the woods and fetch medicine from the outside world. She is ultimately successful in her quest and returns to the village, but not before a terrifying – and tragic – encounter with one of the woodland monsters. There are several intricate ‘twists’ to the film (this is, after all, Shyamalan¹⁹⁸). It transpires that these humans are not indigenous to this forest setting. The mendacious founders of the community – known as the ‘Elders’ – have *created* an alternative existence to modern society. They have set it in the midst of a large reservation, which is owned by their wealthy leader, Edward Walker (William Hurt). The forest, which seems unending and wild, is surrounded by high walls – again, Nature is ‘locked up tight’¹⁹⁹ – which imprison the villagers within. They have set it, too, in the nineteenth century, though this world, in fact, is contemporaneous with our own. The most shocking revelation, however, is the fact that the ‘monsters’ are entirely fictitious. They are revealed to us, in the end, as merely the Elders in disguise. They have been invented to ensure the community’s survival: if the villagers fear these woodland denizens, then they are certain to remain in this segregated world. Thus, the Gothic nature of this forest, along with its monsters, is *humanly* contrived.

In *The Village*, we have a woodland community that is consciously designed as a veritable alternative to the immorality of modern [sub]urban civilisation. The evolution from ‘forest-dwellers’ to ‘apartment-house-dwellers’²⁰⁰ is deliberately reversed, as we have an extreme example of the tendency, as noted by Girard, to view civilisation en-masse as ‘sick’ – or, as one character insists, ‘wicked’ – and accordingly decide that primitive society ‘must be

¹⁹⁸ Shyamalan is known for the unexpected twists in his work and is the man behind the infamous revelation in *The Sixth Sense* (1999).

¹⁹⁹ Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, p. 123.

²⁰⁰ Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p. 29.

the healthy one’.²⁰¹ The founders of The Village are all victims of various crimes in the modern world, which lead them to conclude, in line with Putnam, that there is indeed ‘an extremely serious [...] breakdown in community’.²⁰² This can be remedied, they believe, by living in the woods. Foster Stockwell, writing on the incentives behind communal living, argues that all communes are designed with an ideal in mind of ‘societal perfection’²⁰³ – and certainly The Village is no exception. The fact that such ‘perfection’ is imagined – *incorrectly* – to be found in the woods provides us with an intriguing commentary on our ideas about the wilderness. It is significant, then, to examine the ways in which this ‘ideal’ is constructed and the various motivations that underlie it.

Firstly, the community is necessarily isolated and set in the midst of the woods. In many ways, the Elders may be seen to be using *Walden* as their blueprint: they ‘front only the essential facts of life’ and endeavour, indeed, to ‘live deliberately’.²⁰⁴ In accordance with the traditional idea that consumerism is tied to the desolation of the land,²⁰⁵ this is a world in which money does not exist. Moreover, whilst we have already seen that woodland communities are often linked to the past, here this connection is explicitly designed. In addition to the fact that the forest is traditionally timeless, the Elders choose to set their community two centuries earlier than what in fact is the present day.²⁰⁶ We have a literalisation, indeed, of ‘getting back to Nature’. Significantly, we learn that Edward Walker was once a history professor, and so is able to select which elements of history to include as he desires. Whilst The Village is officially set in the nineteenth century, it is yet thoroughly evocative of New World settlements. Dennis

²⁰¹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 35.

²⁰² Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2000), p. 25.

²⁰³ Foster Stockwell, *Encyclopaedia of American Communes, 1663-1963* (Jefferson: MacFarland and Co., 1998), p. 4.

²⁰⁴ Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 143.

²⁰⁵ Lisa Kröger, ‘Panic, paranoia and pathos: ecocriticism in the eighteenth-century Gothic novel’, in Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 15.

²⁰⁶ In the opening scene, we see the date on a gravestone, which reads 1897.

B. Blanton has described the New World as a ‘virtual Eden’²⁰⁷ in which the new settlers could reinvent themselves, leaving the Old World behind them; the same can be said for the origins of The Village – though the irony here, of course, is that it is the ‘new’ or modern world that is abandoned. Moreover, Lauren Coats et al have convincingly argued that the villagers may be viewed symbolically as ‘Puritans’ and the woodland monsters symbolically as ‘Indians’.²⁰⁸ The monsters, which may be seen as embodiments of the ‘howling wilderness’,²⁰⁹ serve, also, as figurative substitutes for the Puritan God. Much like the mysterious entity in *Jug Face*, they illustrate the Puritan conviction that signs of God’s estimation would manifest in Nature. Moreover, the covenant between these creatures and the villagers echoes the experience in the New World, which has been described by Morone as ‘an errand into wilderness, sealed by a covenant with God’.²¹⁰

The community exists ‘outside of the law’ and so, in Girard’s terms, it is technically ‘primitive’. However, this primitive society, at least initially, has no system of human sacrifice. Its lack of either a legal or sacrificial system is born of the conviction that here, there will be no crime: violence, cruelty and avarice exist only in the cities. Nonetheless, the community has its own set of extensive rules and rituals that are centred on *the forest environment*. This brings us to one of the most essential elements of The Village’s construction: the criticality of mythology. The Elders imbue this world with myth and fill it, consciously and deliberately, with a myriad of monsters. They are emulating the tendencies in earlier times to fill uncharted

²⁰⁷ Blanton, “‘The Weather is Fine’”, p. 190.

²⁰⁸ Lauren Coats, Matt Cohen, John David Miles, Kinohi Nishikawa and Rebecca Walsh, “‘Those We Don’t Speak Of’: Indians in *The Village*”, PMLA, Vol. 123, No. 2 (Mar., 2008), pp. 358-374. The mysterious creatures, like the so-called Indians, are indigenous creatures in the woods that are feared by those in the settlements. Coats et al highlight the fact that they are termed only ‘Those We Don’t Speak Of’, drawing a parallel with the taboo and little known subject of Native Americans that are living today.

²⁰⁹ Murphy, *The Rural Gothic*, p. 86.

²¹⁰ James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 35.

areas with mythical creatures, though here these entities are *consciously* imagined.²¹¹ With these inventions, the creators of *The Village* transform an owned and thoroughly charted reserve into ‘unknown’ wilderness: in short, they *make* it Gothic. In appearance, the creatures thoroughly symbolise our fears of the forest (*figure 4.4*). They have the skulls, claws, and teeth of various beastly predators. Moreover, we see branches of trees protruding from their spines: these monsters, quite literally, are *made of the woods*. These monsters – and the fear they inspire – are ultimately what ensure that the villagers remain. In this sense, they function in a similar manner to Girard’s gods, which demand human sacrifice, though here, unbeknownst to the villagers, the sacrifice is their freedom. Thus, *The Village*, ostensibly, is presented with an external and divine decree for their continued woodland existence. Indeed, they treat the monsters very much like gods, which are feared and revered in equal measure.



Fig. 4.4, A ‘Monster’ in The Village (2004)

²¹¹ The monsters, we learn, are in fact based on creatures that Edward reads about in folklore. They are based, then, on monsters that were once truly feared to roam the forests.

They engage in various rituals which may easily be seen as religious and firmly illustrate the idea that in order for myth ‘to survive’²¹² it must be ‘dramatised in ritual’.²¹³ In accordance with Girard, the villagers vehemently believe that the least ‘infraction’ of these rituals will ‘call down terrible punishment’.²¹⁴ If the monsters are indeed embodiments of the ‘howling wilderness’,²¹⁵ then we have a literalisation of Richard Hayman’s contention: ‘the role of the forest is to act as the ultimate moral arbiter’.²¹⁶ Most significantly, however, the deliberate inclusion of monsters within this ‘Eden’ is demonstrative of the idea that it to our own detriment that we now live in a world in which many of us view our mythologies merely as fictions. In *The Village*, the ‘ideal’ community is imagined to live in the woods *with monsters*: we have explicit links, then, between the ‘deaths’ of Nature, community, and mythology. It is imagined that by living within a forest – which is once again ‘strange, monstrous, and enchanting’²¹⁷ – these may all be remedied.

The design of *The Village* is revealed, in the end, to be seriously flawed, whilst its foundations are exposed to the audience as essentially inauthentic. This idyllic community, though set apart from the so-called ‘wickedness’ or the cities, is *not* without its own internal violence. Such violence, this community learns, is not bound solely to the world of urban strangers, but occurs in *The Village* precisely because of its communal intimacy. We see evidence of Girard’s contention that humans, naturally, are violent creatures that ‘must be forcibly restrained from murder’.²¹⁸ Moreover, Girard’s theory that in primitive societies, human sacrifice ensures the harmony of the community, is here ultimately validated. Ivy, before she begins her woodland journey, is told by her father that the creatures are a fiction.

²¹² Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 10.

²¹³ James Frazier, *The Golden Bough* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Reference, 1993), p. 608.

²¹⁴ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 15.

²¹⁵ Murphy, *The Rural Gothic*, p. 86.

²¹⁶ Hayman, *Trees, Woodland and Civilisation*, p. 106.

²¹⁷ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 121.

²¹⁸ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 16.

However, once deep in the forest, she encounters one of its infamous monsters. It transpires – though she never learns the truth – that this ‘monster’ is Noah in disguise, as he has stolen one of the Elders’ ‘costumes’. She outwits what she believes is one of the creatures and Noah, consequently, is killed. The details of his death are significant. He is lured by Ivy to a pit in the woods that she has concealed. Here, he falls to his death and the camera dwells on what Ivy is unable to see: the human, dressed as monster, *beneath* the surface of the forest. The villagers are told that he has trespassed into the woods and so was taken by the monsters, which Ivy – the leader of the next generation – now believes to be thoroughly real. Ivy’s blindness may be read as a metaphor for this idea that whatever belies the forest must remain a secret. It is this secret that validates the community’s mythologies and ensures its harmonious continuance. It is only the audience, along with the Elders, who are aware of its inauthenticity and status as an ‘artificial paradise’. We realise, firstly, that the seeming ‘wilderness’ is an enclosed reserve: there is ‘no true wilderness’²¹⁹ as it is revealed, indeed, as ‘imaginary’.²²⁰ The fact that it is owned by the millionaire, Edward Walker, reveals that this village, which is seemingly independent of modern consumerism, is in fact reliant on it (much like The Park in *Innocence*, which is funded by the theatre). There are stark elements, therefore, of Social Ecology. Slavoj Žižek has written on *The Village*²²¹ in this context, arguing that the film is an example of the dubious connections between class, wealth, and wilderness. Essentially, his argument is that the film demonstrates the fact that in the Western World, the now limited wild is only enjoyed by the wealthiest: those able to afford to live in quiet and picturesque settings. The fact that the monsters are fictitious is extremely significant. They are revealed, literally, as humans in disguise. Thus, as it is the monsters primarily that render this a Gothic setting, we must conclude that *humans* are the reason the forest is so frightening. In addition to this, however,

²¹⁹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

²²⁰ Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. 233

²²¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008).

the film presents us with a striking illustration of Smith and Hughes' assertion that Nature is Gothic because it is something from which we are 'fragmented'.²²² 'In its post-Radcliffian guise', they argue, the word 'nature' now evokes 'estrangement rather than belonging'.²²³ The younger generations in *The Village*, much like the children in *Innocence*, are only able to 'belong' in this environment because they are deliberately kept innocent of modern urbanity. *The Village*, ultimately, suggests that the woods are an environment in which we now fundamentally do not belong. It's the twenty-first century, we live in a highly legislated, materialist and overpopulated world, and – at least officially – we no longer believe in monsters. Shyamalan suggests that in order to 'live deliberately',²²⁴ within Nature and with each other, we must realise that the word 'myth' is now synonymous with the word 'lie' – and then lie to ourselves about it.

ii. Human-made Hells: *The Hunger Games* and *The Cabin in the Woods*

The Hunger Games and *The Cabin in the Woods* present us with much more literally constructed forests. In these texts, we have humans in the roles of gods, creating and manipulating 'natural' environments. In stark contrast to *Innocence* and *The Village*, wherein we had 'artificial *paradises*', the forests here are explicitly intended as sites of trial, terror, and violence. The forest is *intentionally* made Gothic by humans. In each, the forest serves – literally – as an arena in which humans are killed. We are forced to consider in each if we are really so evolved beyond so-called 'primitive' societies, which require sacrifices to ensure the conciliation of the masses. Moreover, we are forced to question the proclivity in our Western fictions towards watching the slaughter of the young within these environments.

²²² Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 2.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Thoreau, *Wälden*, p. 143.

Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series is comprised of three novels and four filmic adaptations. My predominant focus here, however, is on the first novel, which is set mainly in a forest. Throughout this novel, there is a continuing tension between the 'natural' and 'unnatural' – and at its centre, we have a 'wilderness' that is literally designed and constructed by humans. The novel is set in a futuristic version of Northern America, which has been renamed 'Panem'. This nation, we learn, was established following a series of natural disasters, which in turn resulted in a vicious war between the humans that survived.²²⁵ Those that were victorious usurped all the wealth and established themselves in a vibrant and 'excessively decadent'²²⁶ city, known as 'The Capitol'. Everyone else was placed in surrounding and numbered 'districts', which existed to provide the Capitol with its various resources – a system that many have noted is an analogy for the relations between the First and Third World. In what is known as 'The Dark Days', some of these districts rebelled, but were ultimately subdued. The Capitol, in order to prevent dissension and moreover to demonstrate their authority, established a yearly gladiatorial system known as 'The Hunger Games'. In these, one boy and one girl from each of the districts is selected to compete. They are then placed in an expansive outside arena in which they must fight to the death, until only one of them survives. The violence, from beginning to end, is televised and transmitted as 'entertainment'. The series' protagonist is Katniss Everdeen, one of the 'tributes' from District Twelve. District Twelve, we learn, is the farthest district from the Capitol and is surrounded by wilderness. Its denizens, therefore, are essentially a backwoods community. It is this community, however, with whom we align, whilst the urban Capitol is deemed as monstrous: from the outset, therefore, there is a thorough division between the city and the wilderness. In the first novel, Katniss competes in a forested arena alongside Peeta Mellark, who is also from District Twelve. Ultimately, they

²²⁵ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (London: Scholastic Children's Books, 2009), p. 21.

²²⁶ Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator in Action: Feminist Criticism for the Stage and Screen* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 85.

are the only two remaining and decide, instead of harming one another, to each consume poisoned berries in a suicide pact. The Games' designers quickly interfere and announce the couple as mutually victorious. In 'reward', they are then removed from this 'wilderness' and taken to the cities.

Space in *The Hunger Games* is very strictly divided. The Capitol is thoroughly distinct from the districts (civilisation, indeed, is defined 'against the forests'), whilst the arenas are wholly separate to the 'authentic' natural world. What is especially interesting about *The Hunger Games* in the context of this work is that it presents us with two very different versions of the forest: we have the 'authentic' wilderness surrounding District Twelve and then the simulated environment of the woodland arena. The 'real' wilderness is divided from District Twelve by a series of fences, which serve much the same purpose as the walls in *Innocence* and *The Village*. The backwoods community are told that these fences exist to protect them from various woodland predators, ominously termed 'the flesh-eaters'.²²⁷ However, they in fact exist as a means of imprisonment. Many of the community fear the forest²²⁸ and even Katniss, who is aligned with this setting, acknowledges its dualistic nature: 'The woods always look different at night [...] as if the daytime trees and flowers and stones have gone to bed and sent more ominous versions of themselves'.²²⁹ Yet, for the most part, we are given a very positive depiction of the natural world. Many of our 'good' characters are aligned, by name, with plants and trees (Katniss, Prim, Rue, the Hawthorns, etc.) Moreover, Katniss, who secretly enters the forest to hunt, associates it from the outset with freedom and views it as a sanctuary. It is her familiarity with this forbidden setting which provides her with the survival skills to survive its simulated antithesis.

²²⁷ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (London: Scholastic Children's Books, 2009), p. 5.

²²⁸ In *Mockingjay*, the final book in the series, many of the rebels trying to escape District 12 are killed because they are too afraid to escape through the woods. They take the roads instead, and are consequently easy targets for overhead weaponry.

²²⁹ Collins, *The Hunger Games*, p. 342.

Each year, we are told, The Hunger Games are set in expansive outside arenas. It ‘just so happens’ that the 74th – the one with which the series begins – is set in the woods. However, Collins had to carefully choose an environment for the beginning of her series which would serve as a credible setting of trial and violence and which could be conceivably frightening. It is significant that she settled on the forest. This environment is suited to the Game Makers’ desires, as it is one that encourages the humans within it to act (and be seen) as animals. The designers explicitly play on this idea that the primitive setting creates the primitive human. Once again: the primitive setting creates the primitive human. It is important to note that all of the arenas throughout the Games, with only one exception,²³⁰ have been based around ‘natural’ settings (deserts, jungles, tundra, etc.) We have extreme examples of the sentiment that ‘Nature is locked up tight’,²³¹ as these environments are enclosed in invisible and impenetrable domes. The Capitol, it seems, especially enjoys viewing these landscapes at a distance and the destruction within them. However, though the majority of the Capitol remains at a distance, it necessarily devises a control centre beneath each arena. Thus, the Capitol, in this sense, belies the forest arena. Once the Games have ended, these environments become sites of historical interest; they are visited, at expense, by tourists from the Capitol and so wholly preserved; they become, in a sense, natural reserves. They crudely illustrate the thoroughly mediated ‘connection’ between civilisation and the wilderness. Though the forest in the Games seems, at first, an ordinary woodland, it is in fact entirely ‘surreal’: the arenas, we are told, are worlds in which ‘the authenticity of everything is to be doubted’.²³² This forest, it transpires, has been designed explicitly as a Gothic environment. Its architects (the head of which is fittingly named Seneca Crane) have exaggerated the elements that frighten in this setting. It is made literally into a landscape of trial, as it is filled with tasks and traps that are extremely dangerous. It is

²³⁰ The 73rd Hunger Games were staged within the ruins of an abandoned city. Nonetheless, this is an environment being slowly reclaimed by Nature.

²³¹ Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, p. 123.

²³² Collins, *The Hunger Games*, p. 378.

ostensibly unending and is crowded with trees: it is a setting in which one is easily lost. Fears of being eaten are entirely justified, as the tributes are ‘gobbled up’ and its makers, intermittently, fill it with monsters.²³³ The fact that these monsters, such as the ‘tracker-jackers’ or ‘muttations’, are humanly designed illustrates, as with the creatures in *The Village*, that what we have to fear in the woods is ultimately *human*. The sense that ‘der Weld hat Augen’²³⁴ (‘the forest has eyes’) is horribly literalised, as the arena is filled with innumerable cameras. This renders those controlling the Game as seemingly omniscient as well as omnipotent – and indeed, they have usurped the roles of the gods. They create little worlds, in which they seem to control Nature itself: they manipulate its wildlife, its terrain, and meteorological conditions. Its creatures, which are of human design and genetically modified, are monstrous examples of humankind’s (very real) interference with Nature. In the final scene in this artificial wilderness, as Katniss and Peeta begin to eat the poisoned berries, we have the most explicit image of humans having usurped the role of God. The imagery, of one man and one woman in ‘Nature’ with this ‘forbidden fruit’, evokes the story of Genesis. This, however, is our most perverse Eden yet: this is not a God-made paradise, but a manmade Hell; ‘Adam’ and ‘Eve’ are not newly created, but the metonymical last of their kind; and they are not tempted towards their own destruction, but choose it willingly as a final resort. Claudius Templesmith, the Games’ ‘narrator’ of sorts, addresses the tributes suddenly, so as to prevent their suicides and announces their shared victory. His voice booms from the sky, as though he is God – an analogy which is further underlined by his name, which carries religious connotations. The transgression, significantly, is not punished by an expulsion into the wilderness, but instead they are sent to

²³³ Ibid., p. 50.

²³⁴ Porteous, *The Forest in Folklore and Mythology*, p. 12.

the city. On artificial setting is replaced with another – which, ultimately, is even more threatening.

The Hunger Games is a text that explicitly suggests that the forest is only a frightening and Gothic locale when it has been interfered with by humankind. It presents us with two versions of Nature: one authentic and the other constructed. The former is shown in wholly positive terms, aligned with the characters we view as ‘good’ and viewed as a sanctuary. The constructed wilderness, conversely, is associated with the avarice and cruelty of the city and is certainly no ‘artificial paradise’,²³⁵ but instead an ‘artificial nightmare’. The forest is construed by the Capitol as an unsuitable site of human habitation indeed, as they place beside it only the very poorest and least valued in society, whilst the humans actually located within it are those intended for sacrifice. This system of sacrifice provides a bleak twist on the theories of Girard. The tributes are not demanded by the ‘primitive’ communities, but by the Capitol: the very apex of civilisation. There is no external, or divine decree, as they are sacrificed only to appease the desires of the city. Thus, we see again that the members of the Capitol view themselves firmly in the role of the gods. We have a striking analogy for the ‘Death of Nature’ and the human vanity in viewing ourselves as above and in control of the natural world. What this reveals, however, is that we are ‘fragmented’²³⁶ indeed from any ‘true wilderness’.²³⁷ It is little wonder, then, that it is at its most Gothic when we create it ourselves.

Drew Goddard’s *The Cabin in the Woods*,²³⁸ which was co-written and produced with Joss Whedon, shares many thematic similarities with *The Hunger Games*. Once again, we have a forest that is literally designed and constructed by humans – and in which human sacrifices are killed as entertainment. We encounter, once more, ideas surrounding ‘The Death of Nature’

²³⁵ Baudrillard, *America*, p. 8.

²³⁶ Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 2.

²³⁷ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

²³⁸ Hereafter abbreviated to ‘*Cabin*’.

and an engagement with Girard's theories on the motivations behind 'primitive' societies. In *Cabin* we find an explicit (and meta) interrogation into the workings of the horror genre – and its continuing use of woodland settings. We may find, too, an ecological thread that runs throughout: *Cabin*, essentially, is a text in which humans are deemed unworthy of the Earth.

Initially, *Cabin* seems a very conventional horror movie. We meet several college students who conform to various archetypes used frequently in the genre: the 'whore' (Anna Hutchinson), the 'athlete' (Chris Hemsworth), the 'scholar' (Jesse Williams), the 'fool' (Fran Kranz) and the 'virgin' (Kristen Connolly), whom we naturally presume will be our 'Final Girl'. These students, much like those in *Evil Dead*, head for a weekend getaway in a secluded cabin in the woods. They assume the wilderness will serve a 'special function'²³⁹ indeed, as a recreational paradise. In line with convention, they are gradually picked off one by one, until we have only the 'virgin', Dana, to save the day. However, there is a thoroughly 'complex' twist to this film. We learn early on that this forest is sealed in a technological dome and is controlled by its human creators, who lie literally beneath it in an elaborate organisation known as 'The Complex'.

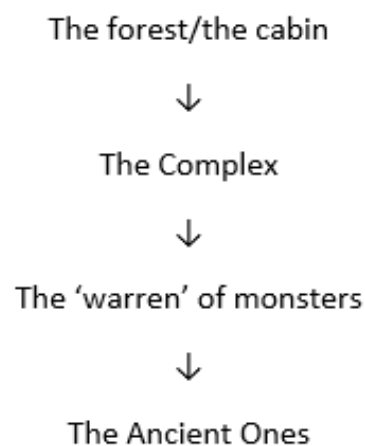


Fig. 4.5, The Layers of *The Cabin in the Woods*

²³⁹ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

This organisation exists to ensure that the students above are killed in this setting in accordance with various sacramental ‘rules’. In this film, we have our most elaborate example of the ‘awful secret’ which literally belies the forest (*figure 4.5*). Beneath them lies what Katherine A. Wagner has called ‘a warren of monsters’,²⁴⁰ from which various creatures are selected to then enter the woodlands. Beneath these are mysterious entities known as ‘The Ancient Ones’, to whom The Complex sacrifices the victims above, to ensure that the world does not end. These are significantly never revealed and stand, I argue, for *us*: the modern audience. Eventually, only Marty (the ‘fool’) and Dana remain, and they manage to infiltrate The Complex. They deliberately ruin the ritual and – quite literally – all Hell breaks loose.

As in *The Hunger Games*, we learn that there are many various ‘arenas’ in which the sacrifices may be killed – and here, once again, it ‘just so happens’ to be the forest. We learn, too, that each country in the world establishes its own Complex and conditions for harvesting sacrifices. The film is focused on the main Western representative, which is, of course, the cabin in the woods. This choice is extremely significant, as it a conscious observation of the ubiquity of this setting within the Western Gothic. The very title of the film – *The Cabin in the Woods* – alerts us immediately to the importance of location and presents us with a recognisable scenario used frequently in the genre. Indeed, as Rick McDonald argues, the film consciously examines ‘the traditional story of “horror in the woods”’.²⁴¹ Goddard, when interviewed about the film, has commented on the essentiality of its natural environment: ‘I realised early on how important the character of the woods are to this film [...] so deep, so dark, and so scary’.²⁴² The film plays with many of the traditional elements we associate with woodland horror texts. For example, as in *The Hunger Games*, the idea of this setting as one of *trial* is literalised as it

²⁴⁰ Wagner, ‘Haven't We Been Here Before?: The Cabin in the Woods, the Horror Genre, and Placelessness’, p. 1.

²⁴¹ McDonald, ‘Sacred Violence and *The Cabin in the Woods*’, p. 4.

²⁴² Drew Goddard, ‘We Are Not Who We Are: Making *The Cabin in the Woods*’. Special Features. *The Cabin in the Woods*. Dir. Drew Goddard. Lionsgate, 2012. Film.

becomes an arena. Moreover, we are encouraged to associate the forest with the *past* and specifically the American New World, as Marty informs us that the cabin was built in ‘pioneer days’. We are led, too, to link classical fairy tales with the Gothic nature of this environment²⁴³ and as the sacrifices are ostensibly ‘fed’ to the gods beneath, we have a stark illustration indeed of the forest’s *consuming* threats. The idea that the forest is an environment we fill with our monsters is also exemplified: The Complex does not directly murder the victims, but instead releases monsters into the environment. These then emerge from the very soil of the woods, implicitly an extension of them. Each of the monsters to be found in the ‘warren’ is bound to an object inside the cabin: by interacting with these items, the students, unwittingly, select the means of their own destruction. It seems, much like the woodland setting, that these monsters are chosen by chance, but again we have a significant and deliberate choice by the film’s creators. The monsters selected are ‘The Buckleys’, known more commonly as ‘the zombie redneck torture family’, and are important in this context for several reasons. Firstly, they are visibly *human* monsters, but more significantly they are humans we associate, pejoratively, with settlements by the woods. They are referenced, throughout the film, not only as ‘rednecks’, but as ‘backwoods idiots’. When the battle ensues between these monsters and the urban intruders, we have an instance, indeed, of ‘city vs. wilderness’. The other monsters that are seemingly very nearly selected (a killer-bride, a merman, etc.) in fact bear no connection to the woodland setting. The Buckleys, however, are said to have lived and maimed in this very cabin: it is firmly suggested that our monsters are most especially effective when they are bound so intrinsically to setting.

²⁴³ The cabin contains a mounted wolf head and we have a memorable scene in which the ‘whore’ engages with it suggestively, deliberately evoking the story of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’. The fact that the ‘whore’ assumes the role of ‘Little Red’ is significant, as we are alerted to the questionable and titillating aspects of our fairy tales.

Cabin is another text in which we observe that the reason why the forest is frightening is because of the human interference and presence within it. We see this here very literally with *The Complex* beneath the woods. We have seen in many of the texts throughout this thesis a recurrent implication that Hell resides beneath the forest; here, we not only have the Ancient Ones beneath the woods, but meddlesome humans; ‘Hell’, it seems, is humankind. The employees in *The Complex* are thoroughly distinct from the natural world. Though they are technically within the wilderness, this inside environment is decidedly urbane: it is corporate, ultramodern, and thoroughly sterile. Whilst the forest, traditionally, is linked to ‘chaos’, much of the action in *The Complex* takes place in *The Control Room*: a centre from which the workers control the forest above. This forest, then, is a further example of an ‘artificial’ and ‘constructed’ wilderness. Indeed, as in *The Hunger Games*, it is sealed in an invisible dome: the ‘dualism’²⁴⁴ between humans and Nature is once again literalised, as ‘Nature’, again, is ‘locked up tight’.²⁴⁵ When the students first enter into the midst of this forest, we are shown a significant image of the trees from above. We see a bird soaring above this expansive wilderness, until suddenly it collides with the invisible dome and is killed. In this striking image, we see evidence not only of a tangible interference by humans with the wilderness, but a microcosmic symbol of ‘The Death of Nature’. This resonates especially in an ecocritical context if we consider the fact that in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* – a text lauded by some as the origin of ecocritical writing – she infamously begins with an image of all birds’ extinction. The ‘death’ of Nature is further symbolised, as Kimberly Jackson argues, by the fact that ‘the “bad guys” here don’t only control who lives or dies, but the real environment, including natural elements’.²⁴⁶ Thus, as they design, construct, and then manipulate this ‘wilderness’, Nature becomes seemingly redundant as humans assume the role of the gods. We have, then,

²⁴⁴ Val Plumwood, discussed by Matthew Hall in *Plants as Persons*, p. 1.

²⁴⁵ Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life*, p. 123.

²⁴⁶ Kimberly Jackson, *Technology, Monstrosity and Reproduction in 21st Century Horror* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), p. 24.

a direct parallel between the Game designers in *The Hunger Games* and those in The Complex. The role of The Complex as symbolic gods is emphasised by the language they use to discuss the sacrifices. They explicitly state that it is essential that the victims are determined by their own ‘free will’: ‘in the end, if they don’t transgress, they can’t be punished’. Such wording evokes yet again the story of Eden within this constructed wilderness. This analogy is solidified in the moment that the victims select the objects which determine the monsters. They are warned, explicitly, not to enter the cellar that contains these objects, and moreover they are told not to touch them. The objects serve, symbolically, as ‘forbidden fruits’ which ensure their downfall. The Complex, some would argue much like the omniscient Christian God, has created an ‘Eden’ in which transgression was *always* a part of the design.

Throughout *Cabin*, the theme of human sacrifice is integral. The film begins with a series of credits that depict human sacrifice and violence throughout the ages: we have visual representations of what Girard terms the ‘essential violence’²⁴⁷ of humankind. Indeed, the text lends itself to the theories of Girard, as have yet another example of a covenant of sacrifice between humans and gods. The violence is externally and divinely decreed, thus leaving The Complex, ostensibly, absolved of all blame. As Rick McDonald suggests, ‘The Complex sacrifices a few for the good of society’²⁴⁸ – an example, indeed, of Girard’s human sacrifice that ensures the harmony of the community. However, the question of sacrifice throughout the text is more intricate and complex than it might at first seem. As McDonald continues, ‘who is sacrificing whom is one of the puzzles of this movie’²⁴⁹. Girard’s argument, essentially, is that humans use gods as an oblique rationalisation for the ‘essential violence’ within us – and certainly such a reading may be applied to this film. Much of the discussion on this film has noted the idea that the nebulous ‘Ancient Ones’ are in fact *us*: contemporary Western society.

²⁴⁷ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 363.

²⁴⁸ McDonald, ‘Sacred Violence and *The Cabin in the Woods*’, p. 2.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

We are the ‘gods’ and it is we that are demanding these sacrifices. This prompts the question, as McDonald suggests, of ‘the extent to which *current* civilisation is predicated upon violence’.²⁵⁰ We might consider the fact that American society, as Kevin Corstorphine argues, is built on a ‘flawed utopian myth’, which is founded in turn, as Richard Slotkin continues, on the idea of ‘regeneration through violence’.²⁵¹ Moreover, the notion that we are the ‘gods’ who are demanding this violence raises one of the film’s central and most intriguing ideas, which is that the horror genre *itself* is a contemporary substitute for human sacrifice. Girard states: ‘violence is not to be denied, but it can be diverted onto another object’. The workers in The Complex, much like the inhabitants of The Capitol, view the violence as extreme entertainment, which in turn highlights the meta element that we too are watching this violence as a means of enjoyment. As one worker comments ‘you’ve got to keep the customer satisfied’, there is the sense that the viewer is being referenced directly. Put simply, horror is a forum in which we can enjoy watching each other die, whilst all the while with the security that it is merely a fantasy: we have ‘violence’, indeed, ‘without risk of vengeance’.²⁵² The recurrent use, therefore, of the forest environment as a setting in which we may literally enact such violence is certainly significant. One character, who describes the sacrifices as ‘lambs’, describes the forest in turn as ‘the killing floor’. It is a setting to which we send our sacrifices: a primitive environment which allows primitive purgation.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 1.

²⁵¹ Corstorphine, “‘The Blank Darkness Outside’”, p. 125; Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (USA: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1973).

²⁵² Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 14.

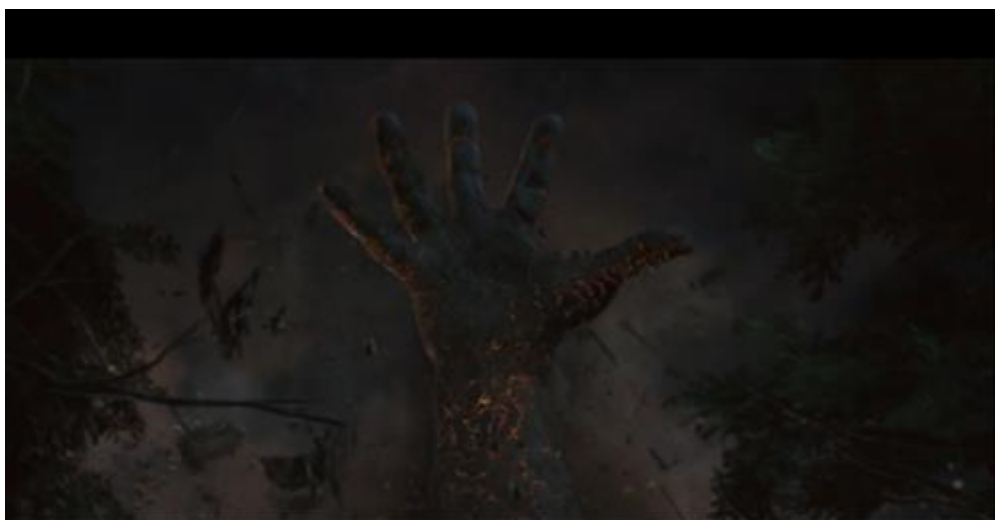


Fig. 4.6, The Hand of 'God' in *The Cabin in the Woods* (2012)

In the ending to the film, Dana and Marty are offered the chance to sacrifice themselves in order to save humanity. They choose, however, to reject this. 'Humanity...', says Marty, 'it's time to give someone else a chance'. The world, consequently, collapses around them. The Ancient Ones awaken and emerge from their hibernation. We do not see them until in the very final scene, when we see an enormous hand break through the cabin, just a moment before the credits roll. Ostensibly, therefore, this ending firmly undermines anthropocentrism. The Complex, along with all of humanity, is destroyed. It is, seemingly, in accordance with the themes of entropy and chaos often aligned with Nature. However, the hand that emerges is decidedly *human* (figure 4.6). We are thus presented with a final image that evokes 'The Death of Nature', and a firm intimation that the 'gods', indeed, are none other than *us*. We are the 'awful secret' that belies the forest. We are left questioning our own appetites for violence and the nature, in this context, of our Gothic fictions. The forest here, resolutely, is so frightening because of *humanity*. This artificial wilderness is designed, controlled, and filled with monsters by none other than ourselves. The primitive setting of the forest is an environment in which we

may enact our proclivities for fear and violence; it is a 'formula',²⁵³ indeed, that we demand again and again.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have suggested that one of the reasons we fear the woods is because we fear it as a site of human settlement. I have argued that such fears divide into two main categories. In the first, we fear the forest as a site of habitation because we think it a dangerous and infectious environment: the primitive setting will create or awaken the primitive human. In the second, we fear that *we*, as humans, are the dangerous and infecting element: the forest is *made* Gothic by our intrusion within it. In each of these theories, we see evidence of the first of the 'Seven Theses', which is that the forest is imagined as *against* civilisation. In those texts wherein the *forest* is an infecting threat, we see fears that the civilised human will not remain civilised in this primitive environment. In those texts where the *human* is the infecting threat, we see evidence that we are 'fragmented' indeed from the natural world.²⁵⁴ Themes of the forest as a site of *antiquity* have resounded throughout this chapter, as the very idea of 'forest-dwellers' is somewhat antiquated.²⁵⁵ When the forest is viewed as infectious, it is shown to have a *regressive* effect on the humans within it. When it is the humans instead that dirty this environment, we see contrasting anxieties that we now cannot authentically 'get *back* to Nature', even if we wish to. Themes of the forest as a site of *trial* are pervasive in these texts, as in all of them we find humans are endangered. In *The Hunger Games* and *Cabin* we have the most explicit examples of this, as these forests are designed as treacherous arenas in which humans will be tested. Fears of being *lost* in the woods are twisted when they become a site of

²⁵³ Drew Goddard and Joss Whedon, *Cabin in the Woods: The Official Visual Companion* (London: Titan Books, Ltd., 2012), pp. 10-11.

²⁵⁴ Smith and Hughes, *Ecogothic*, p. 2.

²⁵⁵ Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p. 29.

human habitation. We have seen that many of the negative associations with those who dwell in the forest stem from our unease with the fact that they are not lost, but are at home in this setting. The consuming threats of the forest are embodied throughout. We have seen this with Bob in *Twin Peaks*, the monster in *The Ceremonies*, and The Pit in *Jug Face*. In these texts as well as those with woodland cannibals, we have imagery of the forest's appetite for human sacrifices. In those texts where it is humans that infect the forest, we see too that it is humans who embody these consuming threats. In the last four texts, it is we that desire to be 'fed' these sacrifices. With the recurrent image in this chapter of 'something' that lies beneath the forest and holds its 'awful secret', we have firm themes of *psychoanalysis*. We return to Freud's citing of Schelling's definition of 'the uncanny' as something 'that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'.²⁵⁶ It is striking to note that in each of the texts there is always something beneath the forest: we have subterranean and hellish spaces, we have monsters concealed beneath the earth, and we have *us* hidden in its very foundations. This image, I argue, is so prevalent in texts with humans in the woods because it neatly and ominously hints at the primitive which belies the civilised. It subtly evokes the fact that even in our cities we dwell in spaces that once were naturally and densely forested.²⁵⁷ Finally, we have seen in these texts themes indeed of the forest as an *antichristian* setting. We have had ominous Nature gods in *The Ceremonies* and *Jug Face*, twisted ideas of Christianity in *We Are What We Are*, and *humans* as 'gods' when the wilderness is constructed. The final four texts showed that when humans play God amidst the wilderness, the result is hellish, whether we intend it or not.

Whether we fear that it is the *forest* that will harm us, or *we* that will harm the forest, this environment is shown throughout these fictions as a site that is unsuitable and hostile to

²⁵⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 130.

²⁵⁷ Harrison, *Forests*, p. ix.

human habitation. They serve, ultimately, to demonstrate the extremity of our fears and uncertainty when it comes to the place of humans in the wilderness in the modern world.

CONCLUSION: WHAT IS ‘THAT AWFUL SECRET OF THE WOOD’?

‘The woods are haunted... they always were’.

— T. E. D. Klein, *The Ceremonies*.¹

Focussing on several modern works of Gothic literature, film, and television, this thesis has examined the ways in which the forest functions as a ‘landscape of fear’.² It has accounted for the ways in which these texts have illustrated what Simon C. Estok has termed ‘ecophobia’:³ modern culture’s fear of Nature. It has highlighted the fact that despite living in a ‘post-enlightenment’ world, as ‘would-be rational adults’, many of us have continued to be ‘terrified by the wild wood.’⁴ This, as I have outlined, is a fact only substantiated by the continuing abundance of Gothic forests in our fictions. As a setting of trial, trepidation, and terror, the foreboding forest remains one of the most enduring and pervasive in our fictions – to such an extent that it is now a ‘cliché’.⁵ The idea of the forest as a ‘landscape of fear’ is certainly not new: we have seen that it has been utilised from our very earliest examples of extant literature⁶ and continues into our contemporary fictions. Its popularity as a cultural meta-narrative, it seems, is only increasing. Even in the last few months, we have had the release of television

¹ Klein, *The Ceremonies*, p. 500.

² Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear*, p. 1.

³ Estok, ‘Theorising in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia’, p. 203.

⁴ Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest*, p. 200.

⁵ McDonald, ‘Sacred Violence and *The Cabin in the Woods*’, p. 4.

⁶ I noted in Chapter One that *Gilgamesh* (c. 1000-1999 BC) contains a foreboding forest that houses its own demons.

shows like *Wayward Pines* (2015)⁷ and *Jordskott* (2015),⁸ and the news that the novel *Uprooted* will soon be adapted into a major feature film.⁹ Moreover, two texts that have given us ‘classic’ examples of ominous forests, *Evil Dead* (1981) and *Twin Peaks* (1990-1), are each set to be revisited in the form of modern television series.¹⁰ In addition, we are in the midst of what has been termed a ‘fairy tale renaissance’, which has produced a plethora of texts that bring us into the forest (*Grimm* [2011-], *Once Upon a Time* [2011-], *Snow White and the Huntsman* [2012], *Into the Woods* [2014], etc.).¹¹ The centrality of the forest trope in popular culture underlines the importance of its examination – as does, of course, the fact that we are now in an age of environmental crisis. It is surely not a coincidence that, in our current environmental context, the trope of the Gothic forest has become so popular. One might argue that in an increasingly urbanised Western world, which is now devoid of ‘true wilderness’,¹² it is only a matter of time until fears of the forest become defunct. However, I would contend that the increasing prevalence of the Gothic forest in our fictions in fact demonstrates that such fears will be increasingly relevant. The absence of wilderness in our day to day lives renders its image all the *more* uncanny and ubiquitous; as we destroy our literal forests, our figurative forests loom

⁷ *Wayward Pines* is adapted from the novels by Blake Crouch (2012-14) and centres on a mysterious small town amidst an expansive American forest. Its title hints interestingly from the outset at the chaotic nature of this setting. It transpires that the town contains some of the last humans on Earth and is enclosed (much like the forests in *The Hunger Games* and *The Cabin in the Woods*) by an expansive dome which has been constructed to divide them from the terrors of the woods. These terrors are creatures named ‘abbies’, which are an evolved species of human that can withstand any extremes of environment. We have strong environmental themes as these creatures are born of environmental disaster. Crouch has acknowledged that the premise of a mysterious town amidst the wilderness was inspired by *Twin Peaks*.

⁸ *Jordskott* is a Swedish thriller-fantasy, centring on a small town named Silverhög, which lies in the midst of ancient woodland. The title refers to a small seed, a ‘jordskott’, which can be swallowed by a human, resulting in them containing elements of the forest within. This series, too, contains strong environmental themes, as the forest here only becomes menacing when it is exploited by humankind for commercial gain. Order and tranquillity is restored to Nature in the series’ finale, when the exploitation of the environment is suddenly ceased.

⁹ The novel, which is discussed in Chapter Two, will be produced by Warner Brothers. Warner Brothers won the rights to its production, following a fierce bidding war with rivals such as Lionsgate and Fox 2000. Sourced: <http://www.darkhorizons.com/news/37305/warners-plans-uprooted-film-adaptation>. Accessed 20/08/2015.

¹⁰ *Ash vs. Evil Dead* is currently due for release later this year, whilst *Twin Peaks* is set to come out in 2017.

¹¹ The extremely popular Gothic television series *Pretty Little Liars* (2010-) utilised the idea of the dark potentialities of the enchanted forest in its penultimate episode, ‘Last Dance’ (2015), in which the series’ villain is ultimately unmasked.

¹² Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

all the larger – and all the more menacingly – in the cultural imagination. However, as noted by critics such as Stacy Alaimo and Tom J. Hillard, there has been a surprising dearth of critical focus on such menacing images of the environment – on what Alaimo has termed ‘monstrous natures’.¹³ Thus, as Estok asserts, it is essential that we begin to ‘theorise’¹⁴ this evidence of ecophobic dread. This brings us, of course, to the ecoGothic. I have aligned with Andrew Smith and William Hughes’ definition of this theory as a means of ‘exploring the Gothic *through* theories of ecocriticism’ [my emphasis].¹⁵ I have contributed to this definition by adding my own caveats in order to distinguish ‘ecoGothic’ from the closely related field of ‘ecohorror’. In short, whilst ‘ecohorror’ is genre, the ‘ecoGothic’ is a framework by which to analyse the Gothic nature of Gothic Nature. Moreover, whilst ‘ecohorror’ is bound to themes of Nature’s revenge and always carries an environmental moral, this is not a requisite in the texts addressed in an ecoGothic context. Instead, the ecoGothic is concerned with the Gothic ambience that is found in certain natural settings: with the Gothic nature of Gothic Nature. In the texts examined throughout this thesis, we have a mix of those in which environmental anxieties are explicitly addressed and those wherein such themes may be found and brought to the foreground. In each, however, the present context of environmental uncertainty is highly relevant in influencing the ways in which we read them. Consequently, these texts are of considerable significance because they simultaneously reflect and teach the ways in which we view the natural world: they serve in themselves as ‘ecological forces’.¹⁶

In the Western world, we have starkly ambivalent ideas about the forest. We have seen throughout these texts our contradictory desires and fears in relation to this environment. When

¹³ Alaimo, ‘Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films’, p. 280; Hillard, ‘Deep Into the Darkness Peering’, p. 688.

¹⁴ Estok, ‘Theorising in a Space’, p. 203

¹⁵ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 1

¹⁶ Hubert Zapf, ‘Literature as Cultural Ecology: Notes Towards a Functional Theory of Imaginative Texts, With Examples from American Literature’, Herbert Grabes, ed., *Literary History – Cultural History: Forcefields and Tensions* (Tübingen: Gunter Naar Verlag, 2001), p. 85.

it comes to addressing why we desire the wilderness, this is predominantly bound to the notion of this setting as an unstained and Edenic paradise. It symbolises something we fear we have lost, and wish to regain at will. We imagine, as Peter Barry argues, that it will serve some ‘special function’ for humankind.¹⁷ It is imagined as a site of recreation (*Tom Gordon, Evil Dead*), of healing (*Antichrist*), and of escape (*Off Season, The Ceremonies*). We go to the woods to leave behind the disenchantment of urbanity, to reawaken and rediscover a sense of mythology and in turn to ‘remythologise’ this landscape (*YellowBrickRoad, The Blair Witch Project*). We envisage this environment as the antidote to the sins of the modern world. Here, it is thought, we may emulate the experience of *Wälden*. We head into the forest to salvage Eden (*Innocence, The Village*). Simultaneously, we may desire the woods as a setting in which to embrace our more monstrous natures (*Trick ‘r Treat, Darkest Desire*). It may be enjoyed, too, at a distance as a stage for our sacrifices (*The Hunger Games, The Cabin in the Woods*). However, our idealisation of the forest only accentuates its Gothic potentialities, as there is then imaginative room for its twisted distortions.

When it comes to why we fear the woods, the reasons are multitudinous. Whilst we may now have few practical causes for such anxiety, this thesis has illustrated that we have a whole host of cultural and mythical motivations. I have demonstrated that the woods are frightening because they are *animate*, because they are filled with *monsters*, and because of the *humans* within them. Each of these ideas ties in with the overarching causes of our fears of the forest, as I outlined in the introductory chapter under the heading of the ‘Seven Theses’. The first of these, which I have shown, is that the forest is feared, primarily, because it is viewed as *the antithesis to civilisation*. Civilisation is tied, traditionally, to order and reason, and so the forest, implicitly, is bound to disorder and chaos. Consequently, there has been a desire to keep the two thoroughly distinct, to show humans as firmly above such wildness and anarchy. This

¹⁷ Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p. 257.

has resulted in what Val Plumwood has termed the ‘human-nature dualism’: the theoretical distinction between human and nonhuman Nature.¹⁸ In the majority of texts, this ‘dualism’ is threatened, and this is a main cause of anxiety. The dominant image of the animated wood illustrates that there may be less of a distinction between human and nonhuman Nature than we might like to imagine. Estok’s idea that ecophobia is born of our ‘contempt and fear for the agency of the natural environment’¹⁹ is literally brought to life, as the woods are shown as decidedly non-passive: they are *living* and *sentient*, much like us. With themes of theurgy in the works of Blackwood and ideas of our She-Devils ‘melting into the green’, we see manifest fears of the destruction of this dualism. With texts like *Little Otík* and *The Happening*, ideas of the forest as ‘*against*’ humanity are unnervingly literalised, as Nature enacts its revenge. The image of the monster, as we have seen, is frequently an embodiment of the dualism destroyed. Monsters are literally hybrids of human and nonhuman Nature and are terrifying precisely for this uncanny reason. Moreover, by relegating our monsters to the Gothic forest, contemporary culture thereby reinforces the conceptual notion that ‘the wilderness is where “unordered” things such as monsters rightly belong’: it is the fitting environment for our fears of chaos and the unknown.²⁰ Our unease with humans who settle in the wilderness is born of the idea that such inhabitants are not distinct from their surrounding environment: if they are savage and uncivilised, they are viewed as the consequences of a failure to maintain this human-nature dualism. However, in those texts that centred on themes of artificial wilderness, we encountered fears of an all too successful division between humans and wilderness. In these, we found explorations of our unease with our ‘estrangement’ from Nature.²¹ In *Innocence* and *The Village*, we see the horrifying consequences of enforcing this division, whilst in *The*

¹⁸ Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, p. 81.

¹⁹ Estok, ‘Theorising in a Space’, p. 203.

²⁰ Debbie Felton, ‘Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous’, in Asa Simon Mitmann and Peter J. Dendle, Ed., *The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), p. 105

²¹ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 2

Hunger Games and *Cabin*, we find a dualism so extreme that the wilderness is reserved only as a site of ritual execution. The second main reason I argued we fear the woods is because *it is a site of primeval antiquity*. I argued that just as the Gothic is concerned with our fears of a ‘return of the past’,²² this manifests in the Gothic forest with the idea that this environment will ‘return’ and ‘reclaim’ the spaces that it once dominated. I highlighted the idea that we believe we are somehow ‘beyond’ the wilderness, as we talk of ‘getting *back* to Nature’, and noted too the idea of ‘heritage noire’,²³ with our fears of being haunted by the crimes of the American New World. With Blackwood’s themes of theurgy and the melding of our She-Devils into the environment, we have seen terrifying examples of ‘getting back to Nature’. In *The Willows* and *Uprooted*, we saw the forests quite literally closing in on areas inhabited by humans and reclaiming them, and in *Little Otik* and *The Happening*, we saw explicit themes of our own extinction. In our examination of forest monsters, we saw that when the world was uncharted, its unknown spaces were imaginatively filled with these creatures. The wealth of contemporary texts with monsters in the forest illustrate that such behaviour endures: we have terrains that *feel* unknown and so we continue to inhabit them with invented monsters. In the texts with humans in the woods, the fearful notion of the ‘return of the past’ is embodied in fears of human regression: in the idea that the primitive setting will create the primitive human. This was seen, most especially, with the subject of cannibalism. Quite fittingly, themes of ‘heritage noir’ and the New World wilderness became especially relevant in these texts of humans in the wild. Interestingly, in the discussion of artificial wilderness, fears concerning the past were fixated not on its return, but on its loss, and on the fearsome intrusion of modernity instead. The third reason I suggested the forest is frightening is because *it is a site of trial*. I highlighted our widespread associations of trial in this setting and how many of these are born of our knowledge

²² Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith, *Modern Gothic*, p. 94

²³ Morgan, ‘Heritage Noire’, p. 137

of Western fairy tales. Several of the texts in this thesis are explicitly inspired by fairy tales and their themes of trial, as for example in *Little Otík* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*. This was most explicit in those texts with witches and wolves, which held prominent themes of ‘Hansel and Gretel’ and ‘Little Red Riding Hood’: two classic examples of stories in which one is challenged to survive the monsters in this setting. Ultimately, the most explicit themes of trial in the forest are found in *The Hunger Games* and *The Cabin in the Woods*, wherein the environment is consciously constructed as a deadly arena. The fourth reason I suggested we fear the woods is because we imagine that here *we will be lost*: we will be literally ‘bewildered’.²⁴ We have seen various ways in which this manifests: with those texts where humans become hideously ‘at one’ with Nature, or are literally consumed, they are lost *to* the woods. Texts like *Tom Gordon*, *Yellow Brick Road* and *Blair Witch* have as their central premise the idea of being lost in the woods. In each of these texts, the horror is born of the idea that we may *still* be lost in this setting. The humans who choose to dwell in the woods are feared in part because they are *not* lost: they are at home in this setting and so deemed as monstrous. The fifth reason I argued we fear the forest is because *it is a consuming threat*. I discussed the uneasy contention between ideas of Nature consuming *us*, and *us* consuming *Nature*. With such examples as ‘The Transfer’ and *Little Otík*, voracious Nature is hideously realised, yet juxtaposed with images of *human* greed. The symbolic devouring by humans of the natural world is seen again in such texts as ‘The Temptation of the Clay’ and *The Happening*. Fears of being eaten within the woods are traditionally associated with monsters and indeed this threat was prevalent in the monster texts within this thesis. Interestingly, we saw such flesh-eating zeal with the woodland cannibals, as humans then assumed the forest’s voracity. The sixth motivation I suggested for fearing the woods was because it is a ‘landscape of the mind’: *it is*

²⁴ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 1

an environment of the unconscious.²⁵ This was demonstrated firmly in *Antichrist*, where the forest seemed born of the woman's imagination. It was illustrated further by texts like *Darkest Desire*, which suggested the forest as home not only to our monsters, but to our monstrous selves: as the environment in which the Id roams free. In *The Woods Are Dark* and *The Woman* we found memorable examples in which it was suggested that civilised humans needs only to be brought into this setting to release and enable their basest desires. In each, the civilised embrace an existence of savagery in the woods. The seventh reason I gave for Western fears of the forest was that it has been widely construed as an *antichristian space*. I highlighted the ideas that 'the Bible contains all you need to know in order to hate the wilderness'²⁶ and that 'Nature is Satan's church'.²⁷ I argued that religion in the woods is usually presented as skewered and that the epitome of this is to be found in the image of the forest as a perverted Eden. This is consciously evoked in *Antichrist* by elements such as its title and the fact the woods within it are literally named 'Eden'. This idea is more subtly, but consistently evoked wherein the forest is imagined as an idyllic paradise, but is revealed in the end as a nightmare. The idea that 'Nature is Satan's church' is shown in such texts as *Evil Dead* and *Darkest Desire* we learn explicitly that it is his domain. This is suggested further by the ambiguous villains in *Tom Gordon* and *YellowBrickRoad*, which seem to exist in defiance of the Christian God. With several of the texts with humans in the woods, we encounter skewered religions indeed. In *The Ceremonies* and *Jug Face*, the 'gods' are monstrous entities that lie beneath the forest, whilst in *We Are What We Are*, a warped version of Christianity is used as a façade to excuse murderous activities. In the four final texts where we have artificial wilderness, we have artificial gods: which is to say, we have humans assuming the role of the Divine. In each, the woods are not godly paradises, but manmade hells. In *Innocence* and *The Village* this is

²⁵ Melbye, *Landscape Allegory in Cinema*, p. 2.

²⁶ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 133.

²⁷ *Antichrist*.

undesired, whilst in *The Hunger Games* and *Cabin* this is the intentional design. The motivations, however, are ultimately irrelevant as the result is the same: when humans play God, Nature is cursed.

Early on in this thesis, I discussed the fact that in the modern world it has been alleged that both myth and Nature are dead. Rollo May has introduced the term ‘mythoclasm’, meaning the death of myth, whilst Karen Armstrong attests that ‘the old mythical way of thought has crumbled’.²⁸ Simultaneously, we are told that we are unable to see the ‘numinous’ in Nature, as it has now ‘lost its magic’.²⁹ I have argued that the connections between these two ‘deaths’ are not coincidental. Instead, I have suggested that in our ‘increasingly urbanised’ and ‘desacralised’ world, it is little wonder that we have created this ‘human-nature dualism’.³⁰ Whilst Armstrong argues that with the decline of myth, there has been no substitute, I align with the wealth of critics that insist our literature and films have assumed this function. I have argued, further, that it is in horror and the Gothic that this substitution is the most effective, as the experience of fear forces a prioritisation of ‘mythos’ over ‘logos’. Texts in which we encounter the Gothic forest serve to undermine not only the death of myth, but of Nature, too. In our depictions of such ‘monstrous natures’, it is impossible to view the environment merely in terms of a ‘passive resource’.³¹ Robert Pogue Harrison’s assertion that we have lost the ability to see the forest as ‘strange, *monstrous* and enchanting’³² [my emphasis] is similarly brought into question. These texts *change* the way that we view the environment, as they not only reflect, but teach, our fears of the wilderness. The abundance of these ‘myths’ means that we are thoroughly schooled in recognising the forest as a Gothic locale. Moreover, such

²⁸ May, *The Cry for Myth*, p. 25; Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 128.

²⁹ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 111.

³⁰ Plumwood, *Feminism and Mastery*, p. 81.

³¹ Hall, *Plants as Persons*, p. 4.

³² Harrison, *Forests*, p. 121.

abundance is fitting if we return to this idea that ‘myth is the discourse we need in extremity’.³³

The extremity in this case is that we exist in an age where our treatment of the natural world is in itself a horror story. May asserts that myths exists ‘to make sense of a senseless world’.³⁴

The prevalence of these texts, within this context, may be read in starkly divergent ways. On the one hand, they may justify our destruction of the wilderness: if Nature is wild and frightening, it surely makes sense to destroy it. Yet on the other hand, we may read these texts as demanding a long and overdue shift in perspective: it is the very destruction of the wilderness that is in this sense ‘senseless’. If we examine these texts through the ecoGothic, we are certainly drawn to the latter interpretation. These multiple images of the Gothic forest in our fictions are so important because they serve to *remythologise* the woods. As we fill this space with our various monsters and scary stories, we are symbolically ‘rewilding’ the environment. Simultaneously, the ease with which we fear the woods serves to ‘rewild’ mythology. This idea is summarised neatly in *The Ceremonies*. The protagonist, Jeremy, learns that in the secluded town of Gilead, most people believe the surrounding woods are haunted. We are told that ‘Jeremy decided that he liked this idea’ because ‘it was [...] evidence of modern superstition’.³⁵

If we return to Maitland’s idea that we continue to be ‘terrified by the wild wood’ *despite* our own enlightenment, we see that these fears may well serve as such evidence indeed. By embracing and encouraging the expression of these fears, we may learn, as Lawrence Buell suggests, to ‘think ecologically’ and therein to recover the ‘mythological way of thought’.³⁶

The prevalence of the Gothic forest in our fictions suggests that we have *not*, in fact, lost the ability to see the forest as ‘strange, monstrous and enchanting’. As Mercea Eliade attests: humankind will ‘never succeed completely in doing away with religious behaviour’.³⁷

³³ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 36.

³⁴ May, *The Cry for Myth*, p. 15.

³⁵ Klein, *The Ceremonies*, p. 265.

³⁶ Lawrence Buell discussed in Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology*, p. 183.

³⁷ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 29.

While this work has very broadly addressed Western fears of the forest within ecoGothic studies, there is a variety of directions that other works setting out to ‘theorise’³⁸ ecophobia could take. First and foremost, due to its infancy, the very subject of the ecoGothic requires much critical examination and debate as to its exact tenets. Whilst I have outlined my own delineations between ‘ecohorror’ and ‘ecoGothic’, these will only become clearer with an increased body of work that increasingly differentiates between the two. There are many interesting avenues to be explored within ecoGothic studies. One key direction might be to interpret more explicitly this idea that the ecoGothic is the examination of Gothic texts ‘*through theories of ecocriticism*’:³⁹ to engage more intertextually and in more detail with said theories. One facet of ecocriticism could be selected to be used in the analysis of Gothic Nature. For example, an entire work could be produced on ecofeminism and the ecoGothic (we have seen in this work the common recurrence of such themes, especially with the figure of the ‘She-Devil in the Wilderness’, who might well deserve her own study). Similarly, one might focus on the connections between Social Ecology and our representations of Gothic Nature (we have touched on such ideas in the final chapter, but a more exhaustive study of these would certainly be fruitful). In this thesis, I have used the ecoGothic to analyse, exclusively, our depictions of the Gothic forest: an obvious expansion of the ecoGothic would be to use it to analyse *other* natural ‘landscapes of fear’. Informative works might be written, for example, on such subjects as the jungle and the ecoGothic, or snowscapes and the ecoGothic. The former might examine such texts as *Lord of the Flies* (1954), *Lost* (2004-10), and *Green Inferno* (2013), and be concerned with such themes as the perversion of tropical paradise, colonialism and isolation in this environment. The latter might explore texts like *The Thing* (1982), *The Last Winter* (2007) and *Devil’s Pass* (2013), and focus on themes like isolation, monstrous geography and global

³⁸ Estok, ‘Theorising in a Space’, p. 203.

³⁹ Smith and Hughes, *EcoGothic*, p. 1

warming. I touched on this work on the role of monsters in the context of the ecoGothic, but such a subject easily warrants its own detailed examination. It might be interesting to focus on the role of individual monsters within this light. For example, a critical examination of figures such as the Wendigo, or ‘Gothic Pan’ could be enlightening in this context.⁴⁰ In regard to the development of work on the forest and the ecoGothic, there is much to still be examined. The continuing wealth of texts that feature these spaces demand more scrutiny. There are inevitably many texts that did not make into this thesis, due to their sheer number and reasons of thematic congruity, which would yield fruitful examination. In addition, it would be intriguing to both broaden and narrow the geographical limits on the study of the Gothic forest. On the one hand, we might look to non-Western depictions of this setting and how these vary from the ones examined in this work. Yet, it would also be advantageous to examine in detail the more niche associations with the forest in one given country, or region. For example, I think a study on Scandinavian ecoGothic would be thoroughly illuminating. Scandinavia is rich in forest mythology (huldras and trolls, for example, are born of the Norse imagination) and it is fiercely protective of its natural environments. It is maybe unsurprising, then, that such fascinating texts as *Thale* (2012), *Troll Hunter* (2014), and *Jordskott* (2015) have emerged from this part of the world – and gained international attention – as here, the forest is still very much a mythological space.

⁴⁰ The Wendigo is a were-beast born of the Algonquian imagination. It is frequently envisaged in the forest environment and is associated with human cannibalism. Interestingly, its image has been appropriated recently in the NBC series *Hannibal* (2013-15), in which the infamous character of Dr Hannibal Lecter is imaginatively juxtaposed with the Wendigo throughout the series. ‘Gothic Pan’, as termed by Patricia Merivale, is the name for our more sinister understandings of this Pagan God. He is intimately associated with Nature and has been described by Nash as ‘the lord of the woods’. Merivale has argued that ideas of the Dionysian and the Freudian unconscious may be read as this figure’s direct descendants, but that his identity in modernity is ‘kept deliberately anonymous’. It would be intriguing, therefore, to see where he might be ‘unmasked’. For example, in *YellowBrickRoad*, the maddening music that fills the woods might be read as evidence of his continued presence. Sourced: Patricia Merivale, *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 220 and p. 225.

Ultimately, as we endeavour to answer why exactly the forest is frightening, it is essential we return to the title of this thesis, taken from Arthur Machen's portentous wording when he described 'that awful *secret* of the wood' [my emphasis].⁴¹ With these words, he captured something inherent to our fears of the forest: in the end, their motivation *must* remain somewhat unknown. Though he muses on this 'awful secret', it is never fully revealed, and it is this element of foreboding mystery that endows the woods with such enduring horror. There must be something in our fears of the forest that we do not quite understand and we must be *aware* of this incomprehension. We must suspect that the woods harbour a 'secret' and that this secret is 'awful' indeed. To use the words of Sophia Bittacy, we must fear 'this tree and forest business' as something that is necessarily 'so *vague* and so *horrible*' [my emphasis].⁴² Certainly, in the texts examined throughout this thesis, we might notice a constant and ominous imprecision and secrecy in the language used to describe the woods. Again and again, we are told things like 'there's *something* in the woods' (*Evil Dead*), that '*something* terrible is happening' (*Hotel*), that 'there are *things* in the trees' (*The Ceremonies*), and that 'there's a *sort of evil* [...] in the forest' (*Twin Peaks*) [my emphasis]. We are warned, repeatedly, 'don't go into the woods' (*The Woods*) and told that in this setting 'there's some weird shit going on', which – if we know what is good for us – 'we don't want anything to do with' (*Jug Face*). The forest's 'awful secret', whatever it is, is something that we *should not* learn. This environment, in accordance with Friedrich Schelling's idea of something 'that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light', is thoroughly uncanny.⁴³ It makes sense, then, as we have seen, that so many of these texts with Gothic forests are filled with various occluded and menacing spaces. Much of the ambient dread of the forest stems from the fear of uncovering, or bringing to light, its secret. In *Into the Woods*, Little Red Riding Hood emerges from her

⁴¹ Machen, 'The Great God Pan', p. 106.

⁴² Blackwood, 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved', p. 40.

⁴³ Freud, *The Uncanny*, p. 130.

ordeal, proclaiming that she glimpsed ‘secrets’ that she ‘never want[s] to know’. Whatever these are, they are *too* ‘awful’ to be discovered. The enduring mystery and secrecy of the woods explains why we *continue*, as Maitland claims, ‘to be terrified by the wild wood’. We may intellectually ‘theorise’ as much as we like about the reasons behind our fears of the woods, and even think we understand them, but this does not diminish them. As we saw in *YellowBrickRoad*, you can enter into the woods with a wealth of knowledge – with academics, foresters, cartographers, medics, psychologists, and even the latest technology – and still be lost. Heather, who claims so assuredly in *The Blair Witch Project* that it is near impossible ‘to get lost these days’, is of course so memorably contradicted. Films such as these are so effectively frightening – and in some sense thrilling – because they inform us that we *can* still get lost in the woods, should we venture into them. It seems that we have *not* lost the ability, after all, to find the forest ‘strange, monstrous, and enchanting’.⁴⁴ ‘Mythos’, in the Gothic forest, will always triumph over ‘logos’. Richard Hayman was right when he said that there is still ‘an echoing green that resounds within and around us’.⁴⁵ Little Red, at the beginning of her journey in *Into the Woods*, tries to convince herself that ‘the woods are just trees’ and ‘the trees are just wood’. She, of course, learns the hard the way that she is thoroughly mistaken. The forest, in the end, will never be ‘*just trees*’, or ‘*just wood*’: it will always – thankfully – be so much more than this.

⁴⁴ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 121

⁴⁵ Hayman, *Trees, Woodland and Civilisation*, p. 1.

‘Isn’t it nice to know a lot! And a little bit... not’.

— Little Red Riding Hood, *Into the Woods*.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Stephen Sondheim, ‘I Know Things Now’, *Into the Woods*, (1986). Musical.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alaimo, Stacey, 'Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films', in Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, eds., *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (Virginia: the University Press of Virginia, 2001)
- Aldiss Brian W., 'Foreword' in *The Mythic Fantasy of Robert Holdstock: Critical Essays on the Fiction*, eds Donald E. Morse and Kálmán Matolcsy (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2011)
- Alighieri, Dante, *Inferno*, ed. and trans. Allan Mandelbaum (New York: Random House, 2004)
- Allen, Douglas, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (London: Routledge, 2002)
- Allen, Robert, ed., *The Penguin English Dictionary* (London: Penguin Books, 2002)
- Andriano, Joseph, quoted in Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2010)
- Appleton, Jay, *The Experience of Landscape* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1996)
- Armbruster, Karla and Wallace, Kathleen R., eds., *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism* (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 2001)
- Armstrong, Karen, *A Short History of Myth* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005)
- Ashley, Mike, *Starlight Man: The Extraordinary Life of Algernon Blackwood* (London: Constable, 2001)
- Asma, Stephen T., *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Atwood, Margaret, 'Running With the Tigers' in *Essays on the Art of Angela Carter: Flesh and the Mirror*, ed. Lorna Sage (London: Virago, 1994)

- Bacchilega, Cristina, 'Cracking the Mirror: Three Re-visions of Snow White', *Boundary 2*, Spring-Fall 1988, Col. 15/16, Issue 3/1, 1-25.
- Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1958)
- Barry, Peter, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)
- Bate, Jonathan, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991)
- Baudrillard, Jean, *America*, (London: Verso, 1989)
- Bazalgette, Cary and Buckingham, David, eds., *In Front of the Children: Entertainment and Young Audiences* (London: BFI Publishing, 1995)
- Beal, Timothy K., *Religion and its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002)
- Bell, David, 'Anti-idyll Rural Horror', *Contested Countryside Cultures: Otherness, Marginalisation and Rurality*, eds Paul Cloke and Jo Little (London: Routledge, 2005)
- Bell, James, 'Haunted Landscapes', in *Gothic: The Dark Heart of Film*, ed. James Bell (London: BFI, 2013)
- Benchley, Peter, 'Swimming with Sharks', *Audubon*, 100.3 (1998): 52-57.
- Bergland, Renée L., *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hannover: Dartmouth College University Press, 2000)
- Berglund, Jeff, *Cannibal Fictions: American Explorations of Colonialism, Race, Gender and Sexuality* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006)
- Berryman, Charles, *From Wilderness to Wasteland: The Trial of the Puritan God in the American Imagination* (Port Washington: Kennikat, 2009)
- Bettleheim, Bruno, *The Uses of Enchantment* (London: Penguin, 1976)

- Biodrowski, Steve, 'The Story of how William Friedkin got out of his Tree', *Cinefantastique*, Vol. 20, No. 5, May 1990, 10-15.
- Bjelland, Mark D., Fellman, Jerome D., Getis, Arthur, and Getis, Judis, *Human Geography: Landscapes of Human Activities* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008)
- Blackwood, Algernon, *Pan's Garden: A Volume of Nature Stories* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912)
- _____ *The Willows* (USA: Wildside Press, 1907, 2005)
- Blakely-Cartwright, Sarah, and David Leslie Johnson, *Red Riding Hood* (London: Atom, 2011)
- Blamires, David, 'The Forest in the Grimms' Fairy Tales', in *The Children's Books History Society*, Issue 109, July 2014, 14-21.
- Blanton, Dennis B., "'The Weather is Fine, Wish You Were Here, Because I'm the Last One Alive': 'Learning' the Environment in the English New World Colonies", in *The Colonisation of Unfamiliar Landscapes: The Archaeology of Adaptation*, eds. Marcy Rockamn, James Steele, and R. Blust (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 190-99.
- Blyton, Enid, *The Magic Faraway Tree* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2007)
- Boardman, John, *The Great God Pan: The Survival of an Image* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997)
- Bondar, Alanna, F., 'Bodies on earth: exploring sites of the Canadian ecoGothic', in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and Bill Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 72-86.
- Botting, Fred, *Gothic: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 1996)
- _____ quoted in *Dark Cartographies: Exploring Gothic Spaces*, ed. Anya Heis-von der Lippe (Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press, 2013)

- Bradley, Linda, *Lars Von Trier (Contemporary Film Directors)* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010)
- Bremmer, Jan, trans. in D. Felton, 'Rejecting and Embracing the Monstrous', in *The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Asa Simon Mitmann and Peter J. Dendle, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012)
- Brown, David L., and Kai A. Schafft, *Rural People and Communities in the Twenty-First Century: Resilience and Transformation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011)
- Brown, Jennifer, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013)
- Budiansky, Stephen, *Nature's Keepers: The New Science of Nature Management* (New York: The Free Press, 1995)
- Buell, Frederick, *From Apocalypse to Way of Life* (New York: Routledge, 2003)
- Buell, Lawrence, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture and Environment in the U. S. and Beyond* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2001)
- Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990, 2006)
- Buttsworth, Matt, *The Death of Nature: The Radical Ecological Attack Upon Science, Capitalism and the Civilisation of the West* (Australia: Buttsworth Books, 2012)
- Buxton, Richard, quoted in Chet Van Duzer, 'Hic Sunt Dracones: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012)
- Calvino, Italo, 'The Wolf and the Three Girls', in *Italian Folktales* (London: Harcourt Inc., 1980)
- Campbell, Joseph and Moyers, Bill, *The Power of Myth* (USA: Random House, 2011)
- Carlson, Carol F., *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York and London: Norton and Company, 1987)

- Carroll, Lewis, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871)
<http://pdfbooks.org/0-carroll.htm>
- Carroll, Michael Thomas, 'Agent Cooper's Errand in the Wilderness: *Twin Peaks* and American Mythology', in *Literature and Film Quarterly*, 1993, Vol. 21, Issue 4, 51-59.
- Carroll, Noël, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990)
 _____ 'Afterword', in Steven Jay Schneider, *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- Carter, Angela, *The Bloody Chamber* (London: York Press, 2008)
- Chasseguet-Smirgel, Janine, *Female Sexuality: New Psychoanalytic Views* (Exeter: BPC Wheatons Ltd., 1991)
- Chevalier, Jean and Gheerbrant, Alain, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1969)
- Chion, Michel, *David Lynch: Second Edition*, trans. Robert Julian (London: BFI Publishing, 2006)
- Clagget, Thomas D., *William Friedkin: Films of Abberation, Obsession and Reality* (North Carolina: McFarland and Co., Inc., 1990)
- Clark, Timothy, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)
- Cloke, Paul and Little, Jo, eds., *Contested Countryside Cultures: Otherness, Marginalisation and Rurality* (London: Routledge, 2005)
- Clover, Carol J., *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992)

Coats, Lauren, Matt Cohen, John David Miles, Kinohi Nishikawa and Rebecca Walsh,

“‘Those We Don’t Speak Of’: Indians in *The Village*’, *PMLA*, Vol. 123, No. 2 (Mar., 2008), 358-74.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)

_____ ‘Postscript’ in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle, Ed.(Surrey: Ashgate, 2012)

Coleman, Jon T., *Vicious: Wolves and Men in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004)

Collins, Suzanne, *The Hunger Games* (London: Scholastic Children’s Books, 2009)

Corstorphine, Kevin, “‘The Blank Darkness Outside’: Ambrose Bierce and Wilderness Gothic at the End of the Frontier”, *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and Bill Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 120-33.

Cowan, Douglas E., *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008)

Coyle, Rebecca, ‘Spooked by Sound: *The Blair Witch Project*’, in *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound and Horror Cinema*, ed. Philip Hayward (London: Equinox, 2009)

Creed, Barbara, *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Oxon: Routledge, 1993)

_____ ‘Dining With Hannibal Lecter’, in *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud’s Worst Nightmare*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 188-202.

Cronon, William, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1996)

- Crosby, Sara L., 'Beyond Ecophilia: Edgar Allan Poe and the American Tradition of Ecohorror', in *ISLE*, Vol. 20.2, 2013, 513-525.
- Dahl, Roald, 'Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf', *Revolting Rhymes*. Online.
<http://ace.home.xs4all.nl/Literaria/Txt-Dahl.html>
- Dalby, Richard, *Dracula's Brood: Neglected Vampire Classics by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, M. R. James, Algernon Blackwood and Others*, (Northamptonshire: Equation, 1987)
- Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, *The Green Man: Tales from the Mythic Forest* (New York: Viking Juvenile, 2002)
- _____. *Snow White, Blood Red* (London: Penguin, 1993)
- Dawkins, Richard, *The Selfish Gene: 30th Anniversary Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- Day, William Patrick, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985)
- Deckard, Sharae, "'Uncanny States': Global EcoGothic and the World Ecology in Rana Dasgupta's *Tokyo Cancelled*", in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and Bill Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013),
- Descartes, René, *Discourse on the Method*, trans. John Veitch (New York: Cosimo Inc., 2008)
- Desmet, Christy, 'The Canonisation of Laura Palmer', in *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks*, ed. David Lavery (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 93-108.
- Dickinson, Emily, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Mary L. Hampson (USA: Burton J. Jones, 1960)
- Dolan, Jill, *The Feminist Spectator in Action: Feminist Criticism for the Stage and Screen* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013)

- Donalson, Malcolm Drew, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation: From Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellis Press, 2006)
- Druerr, Hans Peter, *Traumzeit: Über die Grenze Zwischen Wildnis und Zivilisation* (*Dreamtime: Over the Border Between Wilderness and Civilisation*), (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1978)
- Duzer, Chet Van, 'Hic Sunt Dracones: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 387-436.
- Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane; The Nature of Religion; The Significance of Religious Myth, Symbolism, and Ritual within Life and Culture*, (USA: Harcourt, 1959)
- Eysenck, Hans, quoted in Stephen Frosh, *A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (New York: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2012)
- Estok, Simon C., 'Theorising in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', in *ISLE*, Vol. 16.2, 2009, 685-95.
- Faithful, Marianne, quoted on the cover of Frank Wedekind's *Mine-Haha: Or, On the Bodily Education of Young Girls* (London: Hesperus Press Ltd., 2010)
- Feldman, George Franklin, *Cannibalism, Headhunting and Human Sacrifice in North America: A History Forgotten* (Pennsylvania: Alan C. Hood and Co. Inc., 2008)
- Foy, Joseph L., 'It Came from Planet Earth: Eco-Horror and the Politics of Postenvironmentalism in *The Happening*', in *Homer Simpson Marches on Washington: Dissent Through Popular Culture*, eds. Timothy M. Dale and Joseph J. Foy (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2010), 167-189.
- Frazier, James, *The Golden Bough* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Reference, 1993)

- Freud, Sigmund, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin Freud Library, 1933)
- _____ *The Uncanny*, ed. Adam Phillips, trans. David McLintock, (London: Penguin Books, 2003)
- _____ 'The Uncanny', in *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, ed. Benjamin Nelson (New York: Harper and Row, 1958)
- Frosh, Stephen, *A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory* (New York: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2012)
- Ganz, Shoshannah, 'Margaret Atwood's Monsters in the Canadian EcoGothic', in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and Bill Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 87-102.
- Garrard, Greg, *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2004)
- _____ ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)
- Gatta, John, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion and the Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (USA: Yale University Press, 1979)
- Gilmore, David, quoted in Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2010)
- Girard, René, *Violence and the Sacred* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1977)
- Gittleman, Sol, *Frank Wedekind* (New York: Twayne, 1969)
- Glotfelty, Cheryl, 'Preface', in *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

- Goddard, Drew, 'We Are Not Who We Are: Making *The Cabin in the Woods*'. Special Features. *The Cabin in the Woods*. Dir. Drew Goddard. Lionsgate, 2012.
- _____ and Joss Whedon, *Cabin in the Woods: The Official Visual Companion* (London: Titan Books, Ltd., 2012)
- Golding, William, *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954)
- Golledge, Reginald G., 'Human Wayfinding and Cognitive Maps', in *Colonisation of Unfamiliar Landscapes: Archaeology of Adaptation*, eds. Marcy Rockman and James Steele (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 25-43.
- Gonder, Patrick, Review of *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)*, Summer 2014, 21 (3). 716.
- Greenburg, Dan, *The Nanny* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987)
- Greenhill, Pauline, and Steven Kohm, 'Little Red Riding Hood and the Pedophile in Film: Freeway, Hard Candy, and The Woodsman', *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*, Volume 1, Issue 2, (Winter 2009), 35-65.
- Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, 'Hansel and Gretel', in *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, ed. Maria Tatar (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 2004), 72-85.
- _____ 'Little Red Riding Hood', in *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, ed. Maria Tatar (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 2004), 140-9.
- Gross, Larry, 'The Six Commandments of the Church of the Antichrist', *Film Comment* 45.5, (2009), 38-46.
- Grosz, Elizabeth, *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics and Art* (USA: Duke University press, 2011)

Hadžihalilović, Lucile, 'Interview with Lucile Hadžihalilović', Special Features, *Innocence*
(Dir: Lucile Hadžihalilović, 2004)

Hall, Matthew, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany* (New York: SUNY Press, 2011)

Harkins, Anthony, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2004)

Harrison, Robert Pogue, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation* (Chicago: Chicago University
Press, 1992)

Hayman, Richard, *Trees, Woodland and Civilisation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)

Heiland, Donna, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004)

Hillard, Tom J., 'Deep Into the Darkness Peering': An Essay on Gothic Nature, in
Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE), Autumn 2009,
Vol. 16, Issue 4, 685-95.

_____ 'From Salem Witch to *Blair Witch*: The Ritual Influence of American
Gothic Nature', in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and Bill Hughes (Manchester and
New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 103-119.

Hills, Matt, *The Pleasures of Horror* (London: Continuum, 2005)

_____ 'An Event-Based Definition of Art Horror', in *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic
Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, eds. Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Oxford:
Scarecrow Press, 2003), 138-57.

Holdstock, Robert, *Mythago Wood* (London: Gollancz, 1984)

Hole, Christina, *Witchcraft in England* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1977)

- Holland-Toll, Linda J., *As American as Mom, Baseball and Apple Pie: Constructing Community in Contemporary Horror Fiction* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 2001)
- Holy Bible: Quatercentenary Edition: King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)
- Hubbs, Joanna, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988)
- Hughes, William, “‘A Strange Kind of Evil’: Superficial Paganism and False Ecology in *The Wicker Man*’ in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and Bill Hughes Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 58-71.
- Hutton, Ronald, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)
- Ingram, David, *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000)
- _____. ‘Rethinking Eco-film Studies’, *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 459-474.
- Irigaray, Luce, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Jill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985)
- J. D., ‘Evil Dead: Film 2013’, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 3/22/2013, Issue 11, 85. Accessed 02/02/14.
- Jackson, Kimberly, *Technology, Monstrosity and Reproduction in Twenty-First Century Horror* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013)

- Jackson, Rosemary, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981)
- James, William, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (USA: Penguin Classics, 1985)]
- Jancovich, Mark, 'Foreword' in Jennifer Brown, *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), ix-x.
- Jenkins, Philip, *Beyond Tolerance: Child Pornography and the Internet* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001)
- _____ *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998)
- Johns, Andreas, *Baba Yaga: The Ambiguous Mother and Witch of the Russian Folktale* (USA: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2004)
- Joshi, S.T., *The Weird Tale* (Holicong: Wildside Press, 1990)
- Jung, Carl Gustav, *Analytical Psychology: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1925* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989)
- _____ *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (USA: Fontana Press, 1995)
- _____ *Psychology and Religion: West and East* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969)
- _____ *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (New York: Bollington Press, 1959)
- _____ *The Collected Works: Volume 11: Psychology and Religion: West and East: East and West*, eds. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London and New York: Routledge, 1969)

- Karlsen, Carol F., *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1998)
- Kearney, Richard, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003)
- Ketchum, Jack, *Off Season* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 1980)
- King, Stephen, *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* (New York: Scribner, 1999)
- Kinkaid, James R., *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992)
- _____. *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998)
- Klein, T.E.D., *The Ceremonies* (USA: Viking Press, 1984)
- _____. 'The Events at Poroth Farm', in *American Supernatural Tales*, S.T. Joshi (New York: Penguin, 2007), 307-359.
- Kolodny, Annette, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984)
- Kristeva, Julia, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)
- Kröger, Lisa, 'Panic, paranoia and pathos: ecocriticism in the eighteenth-century Gothic novel', in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and Bill Hughes (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 15-27.
- Lang, Andrew, quoted in Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (London: Penguin, 1976)

- Lawson, Thomas T., *Carl Jung: Darwin of the Mind* (London: Karnac Books, 2008)
- Layman, Richard, *The Woods Are Dark* (London: Headline Book Publishing, 1991)
- Laist, Randy, ed., *Plants and Literature: Essays in Critical Plant Studies* (New York: Rodopi, 2013)
- Leach, Eleanor Winsor, *Vergil's Eclogues: Landscapes of Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974)
- _____ quoted in Suzanne L. Roberts, *The ecoGothic: Pastoral Ideologies in the Gendered Gothic Landscape* (PHD Thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 2008)
- Ledwon, Lenora, 'Twin Peaks and the Television Gothic', *Literature Film Quarterly*, Volume 21, Issue 4 (1993), 260.
- Levack, Brian P., ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Levine, Judith, *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002)
- Lewis, Ward B., *The Ironic Dissident: Frank Wedekind in the View of his Critics* (Columbia: Camden House, 1997)
- Lindqvist, John Ajvide, *Little Star*, trans. Marlaine Delargy (London: Quercus, 2011)
- _____ quoted in Jason Meredith, *On Children and Horror: An Interview with John Ajvide Lindqvist*. <http://constructinghorror.com/index.php?id=180>
- _____ in a video interview on *Little Star*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrkEnl9-zM0>
- Lopez, Barry Holstun, *Of Wolves and Men* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1978)

Lovelock, James, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back – And How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Penguin, 2007)

Machen, Arthur, *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural* (Leyburn: Tartarus Press, 2006)

Maio, Kathi, 'Beauty Fades, but Fairy Tales Never Die', *Fantasy & Science Fiction*.
Sep/Oct2012, Vol. 123 Issue ¾, 204.

Maitland, Sarah, *Gossip from the Forest: The Tangled Roots of our Forests and Fairy Tales*
(London: Granta Books, 2012)

Mallet, Carl, quoted in Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)

Marder, Michael, *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013)

Mariconda, Steven J., 'The Hints and Portends of T.E.D. Klein', *Studies in Weird Fiction*,
Vol. 1 (Summer, 1986), 19-28.

Marriner, Brian, *Cannibalism: The Last Taboo!* (Random House eBooks, 2011)

Mathews, Richard, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2002)

Matolcsy, Kálmán, 'Masks in the Forest: The Dynamics of Surface and Depth in *Mythago Wood*', in *The Mythic Fantasy of Robert Holdstock: Critical Essays on the Fiction*,
ed. Donald E. Morse and Kálmán Matolcsy (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2011), 26-45.

May, Rollo, *The Cry for Myth* (London: Souvenir Press, 1993)

McCormack, Carol P. and Strathern, Marilyn, eds., *Nature, Culture and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)

- McCormack, Patricia, 'Posthuman Teratology', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, eds. Asa Simon Mittman and Peter J. Dendle (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 293-310.
- McDonagh, Maitland, *Broken Mirror/Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento*, (London: Sun Tavern Fields, 1991)
- McDonald, Rick, 'Sacred Violence and *The Cabin in the Woods*', *Slayage: The Journal of Joss Whedon Studies Association*, Fall 2013, Vol. 10, Issue 2, 15.
- McGowan, Todd, *The Impossible David Lynch* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2007)
- McKribben, Bill, quoted in John Gatta, 'Afterword', in *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion and the Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
- Meinig, D. W., ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979)
- Melbye, David, *Landscape Allegory in Cinema: From Wilderness to Wasteland* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010)
- Merchant, Carolyn, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003)
- _____. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983)
- Merivale, Patricia, *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969)

Merrell, James H., *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier*

(New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999)

Meyer, Stephanie, *Twilight*, (London: Atom, 2006)

Mickle, Jim, quoted in Lisa Mullen, 'We Are What We Are', November 2013, *Sight and Sound* Vol. 23, Issue 11, 92.

Mitchell, Stephen, ed. and trans., *Gilgamesh* (London: Profile Books, 2004)

Mittman, Asa Simon and Dendle, Peter J., eds. *The Ashgate Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012)

Moers, Ellen, *Literary Women: The Great Writers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976)

Morgan, Sally J., 'Heritage Noire: Truth, History and Colonial Anxiety in *The Blair Witch Project*', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 7.2 (2001), 137-48.

Morone, James A., *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003)

Morse, Donald E., 'Introduction' in *The Mythic Fantasy of Robert Holdstock: Critical Essays on the Fiction*, eds. Donald E. Morse and Kálmán Matolcsy (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2011)

Morton, Timothy, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007)

_____ *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010)

- Mosely, William G., Lanegran, David A., and Pundit, Kavita, *The Introductory Reader in Human Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007)
- Mullen, Lisa, 'We Are What We Are', November 2013, *Sight and Sound* Vol. 23, Issue 11, 92.
- Murphy, Bernice M., *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)
- Myers, Greg, "'The Power is Yours': Agency and Plot in *Captain Planet*", in *In Front of the Children: Entertainment and Young Audiences*, eds. Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), 62-74.
- Nasawaty, Chris, 'Evil Dead', *Entertainment Weekly*, 4.12.2013, Issue 1254, p. 52.
- Nash, Roderick Frazier, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001)
- Newman, Kim, *Nightmare Movies: Horror on the Screen Since the 1960's* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988 and 2011)
- _____ *The BFI Companion to Horror* (London: Cassell, 1996)
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Antichrist*, trans. H.L. Mencken (New York: Noontide Press, 1980)
- Norwood, Vera, *Made from this Earth: American Women and Nature* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993)
- Novik, Naomi, *Uprooted* (Oxford: Macmillan, 2015)
- Odell, Colin, and Michelle Le Blanc, *David Lynch* (Herts: Kamera Books, 2007)
- Orenstein, Catherine, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* (New York: Basic Books, 2002)

Oswald, Dana M., *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2010)

Otto, Rudolph, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. JW Harvey (New York: OUP, 1923; second edition, 1950)

_____ quoted in Douglas E. Cowan, *Sacred Terror: Religion and Horror on the Silver Screen* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008)

_____ quoted in Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002)

Parker, Elizabeth, 'Jug Face (2013): An interview with writer/director Chad Crawford Kinkle and producer Andrew van den Houten', *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*, Vol. 13 (Summer 2014), 155-57.

Perrault, Charles, 'Little Red Riding Hood' in *Perrault's Complete Fairy Tales*, trans. A. E. Johnson (Middlesex: Kestrel Books, 1961), 71-7.

Petek, Polona, 'The Death and Rebirth of Surrealism in Bohemia: Local Inflections and Cosmopolitan Aspirations in the Cinema of Jan Švankmajer', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, April 2009, Volume 17, Issue 1, 75-89.

Phillips, Dana, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Piepenburg, Erik, 'New Ugliness in a Little Cabin of Horrors', in *The New York Times*, 27.03.2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/31/movies/the-evil-dead-is-reimagined.html?_r=0) Accessed 01.11.2013.

Pindeo, Isabel Cristina, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997)

Plumwood, Val, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993)

Pomerance, Murray, 'Whatever is Happening to M. Night Shyamalan: meditation on the "Infection" Film', in *Critical Approaches to the Films of M. Night Shyamalan: Spoiler Warnings*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (New York: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2010), 203-18.

Porteous, Alexander, *The Forest in Folklore and Mythology* (New York: Macmillan, 2012)

Punter, David, 'Algernon Blackwood: Nature and Spirit', in *Ecogothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and Bill Hughes (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 44-67.

_____ 'Pity: Reflections of Algernon Blackwood's Gothic', in *English Language Notes*, Spring/Summer 2010, Vol. 48.1, 129-138.

Putnam, Robert D., *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2000)

Rachels, James, *Created from Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1991)

Rambo, Elisa, 'Preface', in Malcolm Drew Donaldson, *The History of the Wolf in Western Civilisation: From Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellis Press, 2006)

Rankin, Walter, *Grimm Pictures: Fairy Tale Archetypes in Eight Horror and Suspense Films* (North Carolina: McFarland and Co., 2007)

Rea, Paul W., Review: *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Civilisation* by Carolyn Merchant, in *International Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)* (Summer 2004), 11 (2): 296-7.

- Reis, Elizabeth, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithac and London: Cornell University Press, 1997)
- Roberts, Suzanne L., *The ecoGothic: Pastoral Ideologies in the Gendered Gothic Landscape* (PHD Thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 2008)
- Rockman, Marcy, Steele, James and Blust, R., eds., *The Colonisation of Unfamiliar Landscapes: The Archaeology of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997)
- Rogin, Michael, *Ronald Reagan: The Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (California: University of California Press, 1987)
- Ross, Andrew, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature's Debt to Society* (London: Verso, 1994)
- Roszack, Theodore, Gomes, Mary E. And Kanner, Allen D., eds., *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1995)
- Rowan, Michael Joshua, 'Innocence', *Cineaste*, Spring 2006, Volume 31, Issue 2, 59-61.
- Rowlandson, Mary, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together with the Faithfulness of His Promise Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), in *The Meridian Anthology of Early American Women Writers, from Anne Bradstreet to Louisa May Alcott, 1650-1865*, ed. Katherine M. Rogers (New York: Meridian, 1991)
- Rowling, J. K., *The Harry Potter Series* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998-2007)
- Rivkin, Julie and Ryan, Michael, eds., *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998)
- Robinson, Paul, *Freud and his Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

- Royle, Nicholas, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003)
- Russell, Jeffrey, quoted in Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1978)
- Russell, Sharon, 'The Witch in Film, Myth and Reality', in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film: Revised Edition*, eds., Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 63-71.
- Rust, Stephen A. and Soles, Carter, 'Ecohorror Special Cluster: "Living in Fear, Living in Dread, Pretty Soon We'll all be Dead"', *ISLE*, Vol. 21.3 (2013), 509-12
- Sage, Lorna, ed., *Essays on the Art of Angela Carter: Flesh and the Mirror* (London: Virago, 1994)
- Sage, Victor and Smith, Allan Lloyd, *Modern Gothic: A Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996)
- Sánchez-Escalonilla, Antonio, 'Hollywood and the Rhetoric of Panic: The Popular Genres of Action and Fantasy in the Wake of the 9/11 Attacks', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Spring 2010, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 10-20.
- Sanday, Peggy Reeves, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)
- Scharff, Virginia J., *Seeing Nature through Gender* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003)
- Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph, discussed in Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin Books, 1919, 2003)

- Schmidt, Anthony, *Darkest Desire: The Wolf's Own Tale* (New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1998)
- Schneider, Steven Jay, ed., *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- Short, Sue, *Misfit Sisters: Screen Horror and Female Rites of Passage* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2006)
- Shyamalan, M. Night, quoted in Antonio Sánchez-Escalonilla, 'Hollywood and the Rhetoric of Panic: The Popular Genres of Action and Fantasy in the Wake of the 9/11 Attacks', Spring 2010, *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, Volume 8, Issue 1, 10-20.
- Silverman, Jon, and David Wilson, *Innocence Betrayed: Paedophilia, the Media and Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002)
- Simmons, Margaret A., *Beauvoir and the Second Sex: Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism* (Maryland: Roman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1999)
- Skal, David, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror* (London: Plexus Publishing, 2001)
- Slotkin, Richard, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (USA: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1973)
- Slovic, Scott, 'Ecocriticism: Containing Multitudes, Practising Doctrine', in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000), 160-162.
- _____, 'Editor's Note', *International Studies in Literature and the Environment (ISLE)*, (Summer 2014), 21 (3) 507-50

- Smith, Allan Gardner Lloyd, *Uncanny American Fiction: Medusa's Face* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989)
- Smith, Andrew and Hughes, William, eds., *EcoGothic* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013)
- Soles, Carter, 'Sympathy for the Devil: The Cannibalistic Hillbilly', in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, eds. Stephen Rust, Salma Monali and Sean Cubitt (New York: Routledge, 2013), 233-250.
- Soper, Kate, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Nonhuman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)
- Spignesi, Stephen J., *The Essential Stephen King: A Ranking of the Greatest Novels, Short Stories, Movies, and Other Creations of the World's Most Popular Writer* (New Jersey: Career Press, 2001)
- Spufford, Francis, *The Child that Books Built* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2002)
- Stevens, Anthony, *On Jung* (London: Penguin, 1999)
- Stockwell, Robert, *Encyclopaedia of American Communes, 1663-1963* (Jefferson: MacFarland and Co., 1998)
- Stoker, Bram, *Dracula*, Ed. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal, Norton Critical Editions (London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1997)
- Sullivan, Jack, *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978)
- Tatar, Maria, *The Annotated Brothers Grimm* (London: Norton and Company, 2004)
- Taylor, Brian, *Perspectives on Paedophilia* (London: Billing and Sons Ltd.)

- Thomsen, Bodil Marie, 'Antichrist-Chaos Reigns: The Event of Violence and the Haptic Image in Lars von Trier's Film', in *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, Vol. 1 (2009), 1-10.
- Thoreau, Henry David, *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1854)
- Tickell, Sir Crispen, 'Foreword', in James Lovelock's *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back – And How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Penguin, 2007)
- Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Cornell, 1975)
- Towlson, John, *Subversive Horror Cinema: Countercultural Messages of Films from Frankenstein to the Present* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2014)
- Tuan, Yi-Fu, *Landscapes of Fear* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1979)
- Turner, Frederick Jackson, quoted in John Gatta, *Making Nature Sacred: Literature, Religion and the Environment in America from the Puritans to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
- Tyburski, Susan J., 'A Gothic Apocalypse: Encountering the Monstrous in American Cinema', in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and Bill Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 147-59.
- Urry, John, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Surge, 1992)
- Värnik, P., 'Suicide in the World', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Issue 9, Volume 3, 760-771.
- Vasseleu, Cathryn, 'Tactile Animation: Haptic Devices and the Švankmajer Touch', *Senses and Society*, Winter 2009, Volume 4, Issue 2, 141-62.

- Wagner, Katherine A., 'Haven't We Been Here Before?: The Cabin in the Woods, the Horror Genre, and Placelessness', *Slayage: The Journal of the Joss Whedon Studies Association*, Vol. 10.2, Fall 2013. Online.
<http://www.whedonstudies.tv/uploads/2/6/2/8/26288593/wagner.pdf>
- Wallace, Sue, ed., *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reader* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1996)
- Wandersee, J. H. And Schlusser, E. E., 'Toward a Theory of Plant Blindness', *Plant Science Bulletin*, no. 47.1 (2001), 2-8 .
- Warner, Marina, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1994)
- Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew, ed., *Critical Approaches to the Films of M. Night Shyamalan: Spoiler Warnings* (New York: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2010)
- _____, 'Lostness (Blair Witch)', in *Nothing That Is: Millennial Cinema and the Blair Witch Controversies*, eds. Sarah Lynn Higley and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004).
- Wheatley, Catherine, 'Not Politics but People: The "Feminine Aesthetic" of Valeska Grisebach and Jessica Hausner', in *New Austrian Film*, ed. Robert von Dassanowsky (London: Berghahn Books, 2011), 136-50.
- White, Leanne, and Frew, Elspeth, eds. *Dark Tourism and Place Identity: Managing and Interpreting Dark Places* (London: Routledge, 2013)
- Williams, Paul, *Wolves of the Imagination: Wolves of England* (Loughborough: Heart of Albion, 2007)
- Williamson, J. W., *Hillbillyland* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995)

Wordsworth, William, 'Tables Turned', in *A Choice of Wordsworth's Verse*, ed. R.S. Thomas (London: Faber and Faber, 1971)

Zapf, Hubert, 'Literature as Cultural Ecology: Notes Towards a Functional Theory of Imaginative Texts, With Examples from American Literature', in *Literary History – Cultural History: Forcefields and Tensions*, ed. Herbert Grabes (Tübingen: Gunter Naar Verlag, 2001), 85-100.

Zipes, Jack, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002)

_____, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of Genre* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012)

Žižek, Slavoj, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile Books, 2008)

WEBSITES

Akkok, Raziye, 'British Adventurer Lost for Two Days in the Australian Outback after Taking a Wrong Turn', 23.08.2015.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/11819133/British-adventurer-lost-for-two-days-in-the-Australian-outback-after-taking-wrong-turn.html>. Accessed: 12.09.2015.

Baccolini, Raffaella, 'Dystopian Fears, Utopian Nightmares? Reflections on M. Knight Shyamalan's *The Village*'

- http://www.mediazioni.sitlec.unibo.it/images/stories/PDF_folder/document-pdf/2006/dossier2006/Village/2%20baccolini.pdf. Accessed: 22.06.2011.
- Blizek, William, Review of *Jug Face*, in *Journal of Religion and Film*, Volume 17 (April 2013) <http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol17/iss1/15>.
- Brown, Christopher A., *The Video Nasties Moment: Examining the Films behind the Scare*, 2014, www.lulu.com.
- Dodd, DW,, 'Wilderness Act' (1964), in *Encyclopedia of Politics of the American West*, CQ Press, Washington, DC, ed. SL Danver, 665-6. www.dx.doi.org. Accessed 18.08.2015.
- Galman, Brett, 'Tales That Witness Madness'. <http://www.oh-the-horror.com/page.php?id=1199>. Accessed 02.08.14.
- Hallock, Chris, 'Jug Face Film Review'. <http://diaboliquemagazine.com/jug-face-film-review/> Accessed 04.08.2014.
- Hausner, Jessica, in 'AFC Austrian Film Commission: Jessica Hausner about *Hotel*', http://www.afc.at/jart/prj3/afc/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1164272180506&artikel_id=8691. Accessed: 22.03.14.
- Hooker, Meli, Review, '*Little Star* by John Ajvide Lindqvist'. <http://dreadfultales.com/2013/04/22/little-star-by-john-ajvide-lindqvist/>. Accessed: 03.03.2014.
- Johnstone, Doug, '*Little Star* by John Ajvide Lindqvist: Raised in the Dark, Powered by Vengeance'. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/little-star-by-john-ajvide-lindqvist-2367601.html>. Accessed: 04.03.2014.

Keetley, Dawn and Kurtz, Rita, Call for papers, 'Plant Horror/The Monstrous Vegetal', 2014.

<http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/58083>

Kraus, Daniel, Review of *Little Star*. <http://rptcd.catalogue.tcd.ie/ebsco-w->

[a/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c61e6acc-eed1-4776-b612-](http://ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c61e6acc-eed1-4776-b612-1d977e8041b7%40sessionmgr4004&vid=2&hid=4209)

[1d977e8041b7%40sessionmgr4004&vid=2&hid=4209](http://ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c61e6acc-eed1-4776-b612-1d977e8041b7%40sessionmgr4004&vid=2&hid=4209). Accessed 08.06.2014.

Matthews, Kevin, 'Jug Face'. <http://flickfeast.co.uk/reviews/film-reviews/jug-face-2013/>.

Accessed 02.01.2014.

Merchant, Brian, 'The Evolution of Ecohorror, from *Godzilla* to Global Warming', Nov. 14th,

2012. <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/the-evolution-of-eco-horror-from-godzilla-to-global-warming>. Accessed 10.08/2012.

Meslow, Scott, Article on *Twin Peaks*. [http://theweek.com/article/index/238491/twin-peaks-](http://theweek.com/article/index/238491/twin-peaks-the-definitive-plan-to-continue-the-series)

[the-definitive-plan-to-continue-the-series](http://theweek.com/article/index/238491/twin-peaks-the-definitive-plan-to-continue-the-series). Accessed 08.09.2013.

O'Shea, Keri, 'Jug Face'. [http://www.brutalashell.com/2013/04/dead-by-dawn-2013-review-](http://www.brutalashell.com/2013/04/dead-by-dawn-2013-review-jug-face-2013/)

[jug-face-2013/](http://www.brutalashell.com/2013/04/dead-by-dawn-2013-review-jug-face-2013/). Accessed 04.06.2014.

Piepenburg, Erik, 'New Ugliness in a Little Cabin of Horrors', in *The New York Times*,

27.03.2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/31/movies/the-evil-dead-is-reimagined.html?_r=0. Accessed 01.11.13.

Rooney, David, Sundance Review: 'We Are What We Are'.

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/we-are-what-we-are-415662>. Accessed 02.06.2014.

Serial. Prod. Sarah Koenig. This American Life, 2014. Podcast. www.serialpodcast.com

Sexton, Anne, 'Red Riding Hood', 1971. [http://allpoetry.com/poem/8505447-Red-Riding-](http://allpoetry.com/poem/8505447-Red-Riding-Hood-by-Anne-Sexton)

[Hood-by-Anne-Sexton](http://allpoetry.com/poem/8505447-Red-Riding-Hood-by-Anne-Sexton). Accessed 20.07.2012.

Smith, Sean, 'Curse of the Blair Witch'. <http://www.newsweek.com/curse-blair-witch-125931>. Accessed 04.03.2014.

Sherrard, Phillip, 'The Rape of Nature'.
<http://www.stpaulsirvine.org/The%20Rape%20of%20Nature.pdf>. Accessed 20.08.15.

Stromer, Richard, 'An Odd Sort of God for the British: Exploring the Appearance of Pan in Late Victorian and Edwardian Literature'. www.soulmyths.com/oddgod.pdf. Accessed 27.02.14.

Ulaby, Neda, 'Eco-Horror: Green Panic on the Silver Screen'.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91485965> . Accessed 02.02.2013.

Vidal, John, 'Global Warming Causes 300,000 Deaths a Year, Says Kofi Annan Thinktank', 29.05.2009. <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/may/29/1>. Accessed 12.06.2014.

"Wilderness, n.". OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/229003?redirectedFrom=wilderness>. Accessed 16.08.2015.

FILMOGRAPHY

Antichrist. Dir. Lars von Trier. Zentropa Entertainments, 2009. Film.

Deliverance. Dir. John Boorman. Elmer Productions, 1972. Film.

Devil's Pass. Dir. Renny Harlin. IFC Films, 2013. Film.

Evil Dead. Dir. Fede Alvarez. TriStar Pictures, 2013. Film.

Fire, Walk With Me. Dir. David Lynch. New Line Cinema, 1992. Film.

Freeway. Dir. Matthew Bright. Republic Pictures, 1996. Film.

Ginger Snaps. Dir. John Fawcett. Motion International, 2000. Film.

Hard Candy. Dir. David Slade. Lionsgate, 2005. Film.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. Dir: Chris Columbus. Warner Bros, 2002. Film.

Häxan. Dir. Benjamin Christensen. Skandias Filmbyrå, 1922. Film.

Hotel. Dir. Jessica Hausner. Bruno Wagner, 2004. Film.

Innocence. Dir: Lucile Hadžihalilović. Artificial Eye, 2004. Film.

Into the Woods. Created. Stephen Sondheim. Broadway, 1986. Musical.

Into the Woods. Dir. Rob Marshall. Walt Disney Pictures, 2014. Film.

Jordskott. Dir. Henrik Björn. ITV, 2015. Television series.

Jug Face. Dir. Chad Crawford Kinkle. Bloody Disgusting, 2013. Film.

Once Upon a Time. Created. Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz. ABC Studios, 2011-.

Television series.

Otesánek. Dir. Jan Švankmajer. Zeitgeist Films, 2000. Film.

Red Riding Hood. Dir. Catherine Hardwicke. Warner Brothers, 2011. Film.

Sleepy Hollow. Dir: Tim Burton. Paramount Pictures, 1999. Film.

Snow White and the Huntsman. Dir. Rupert Sanders. Universal Pictures, 2012. Film.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. Dir: Larry Morey, Ben Sharpsteen, Perce Pearce, David Hand, William Cottrell. Walt Disney Pictures, 1937. Film.

Suspiria. Dir: Dario Argento. Seda Spettacoli, 1977. Film.

Tales That Witness Madness. Dir. Freddie Francis. Paramount Pictures, 1973.

Thale. Dir. Aleksander L. Nordaas. Screamfest, 2012. Film.

The Blair Witch Project. Dir. Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez. 20th Century Fox, 2003. Film.

The Cabin in the Woods. Dir. Drew Goddard. Mutant Enemy Productions, 2012.

The Evil Dead. Dir: Sam Raimi. Renaissance Pictures, 1981. Film.

The Guardian. Dir. William Friedkin. Universal Pictures, 1990. Film.

The Happening. Dir. M. Night Shyamalan. Twentieth Century Fox, 2008. Film.

The Last Winter. Dir. Larry Fessenden. Antidote Films, 2006. Film.

The Purge. Dir. James DeMonaco. Universal Pictures, 2013. Film.

The Thing. Dir. John Carpenter. Universal Pictures, 1982. Film.

The Village. Dir. M. Night Shyamalan. Touchstone Pictures, 2004.

The Woman. Dir. Lucky McKee. Bloody Disgusting, 2011. Film.

The Woodsman. Dir. Nicole Kassell. Newmarket Films, 2004. Film.

The Wizard of Oz. Dir. Victor Fleming. Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer (MGM), 1939. Film.

The Woods. Dir. Lucky McKee. Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, 2006. Film.

Trick 'r Treat. Dir. Michael Dougherty. Warner Premiere, 2007. Film.

Troll Hunter. Dir. André Øvredal. SF Norge A/S, 2010. Film.

Twin Peaks. Created. Mark Frost and David Lynch. Lynch/Frost Productions, 1990-1.
Television Series.

Wayward Pines. Created. Chad Hodge. Blinding Edge Pictures, 2015. Television series.

We Are What We Are. Dir. Jim Mickle. Entertainment One, 2013. Film.

YellowBrickRoad. Dir. Jesse Holland, Andy Mitton. Points North Films, 2010. Film.