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Gothic Nature: An Introduction

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A tale of two Gothic Natures:

One: You are lost in a wood. Now survive.
Two: The planet you think you live on no longer exists. Now survive.

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

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

1. The Nature in Gothic

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[1] See Jimmy Packham's essay in this issue for a more extensive discussion of what he terms 'vegetarian horror'.
[2] Stacy Alaimo's notion of 'trans-corporeality', which essentially holds that distinct categories of 'human' and 'nonhuman' are impossible because everything is ultimately 'intermeshed', is intriguing in this context and is explored in Marc Ricard's essay, below.

2. The Gothic in Nature

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Gothic Nature: Definitions, Developments, and Directions

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Welcome to *Gothic Nature*

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

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

Kevin Corstorphine's essay, '"Don't be a Zombie": Deep Ecology and Zombie Misanthropy', looks to the ways in which the Gothic imagination is used to convey the message of environmentalism. Drawing on such varied and fascinating subjects as population growth, horror fiction, and real-life terrorism, he questions if and how we can develop an aesthetics and

attitude of environmental conservation without resorting to casting either ourselves or Nature as the horror villain. He argues that for real change we need to 'reprogramme our minds' and explores the crucial importance of our *stories* in achieving this.

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

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

In 'EcoGothic, Ecohorror and Apocalyptic Entanglement in Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Tales of the Black Freighter*', James L. Smith and Colin Yeo focus on the embedded narrative of *Black Freighter*, which lies within the graphic novel *Watchmen* (1986-87).

Building on emerging discussions of the nautical Gothic, they explore how *Black Freighter* provides a 'vocabulary of horror' which echoes the grim and environmentally entangled fears of the 1980s. Smith and Yeo shed new light on Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' modern classic, interestingly exploring how it 'takes on', in their words, 'the challenge of the ecoGothic' through its metatextuality.

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

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

Gothic Nature has come into existence specifically to be a part of the response to various calls for what Timothy Morton (2016) terms a 'dark ecology' (p. 1). It seeks to be a

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

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

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

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BIOGRAPHY

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

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