

GOTHIC NATURE



GOTHIC NATURE II

How to Cite: Hauke, A. (2021) The Wicked Witch in the Woods: Puritan Maternalism, Ecofeminism, and Folk Horror in Robert Eggers' *The Witches: A New-England Folktale*. *Gothic Nature*. 2, pp. 37-61. Available from: <https://gothicnaturejournal.com/>.

Published: March 2021

Peer Review:

All articles that appear in the *Gothic Nature* journal have been peer reviewed through a fully anonymised process.

Copyright:

© 2021 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Open Access:

Gothic Nature is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

COVER CREDIT:

Model IV, 2017

Artist: D Rosen

Cast Aluminum (Original Objects: Buck Antler and Stomach (Decorative Model), Camel Mask

(Theatrical Model), Whip (Didactic Model), Stiletto (Decoy Model), Goose Neck (Decoy Model),

Nylons, Bra Underwire, Calvin Klein Dress, Facial Mask, Necklace, Wax

21 x 25 x 12 in.

Photo credit: Jordan K. Fuller

Fabrication: Chicago Crucible

WEB DESIGNER:

Michael Belcher

**The Wicked Witch in the Woods: Puritan Maternalism, Ecofeminism, and Folk Horror in
Robert Eggers' *The VVitch: A New-England Folktale***

Alexandra Hauke

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I read Robert Eggers' 2015 film *The VVitch: A New-England Folktale* across ideas of maternalism, ecofeminism, and folk horror to show that the interconnected disenfranchisement of women and nature in the United States is rooted in a colonial past—one that continues to underlie contemporary socio-political structures. I argue that the American folk horror genre, in particular, calls for critical discussions of the intersections between gender and ecology. One of the genre's principal markers is the significance of landscape as a keeper of the histories of Puritan sins, wherein the damnation of witches in the seventeenth century becomes a violent symbol of the overall subordinate status of women in the patriarchal order. *The VVitch* makes clear the limited opportunities of woman-, mother-, and witchhood in colonial New England, demonstrating that a potential move from the maternal to the postmaternal, and from environmental feminisation to ecofeminism, can only be accomplished if the folk recognise their responsibilities to the world and all its inhabitants.

Like many horror films in recent years, Robert Eggers' directorial debut *The VVitch: A New-England Folktale* (2015) has left viewers and critics divided, regarding both its quality and its generic classification. In this essay, I propose a reading of the film through the lens of American notions of 'folk horror' and the ways this more recent subgenre intersects with significant tenets of ecofeminism. I set out to uncover the ways in which the historical-colonial domination of both women and nature underpins contemporary patriarchal supremacy in the United States, continuously rendering human and non-human 'Others' as inferior. I suggest that *The VVitch* offers postmaternalism and ecofeminism as potential measures to free its protagonist, Thomasin (Anya

Taylor-Joy), from various cultural-political and familial expectations: as a young woman, daughter, sister, and—eventually—as a satanic witch with allegedly destructive and evil powers. Ultimately, it will become clear that the ‘folk’ in folk horror encapsulates both the struggles at the core of American folklore and, as I have argued elsewhere, ‘the fundamental fear of being folk, of being human’ (Hauke, 2020: p. 172). In this context, I will show that Thomasin’s mother Katherine (Kate Dickie)—a product of the patriarchal system of seventeenth-century New England and a marker of maternalism as the allegedly singular natural calling of any colonial woman—is in fact the central horrifying agent of the film, echoing Matilda Groves’ (2017) notion that folk horror ‘is horror of the people, stemming from folklore’ (n.p.). Thomasin’s only way out therefore is by rejecting the Puritan ideals passed on through generations and entering an alternative ‘safe space’ that is physically, psychologically, and emotionally detached from her family’s Old-World belief system. Witchhood as an extension of the natural propensities of the earth and woods, as well as a linkage to the powers of Satan, serves as a liberating measure for Thomasin. Thus, postmaternal ecofeminism is here suggested as a viable option for women to break free from the horrors of past and present folk.

Women, Nature, and American Folk Horror

Folk horror, as a literary and cultural form, offers new insights into the connections between past events, structures, or practices and contemporary epistemologies. In American folk horror, the myths of discovery and the realities of colonisation—as well as the present-day repercussions of these horrors, especially for marginalised groups—constitute a recurring backdrop. These tales often hark back to actions carried out and ideologies put in place during the establishment of Puritan settlements. Many scholars have noted the substantial impact of the Puritans, Pilgrims, and the Promised Land on American national narratives. In *By Land and By Sea* (1953), for example, historian Samuel Eliot Morison observes that the ‘place of the pilgrim fathers in American history can best be stated by a paradox. Of slight importance in their own time, they are of great and increasing significance in our time, through the influence of their story on American folklore and tradition’ (p. 234). A similar paradox can be observed in the reception of these stories: while American national narratives are riddled with violent land seizures, genocides, and brutal dehumanisation systems such as slavery, much of their legacy has become inscribed in American

cultural memory as a glorious past defined by victory, justice, and perseverance. Anthropologist Margaret Mead (2000) remarks in this context that, in the U.S., the ‘assumption that men were created equal, with an equal ability to make an effort and win an earthly reward, although denied every day by experience is maintained every day by our folklore and our daydreams’ (p. 125). As such, the horrors of these colonial times were established and carried forward by the dominant folk: groups of white, male oppressors responsible for the suffering of allegedly inferior communities (such as Native Americans) and the large-scale erasure of accounts by less privileged peoples. For this reason, I consider folk horror to be a timely and valuable addition to horror literature and scholarship. The backbone of American horror has always been the forceful emergence, history, and development of the United States and its exceptional collection of founding myths. Folk horror is distinct because it foregrounds why and how practices by certain folk have translated into folklore and, therefore, an American cultural consciousness. In doing so, it reveals the horrifying influence folklore continues to have on present and future folk.

I consider folk horror to be not only a complex textual category that builds on the legacies of American horror overall, but also a cultural-political phenomenon that uncovers—largely without the need for jump-scares or serial killers—the violence at the core of processes of American identity- and meaning-making. In this sense, folk horror also serves as a reminder of the roots of the current culture of fear in the United States (cf. Bader et al., Skoll, McCollum), making visible the ghosts of the past and the ways they cast their shadows over contemporary events. In *The Birth of the American Horror Film* (2018), Gary D. Rhodes calls this process of passing down unresolved traumata ‘spectral evidence’ and offers the most pertinent example: ‘horror as an emotion has gripped American life for centuries [...]. But no horrifying event from the colonial era looms larger than the Salem Witch Trials of 1692’ (p. 3). Rhodes’ thesis serves as fertile starting ground for my arguments about American folk horror in the context of ecofeminism and Eggers’ *The Witch*. My reading suggests that the link between colonial notions of womanhood and the natural environment is at the core of a current American condition, one still predicated on the reductive image of women as natural birthgivers, of nature as Mother Earth, and thus as categories falling victim to patriarchal discrimination and dominance. What will become clear, therefore, is how and why the settlers’ original idea about the wilderness in the New World as an evil breeding ground was carried forward and returns in folk horror narratives of the twenty-first

century, an era largely defined by practices of degradation at the core of anthropocentric and homogenocentric ecosystems.

In his seminal study *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* (2017), Adam Scovell outlines a four-part narrative framework he calls the ‘folk horror chain’, which consists of landscape, isolation, skewed belief systems and morality, and a summoning/happening (p. 17-18). As outlined above, landscape, especially through the connection to nature’s ecologies in past and present American territories, also becomes one of the fundamental elements in American folk horror. Tom Hillard (2013) argues that the settlers’ mission to conquer the newly encountered wilderness is grounded in ‘an important imaginative symbolic structure that allowed them to “read the world” to interpret signs from God’. This idea ‘not only coloured Puritan textual representations of nature, but also prefigures key characteristics of the literary Gothic mode as it is later developed’ (p. 106). Hillard’s analysis is framed by theoretical underpinnings of the ecoGothic, which focuses on discussions of nature as ‘a more contested term [that] appears to participate in a language of estrangement rather than belonging’ (Smith and Hughes, 2013: p. 2). I argue that the process of division stemming from the colonial separation of culture from nature, and civilisation from wilderness, can be similarly found in American folk horror with regard to the divine subsumption of the environment and women. Hillard’s reading of the 1999 box office hit *The Blair Witch Project* as ‘a modern manifestation of older, widespread cultural anxieties about the natural world’ (p. 106) speaks not only to this connection between American ecology and gender questions but also to the ways in which the film can be read as a precursor to *The VVitch*. In this found footage horror movie, protagonist Heather Donahue (whose character is named after the actress) resembles the biblical Eve when she convinces her fellow male travellers to move deeper and deeper into forbidden territories only to be punished by an unseen entity. The eponymous Blair Witch, or whatever iteration of nature striking back against unwelcome intrusions is at work, is never revealed. What is clear, however, is that the film provides and plays with a view of the association of the sinister forest with the evil witch coming to haunt the explorers, carrying forward the Puritan damnation of agents of the Devil, who were thought to be almost exclusively female. This association between women and satanic powers goes back to what Elizabeth Reis (1997) calls ‘the allegedly unappeasable nature of women’ (p. 93), whereby Puritanism declared women as highly susceptible to satanic attacks of the body and soul. They

‘were in a double bind during the witchcraft episodes’ of seventeenth-century New England because ‘the representation of the vulnerable, perpetually unsatisfied, and yearning female soul, passively waiting for Christ but always open to the Devil as well, implicated corporeal women themselves’ (Reis, 1997: p. 94). There is no doubt, therefore, that if the Blair Witch exists, she must be female, and her possible snatching of Heather’s friend Josh (Joshua Leonard) one night can thus be read as both a revenge-feminist act against patriarchy and a service to the Devil’s plan to eliminate other men in order to be able to reign supreme.

Reis’ idea that, because of their biology and anatomy, female-identified humans are as much read as the principal evildoers in colonial ideologies as supernatural women also explains Heather’s downfall in the film. Her suffering can be read as punishment by the Blair Witch for bringing representatives of the patriarchy, namely Mike and Josh, to her woods to conquer them. The group’s crime of trespassing into lands they do not own for the benefit of their film project, thereby paralleling the settler imperative of discovery, is further exacerbated by the fact that Heather—a woman—serves as the leader. Her fate, very much like Thomasin’s in *The Witch* before she becomes the eponymous protagonist, thus seems to be sealed: as long as she chooses to align herself with the patriarchal order, she does not seem to stand a chance to leave the forest alive. Had she entered into conversation with the Blair Witch and thus opened herself up to supernatural possibilities or existences, like Thomasin, Heather may have been spared further misery. What this shows is that there seems to be only one way out for these women, if not death: namely, an alignment with the Devil as a nature-bound witch, which does not constitute an opportunity for full agency but rather conditional freedom under the wings of another master. These complex connections between the nature of the land and the nature of women as victims to the rulers of heaven or hell testify to the ways in which the American landscape was, and still is, inscribed with the histories of gender injustice and environmental degradation that demand further attempts at their mutual liberation. *The Blair Witch Project* serves as a precedent of these ideas in the context of folk horror. Groves (2017) argues that ‘[a] film about witch hunts, regardless of plot and setting, does not need witchcraft to tell a story. The most important element is that the story concerns a society that believes in witchcraft’ (n.p.). Arguably, therefore, the physical presence of the Blair Witch is irrelevant; what counts is the film’s success in establishing a diegesis whose

logic and suspense depend on the characters' and viewers' engagement with the idea of the witch's existence.

It is at this point that *The Blair Witch Project* testifies to the double signification of folk horror. First, the Blair Witch is treated at once like a figment of legendary fables and a real entity haunting and chasing Heather, Mike, and Josh through the woods. Second, while the Blair Witch is also described as the central evildoer of the film by all characters, the three film students—the folk—become the uninvited intruders with a self-righteous entitlement to conquer the woods and the witch. As such, much like we will see in *The VVitch*, the film's true horror is human, alluding to the fact that, in folk horror, no supernatural presence is necessary for violent tendencies to occur. In this way, *The Blair Witch Project* as forerunner of *The VVitch* prepares the themes of Puritanism, woman- and witchhood as well as environmental exploitation in the context of American folk horror. While Eggers' film shows viewers the eponymous witch and thus seems to defy the idea of the inconsequence of her existence, this explicit portrayal can also be read as a mere manifestation of the Puritan imagination of witches, who, in 1630s New England, were very much believed to be a lived reality. This points towards the meaning of the film's title, whereby Eggers alerts viewers to the fact that, especially in colonial times, '[w]itches were integral to the cultural fabric of America' (Davies, 2013: p. 21) because of the ways they served as testaments of the very real presence of demonic horrors. It could also explain the rather stereotypical and dichotomous interpretations of this figure in *The VVitch* as haggard crone or sensual young temptress. In the former guise, she is replete with crooked nose, hairy mole, and broomstick; in the latter, she is sexualised, beautiful, and starkly reminiscent of Snow White and Little Red Riding Hood—heroines from stories known all-to-well for their 'splitting' of 'good' and 'bad' femininity. Witchhood is thus coded in these binary structures in the film, very much like Puritan womanhood overall, in which case the 'good' wife, mother, and family caretaker emerges in contrast to the 'bad' woman who rebels against these roles—who then, naturally, must be a disobedient witch. This dualistic distinction speaks to Chloé Germaine Buckley's (2019) observation that the female witch is 'a deeply ambiguous figure that proves problematic for feminism and its project to subvert or otherwise destabilise misogynist symbols' (p. 22). It also brings with it an inherent contradiction: on the one hand, motherhood is seen as natural for all women because of their so-called prescribed biological predispositions, while witchhood is unnatural in that it stands in

opposition to the Puritan mission to fulfil this role. On the other hand, female closeness to nature is what is responsible for women falling victim to the Devil and becoming witches in the first place. The idea, then, of what comes ‘naturally’ to women is subjected in either case to regulations of a patriarchal logic, whereby the woman does or does not conform and is then judged accordingly. What will become clear from my reading of *The VVitch* is that, even if the Puritan woman does everything to live up to her role, she is still subjected to judgmental gender discourses applied by the male-dominated society around her, limiting not only her opportunities for agency but also her chance at peaceful survival.

Women/witches and nature/land can be simultaneously read and interpreted at will by ‘higher’ powers—be they God, the Devil, or male Puritans. The allegedly inextricable link between these categories sets women and land off from male masters through what Mary Phillips (2016) calls ‘sets of interrelated and hierarchical dualisms, such as mind/body, reason/nature, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine or human/nature’ (p. 472). Thereby:

‘the privileging of the first terms in these dualisms expresses what can be regarded as authentically human/masculine and this is defined as superior and in opposition to the natural, physical or biological realm. Idealised masculinity qua humanity transcends this realm, while women, nature and all else that do not conform are “othered” to confirm and justify their subordination’ (2016: p. 472).

Phillips’ idea echoes the central concerns of ecofeminism, emphasising the mutual oppression of women and nature while aiming for their liberation from their essentialist alignment. Emily Carr and Christine Flanagan are among the few scholars who have examined the significance of ecofeminism in horror and the Gothic, following feminist initiatives outlining the roles of mothers, wives, and daughters, as well as the problems around gender inequality in the genre. Folk horror, however, has not yet seen comprehensive theorisations about (eco)feminism despite the genre’s clear connections to these movements. Recent American folk horror texts, such as Ryan Murphy’s and Brad Falchuk’s *American Horror Story: Cult* (2017), Jeremy Saulnier’s *Hold the Dark* (2018), or Ari Aster’s *Hereditary* (2018), are especially invested in the theme of motherhood as it intersects, to varying degrees, with categories of gender, sexuality, and

naturalisation, calling into question the ways women are expected to conform to prescribed roles only to be demonised when their agency as mothers is undercut by the horrors of patriarchal orders. Sarah Arnold (2013) advocates ‘maternal horror cinema’ as a standout category that often ‘perpetuates an ideology of idealised motherhood’; nevertheless, she continues, ‘certain contradictions and ruptures emerge from the texts, indicating that the maternal ideal is not a stable construct’ (p. 4). Maternalism, a complex set of beliefs and discourses foregrounding—sometimes even glorifying—this ideal of women’s natural propensities for motherhood through childbearing, caring, and nurturing, is also continuously thematised and challenged in the folk horror genre, pointing towards larger questions and problematics surrounding normative, one-dimensional, and possibly outdated ideas of womanhood in and outside of horror fiction.

In this essay, I want to make the connection between ecofeminism and Puritan maternalism in *The VVitch* to uncover the ways in which the film’s protagonist, 16-year-old Thomasin, will be unable to emerge as a heroine because she is doomed from the start as both a woman and a witch. I will situate this argument within the frames of American folk horror, a subgenre grounded in landscape and clashing belief systems but wherein horror principally derives from damaging political ideologies perpetuated by human agents. Thereby, I want to show that Thomasin’s survival and liberation from the constraints of her family, if not her full freedom from patriarchy, can only be guaranteed through matricide and thus through ridding herself of her maternalist role model. While this may indicate that the mother is surprisingly depicted as Thomasin’s main adversary, the film clearly illustrates that this is only true because Katherine is herself a product of the patriarchal order of Puritanism, following learned rules, conforming to societal standards, and condemning any deviations from the sacred norm. Through the clash between Katherine’s outdated worldview and Thomasin’s understanding of the ill-fitting one-dimensionality of this system, *The VVitch* approximates not only central concerns of folk horror but also notions of postmaternalism. Alison Bartlett (2016) describes this idea through the example of a situation when the ‘daughter no longer finds “what has always been” acceptable, while the mother seems to have performed those expectations without questioning them’ (p. 487). Postmaternalism, Bartlett continues, sees ‘the need for a shift in the patriarchal legacies of a mother–daughter continuum whereby mothers model for daughters the experience of marriage and the management of men in a compulsorily heterosexual environment of unequal opportunity and male privilege’ (pp. 487-88).

It is for this reason that *The VVitch* participates in the practices of folk horror: its horrors may be depicted through the eyes of the past, introducing a society that speaks to techniques of New World oppression as well as Puritan models of femininity, masculinity, and power; however, the film's message resonates with twenty-first-century realities, wherein the horrors of androcentric and anthropocentric practices constitute mere repetitions of the past that continue to undermine both women and nature and that ecofeminism can only partially dismantle. As such, while *The VVitch* might offer only a few jump-scares and portrayals of bloody gore, I argue that its alignment with folk horror and Puritanism shows its potential as a most frightening horror film because it dips into the social, cultural, and political nightmares of the United States—both past and present.

Towards an Ecofeminist Reading of *The VVitch* as American Folk Horror

The VVitch provides ample fertile ground for the three-part theorisation (Puritan maternalism, ecofeminism, and folk horror) I suggest in this paper. A self-proclaimed folktale set in 1630s New England, the film revolves around a family relocating to the wilderness: father William (Ralph Ineson), mother Katherine, and their five children, Thomasin, Caleb (Harvey Scrimshaw), twins Mercy (Ellie Grainger) and Jonas (Lucas Dawson), and baby Samuel (Axtun Henry/Athun Conrad Dube). Cast out from their Puritan settlement, they make their new home at the edges of an uncanny forest, where their crops do not grow, their animals do not lay eggs or give milk, and their hunting traps do not catch game. Scovell (2017) observes that in the folk horror genre the landscape can function as 'a character itself' while also 'being a punishment' (p. 17). Certainly, the soil beneath the family's new farm in *The VVitch* shows implications of both, seemingly exacting active vengeance on their sinful behaviours as exploiters of lands that do not belong to them. William and Katherine, while beginning to question whether God has deserted them and is exacting punishment, remain utterly devout, expecting their offspring to take on their religious society's prescribed roles and to follow in their footsteps as good servants to the Lord above and their peers on Earth.

As the film zooms in on William's and Katherine's oldest daughter, Thomasin, it becomes clear that her attempts to live up to these expectations set in place for Puritan women are in vain regardless of her actions. A failure as a caretaker, sister, and daughter in the eyes of her mother, Thomasin becomes virtually banished from the family when they suspect that her non-conformity is rooted in her conspiracy with the Lord of Hell. This establishes a dead-end for the protagonist that speaks to Reis' (1997) idea that:

'Puritans effectively demonized the notion of active female choice. A woman was damned if she did and damned if she didn't. If her soul waited longingly for salvation in Christ, such female yearning could evoke the image of an unsatisfied woman vulnerable to Satan; if, on the contrary, a woman's soul acted assertively rather than in passive obedience, by definition it chose the Devil' (p. 94).

In this respect, it is uncertain who the movie's title refers to and whether it can or should act as an explicit signifier to any one witch the viewer encounters. Elizabeth Parker (2020) remarks in this respect that the 'title notably contains no modifiers', for viewers are confronted 'with the archetype itself, *the witch*' (pp. 179-180). It is of great importance, however, that, for her parents, Thomasin serves as that witch with the powers to enchant nature and cause the earth's infertility, for abandonment of their beliefs in God, despite their initial doubts about His protection, is unimaginable and abominable in the end. Therefore, the family's accusation of the daughter's alleged choice of an alliance with the Devil over Puritan faith serves as multifaceted commentary on the power dynamics at play during this time, carving out a hierarchy wherein Thomasin loses significance in comparison to God, despite her status as daughter and especially if she is suspected of being a traitor. As such, Thomasin falls victim to the gender ideal prescribed by Puritan social structures, whereby all individuals are ranked in a top-down manner according to their gender's worth. 'While Puritan teaching relegated women to the domestic sphere, it also valued their work as Christian labor and an important contribution to Puritan society. Usefulness was a central Puritan virtue, and mothers made themselves useful as they oversaw the increasingly isolated world of the home' (Murphy-Geiss, 2010: p. 218). This conceptualisation is starkly defined by principles now known as maternalism, a multifaceted collection of ideas that 'is premised on an assertion of the public, social importance of motherhood and the nurture and care of children'

(Stephens, 2011: p. 4). Widely discussed in the disciplines of gender studies, feminism, and ecofeminism, among others, maternalism brings with it its own controversies about the reinforcement or subversion of traditional gender roles and family models as well as the expectations of women to conform to specifically female and feminine aesthetics and characteristics. The maternal is thus often described as a natural female attribute and, consequently, a naturalised feminine trait that comes about through the alignment of women's biological predispositions and their social callings. When, in *The VVitch*, Thomasin's baby brother Samuel is mysteriously abducted from her sight one day, Katherine sees this as evidence of her daughter's worthlessness as a caretaker, surrogate mother to her siblings, and thus as a woman. Her obligations to her supposedly natural motherly and womanly propensities violated, Thomasin slips further and further away from her mother's grace and is continuously chastised for her actions. It is at this point that the film suggests that Puritan maternalism relies on a femininely-coded model of motherhood and care, an idea Janet Borgerson (2007) calls 'feminine ethics', whereby she means the 'conventional visions of a natural or an essential female-gender-based way of being in the world' (p. 481). She goes on to differentiate feminine ethics from feminist ethics, whereby the latter aims to (re)centre the problems and meanings of sexual politics as well as the subordination of marginalised groups in social and business environments through ethical awareness.

Mary Phillips (2016) adopts and adapts these ideas in her theorisation of the postmaternal 'as a way of reconceptualising relationships that does not rely on "feminine" maternal models but which stresses a "feminist" approach to connection, embodiment and emotion that is equally valued in both personal and political spheres' (p. 470). This move from the supposedly feminine maternal to the potentially feminist postmaternal constitutes the core of Thomasin's relationship with and development away from her mother, summarised by Katherine's utterance 'What is amiss on this farm? It is not natural'. Directed at both the barren landscape and her insubordinate daughter, the mother unwittingly addresses the interconnected essentialism of woman and nature as deficient entities because of their deviance from the expected norm that defines feminine ethics. Phillips identifies this idea as the central concern of ecofeminism, which 'has been developing in response to the ways in which "woman", other subordinated groups (e.g. the aged, differently abled, ethnic minorities) and "nature" are conceptually linked in Western thought, such that

processes of inferiorization have been mutually reinforcing' (p. 469). Feminist ways of reading women, their bodies, and desires as elements *in* the environment instead of attributes *of* the environment expose the Puritan project in *The VVitch* as a legitimisation of the subjugation of figures and spaces inferior to the male-controlled order of New World patriachs. Surprisingly at first, this suppression happens at the hands of Katherine, who not only resents Thomasin for her inability to perfectly copy her behaviour but also displays fits of envy that are directed at her daughter's beauty, youth, and desire to emancipate herself, which Katherine cannot or can no longer attain. The sexualisation of Thomasin's physique is otherwise reserved for her brother Caleb's longing looks at her cleavage, for even her nakedness later on in the film displays an innocence that is entirely at odds with her defamation through Katherine. When the parents consider sending the young girl away to serve another family, it is supposedly out of their interest in financial and material profit to secure the survival of their farm. While William's intentions in this respect seem more believable, Katherine's underlying wish to live a simpler life without the potential for trouble inflicted by Thomasin suggests the lengths she is willing to go to in order not to compromise her role as a 'good' Puritan woman.

At this point, accusing Thomasin of witchhood becomes not only a convenient excuse but also the only feasible explanation for her unruliness according to Puritan beliefs. As such, woman- and witchhood become reciprocal signifiers of Thomasin's lack of opportunity to live according to her desires. Jane Kamensky (1998) identifies a number of studies that have shown, on the one hand, that 'the witch was essential to the Puritan construction of womanhood, part of a dual-edged ideology that increasingly venerated female piety while clinging to elements of an older, misogynist tradition'. On the other hand, she continues, scholars 'have focused on the role of witchcraft accusations in defining and maintaining social boundaries—between village and town, rich and poor, "deviant" and "normal", men and women' (p. 28). Thomasin treads along these and other frontiers, marked interchangeably by her double identification as woman and witch while showing attributes as either that are unacceptable to her family, especially mother Katherine, who must subsequently find a (preferably supernatural) culprit for the family's misery. Buckley (2019) argues that 'the female witch continues to function as [such] a scapegoat despite the interventions of revisionist storytelling' in horror cinema (p. 28), thus feeding into processes of othering that lie at the base of folk horror as a genre that negotiates humans who mask their everyday monstrosity

through their larger-than-life commitment to the transcendental powers of God. The hypocrisy of this project, whereby allegedly evil supernatural creatures are condemned while the equally unproven metaphysicality of God is celebrated, testifies, once again, to the obsessive Puritan need for reassurance in their lifestyles, regardless of the consequences they may inflict on ‘others’.

The particular horror in *The VVitch* speaks to the fact that ‘in folk horror the word “folk” is key’ (Groves, 2017: n.p.) and points towards the need for scrutinising further the dedicated roles of gendered and, especially, feminised individuals and environments in the genre. Ruth Bienstock Anolik (2003) argues that, ‘[i]n the Gothic world, wives are frequently imprisoned by their husbands’ (p. 25), an impulse adopted by horror texts, ‘wherein the woman is [often] ignored, taken for granted or maltreated, her role as wife and mother being assumed to be all she needs’ (Wood, 1986: p. 137). Katherine appears unusually unaffected in this respect during scenes when her domineering behaviour seems to usurp or at least parallel her husband’s status as the commander of the family. Of course, while she is not physically confined to a cell, her prison is more metaphorical and consists of her lack of options, independence, and freedom to act from autonomous will. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (1980) argues that a Puritan ‘woman became a wife by virtue of her dependence, her solemnly vowed commitment to her husband. [...] One can be dependent, however, without being either servile or helpless. The skilled service of a wife included [...] the responsibilities of a deputy husband’ (p. 37). While there are ‘factors which enhanced the role of deputy husband’, she continues, there are also ‘conditions which muted its significance for colonial women’ (p. 38). Katherine strikes William across the face when she finds out he sold her silver cup, the only material remnant of the Old World she so desperately wishes to return to, after initially letting her believe Thomasin lost the beloved heirloom. She calls him a liar, screams at him because of his inability to save the family from starvation, and blames him for Caleb’s disappearance into the woods—all instances that do not leave the viewer guessing the extent of her assertiveness. ‘You cannot escape the woods’, she exclaims, alluding to the fact that the family is at the mercy of the land as a punishing agent that continuously brings about evils the family can no longer deny.

Following Katherine’s exposure of William’s failure as a father and husband, and thus of his inability to live up to Puritan manhood and masculinity, Thomasin’s continuous feelings of

exclusion and unfair treatment by the family reach a climax. In a moment of recognition of the degree of subordination she has witnessed and suffered, she identifies the culprit for her misery: the patriarch.

‘I am no witch, Father. [...] Why have you turned against me? [...] You and Mother are planned to rid the farm of me. Aye. I heard you speak of it. Is that truth? You took of Mother’s cup and let her rail at me. You confessed not till it was too late. Is that truth? [...] You are a hypocrite. [...] You took Caleb to the wood and let me take the blame of that, too. Is that truth? You let Mother be as thy master. You cannot bring the crops to yield! You cannot hunt! Is that truth? Thou canst do nothing save cut wood! And you will not hear me!’

Thomasin’s courage to speak out against her father is not a direct response to her mother’s similar breakdown in terms of the film’s chronology; however, it could be argued that the daughter’s already growing suspicions about the unjust and hypocritical dynamics underlying her status in the family see confirmation in Katherine’s exposure of William’s sins. While the mother cannot (or refuses to) save herself from her subservient position despite her momentary dissatisfaction, Thomasin realises in her rage the necessity for tearing down the ropes that bind her. What follows is a crucial conflict in the protagonist between the maternal, embodied by Katherine, and the postmaternal, an impulse surfacing in Thomasin. She understands that her imprisonment has not only been as a daughter to her father but also as a woman to another woman and, thereby, to a man who has made himself a private slave to his wife all the while speaking and acting out the word of Christ to the public world. William is henceforth painted as the Edenic Adam, who, while made by God as a commandeering leader, is ultimately seduced by the powers of his Eve, mirrored by Katherine, the cunning actuator of Original Sin. In this sense, *The VVitch* alludes to and makes use of a past as described in Genesis that is perpetuated in the film’s present by the loyal followers of these Christian beliefs. A true iteration of American folk horror at this point, which ‘develops from the contours of the central gothic idea of repetition, realized [...] through the transgenerational hauntings of the folk’s past wrongdoings’ (Hauke, 2020: p. 172), Eggers’ folktale allows for an explicit reading of the American landscape as the keeper of the histories and sins of both the United States and the world, exemplified through the Puritan’s enactment of God’s plans.

Frank McConnell (2009) has observed that '[e]ach era chooses the monster it deserves and projects: and all of them are, in their terribleness, blood brothers' (p. 20). In folk horror, monstrosity is often reserved for humanity; and in the case of *The VVitch*, while the most corrupt horrors are executed by William and Katherine in this sense, it is Thomasin who is codified as what Barbara Creed (1993) has famously called 'the monstrous-feminine', a grotesqueness that 'is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions' (p. 7) or lack thereof. When Thomasin unleashes her desperate anger to put her father in his place, William seems to identify this horrifying quality in his daughter and sees no other way but to lock her in the farm's barn, along with the family's goats and her twin siblings Mercy and Jonas, who Thomasin accuses of communicating with the goat Black Phillip, a manifestation of the Devil. While Caleb was previously kidnapped and enchanted by a beautiful witch who lured him to her cabin in the woods prior to his untimely death from a poisoned red apple—an allusion to the forbidden fruit in 'Snow White', which famously mirrors the fall of Adam and Eve in Paradise—it is the witch as a naked old hag who enters the barn that night to drink from a white goat's teat and scare the children. When the animal turns up dead and the twins have disappeared the next morning while Thomasin and Black Phillip remain alive, the viewer is left to speculate about the old witch and the Devil as murderers. William, horrified at the bloody scene before his eyes, plans to avenge his children by killing the black goat; he has to surrender to his fate, however, when he is impaled by Black Phillip's horns. Brendan C. Walsh (2020) argues that, to Puritans, 'demonic activity was [...] something to be closely inspected for divine meaning' (p. 148); hence, the father's 'execution (and the Devil's role in it) could even be read as a form of divine justice, with God punishing William through the machinations of Satan' (p. 156).

This analysis emphasises the various hierarchies of patriarchal power at play in the film as well as their interconnectedness across physical and metaphysical planes, whereby William's identity as a devoted Christian is ultimately overhauled by his sins. His initial pride no longer serves him when he exclaims his final words—'Corruption, thou art my father!'—giving himself over to the master he will meet in death, be it God or Satan. Overcome by grief and anger, Katherine is unable to recognise her husband's role in the family's downfall and hysterically clings to her understanding of Thomasin as the perpetrator. Rhodes (2018) reads such a 'willingness to

believe unbelievable evidence' in the context of seventeenth-century witchcraft as '[o]ne of colonial America's greatest traumas', as 'a vexing conundrum' (p. 3) that brings with it a long list of accusations and physical as well as psychological violence against alleged practitioners of magic. Katherine thus rails at Thomasin, actively blaming her for the horrors she has seen before exclaiming 'The Devil is in thee! [...] You reek of evil!' and physically attacking her on the ground in an attempt at strangulation. This scene constitutes Thomasin's final desperate attempt to receive her mother's mercy: she cries 'I love you!' numerous times, which first serves as testament to her tireless efforts to prove her worth as a daughter and to communicate her desire to conform but ends up as a final goodbye. Arguably an act of self-defence, Thomasin stabs Katherine uncontrollably until she falls motionless atop of her.

Anolik (2003) argues that 'the absent mother promotes the Gothic narrative' (p. 27). Similarly, in *The VVitch*, the erasure of the mother figure is a necessity for the text to unfold its full potential as folk horror with ecofeminist and postmaternalist themes. Anolik's idea bears two meanings in the film: first, a more literal reading of her thesis concerns Thomasin's inability to act as caretaker of her siblings, whereby she becomes herself a signifier of the absent mother and of maternalist failure. Second, Thomasin's arguably unplanned yet ultimately necessary slaughter of her mother pushes Anolik's proposition to the extreme, because, as I want to argue, the daughter's active removal of Katherine from the scene emerges as the central act of defiance and thus the main event in the film. Only when Thomasin rids herself through matricide of her ascribed role model and thus of the maternalist fantasy of Puritan womanhood embodied in Katherine can she see clearly what is at stake for the rest of her life. With the colonialist mindset and patriarchal structures that dominated her family now gone, Thomasin asks Black Phillip to speak to her and agrees to sign herself over to him in exchange for a delicious life full of butter and pretty dresses. When the goat commands her to remove her clothes, the girl obeys and presents her naked body as a kind of *tabula rasa* signalling the beginning of her new life. Partially covered in Katherine's blood, Thomasin is marked by the corporeal traces of the mother as a spawn of patriarchy and carries with her not only the essence of the woman who created her but also a visible reminder of her wish to separate from the mother. While Thomasin moves on with this symbol on her chest to meet the Devil in his chambers, Katherine's dead body remains on plantation ground, the rest of her blood seeping into the soil, nourishing the earth: a seemingly ritualistic sacrifice of the

matriarch demanded by the witches—arguably as agents of the land as punisher—to restore natural balance and equality. The final horror of her life eliminated, Thomasin can now witness Black Phillip’s transformation from goat to human, from a brutal animalistic entity to a figure ‘garbed in the attire of an early modern English gentleman’ (Walsh, 2020: p. 156). Circling the naked girl like a lustful predator, the Devil guides Thomasin’s hand to sign her name beneath their pact. As they venture into the woods together after Black Phillip’s goat form has resurfaced, the protagonist is allowed to join a coven of witches dancing around a fire while chanting in wild ecstasy. Thomasin laughs wickedly as she is lifted into the sky among her sisters in the film’s last scene, concluding not only an ambivalent final act, but also an altogether ambiguous narrative.

While scholars such as Buckley and Walsh have offered readings of *The VVitch* as a folk horror film, even more studies have commented on the film’s various engagements of feminist themes—or lack thereof. A superficial glance at Thomasin’s alleged liberation post her family’s collective death might lead to an assumption of feminist agency on behalf of the protagonist; similarly, her ultimate transformation into a witch can be read according to ideas of witches as alleged feminist agents or activists. However, as Thomasin’s decision to follow Black Philip makes clear, her fate is determined by the exchange of one patriarchal system for another, a plot point alluding to ‘the classic Gothic novel’, which, according to Donna Heiland (2004), tells the ‘melodramatic story of an innocent young woman trapped by one man and rescued by another’ (p. 1). While the death of the family patriarch marks the beginning of the film’s violent end, the fact that Thomasin’s new master murders her previous guardian speaks to the Devil’s desire for supremacy: William’s elimination must thus take place through Black Phillip, whether a heaven-sent executioner of God or not, establishing his agency as legitimisation of his powers before Thomasin and the other witches. As such, the protagonist is, once more, subjected to an ideology rooted in the binary opposition of male domination and female compliance. However, I want to argue that the fundamental difference between her father’s rule and the Devil’s ways lies not only in the like-minded sisterhood of witches that awaits her this time but also, and particularly, in Thomasin’s first and only opportunity to autonomously choose the latter as her future—even if a lack of other options guides this resolution. Her agency, and with it the film’s feminist leeway, must remain limited, because in seventeenth-century New England, no woman could fully escape Puritan entrapment. As Matilda Joslyn Gage (1893) argues, ‘[w]hen for “witches” we read

“women”, we gain fuller comprehension of the cruelties inflicted by the church upon this portion of humanity’ (p. 291). Similarly, reading ‘women’ for ‘witches’ reveals a reciprocity of societal oppression that can only partially be overcome in *The Witch* through the strategic essentialisms of ecofeminism.

By leaving behind the rotting ecologies of her family’s farm and therewith the maternalist assumption of her natural duties, Thomasin defies the essentialist alignment of woman and nature rooted in Puritan mother- and womanhood. At the same time, however, she confirms the Puritan belief that, by rebelling against these propensities, she must be inherently evil, and thus aligned with the Devil and inscribed in nature as the wicked witch of the woods, an ‘*antichristian space*’ (Parker, 2020: p. 182). However, Thomasin’s metamorphosis into a witch rather makes possible the desires she already nurtured as a human girl—to be heard, to be seen, to act in ways that remain uncontrolled by society, and to make up her mind about the world and the ideologies it offers. The film can thus be said to call for a figuration of the postmaternal according to Bartlett (2016): ‘It articulates the daughter’s insistence that something is wrong and it cannot continue. It insists that the daughter does not want the same as the mother, and yet she still wants the same mother. She may even want maternity, but the maternal can never be the same’ (p. 488). Thomasin’s desperate cry for Katherine’s love prior to the mother’s death testifies to this idea and allows the film to play on conflicting affects of grief and liberation on the daughter’s part that remain open for redemption after the film’s close. These emotional responses are rooted in Thomasin’s postmaternal impulse, one Julie Stephens (2011) calls ‘a fantasy of self-sufficiency’ that ‘can be seen as a kind of unmothering of society as a whole’ (p. 7). This is confirmed by the community of seemingly childless witches at the end of the film, who can, perhaps, act as each other’s caretakers in the new order. Of course, this is only possible if the events of the film’s last scenes are real in the sense that they are part of the action and not figments of Thomasin’s intradiegetic dream world: the protagonist taunts her younger sister Mercy¹ earlier in the film with the idea that, ‘[w]hen I sleep,

¹ There is much debate among scholars and movie critics as to the destinies of Mercy and Jonas post their disappearances. The most straightforward explanation is that the witch snatched them in a manner similar to baby Samuel in order for the coven to be able to practice their ultimate ritual: covered in blood as they dance and chant around the fire before rising into the air in the final scene, this indeed suggests that the children’s bodies were used to prepare flying ointment very much like earlier in the film. Due to the fact that the twins serve as the final reminder of the protagonist’s failure in the eyes of her family in terms of feminine and maternal expectations, they have to die in order for Thomasin to break free from her constraints and find new kinship in the coven. This supports the idea that all proponents of the maternalist system must be eliminated before a new order can emerge. As such, besides mother

my spirit slips away from me body and dances naked with the Devil. That's how I signed his book'. An arguable act of foreshadowing, the viewer later sees Thomasin asleep from grief and exhaustion after the death of Katherine and before she meets her fate with Black Phillip, teasing out the possibility of the end as mere wishful thinking on part of the protagonist.

In any case, this is one of the main reasons *The VVitch* cannot emerge as a wholly feminist tale but is instead a narrative whose spectral presence of the colonial past of Puritan womanhood imbued in the American landscape calls for the critical efforts ecofeminism can provide. Thomasin does not explicitly devalue Katherine's ideals, but neither can she copy them as they are; she is caught in a disruptive space where domestic reality and grotesque fantasy cannot coexist without a dismantling of the dualistic imagination of woman/emotion/nature and man/reason/culture. While Thomasin's family clearly ascribes to her the problematics of the former, Katherine's efforts to act as William's deputy husband seem to move her towards the latter on occasion, despite the fact that her place must, unsurprisingly, remain in the private sphere. As such, domesticity is celebrated as the only successful reality of Puritan womanhood, because it must come naturally to all daughters and wives, which contradicts the fact that Thomasin's exiling by her family is equally justified by reasons of the nature of women, only this time as evil witches. From this follows a kind of hypocrisy that not only differentiates between 'good' and 'bad' women but also between 'right' and 'wrong' kinds of nature. The Puritan anxieties of God's abandonment and the Devil's seduction collide in this respect as *The VVitch* refracts the fear of divine judgment following Eve's damnation for her devilish appetites onto the film's seventeenth-century present, where Thomasin and her family supposedly await the same threats. Gretchen A. Adams (2008) sees the contexts of the histories of witchhood and the ensuing Salem Witch Trials in the 1690s as a clear 'dividing

Katherine's tragic yet utilitarian death, it is imperative that Jonas and Mercy—respective successors of the family's patriarch and maternalist role model—must be sacrificed because they threaten the possibility for ecofeminist and postmaternalist change. In a convincing blog post on the meanings of the seven deadly sins in *The VVitch*, it has been suggested that Mercy serves as a representative of envy because she 'badmouths Thomasin at any given moment and acts incredibly hostile towards her. She sews the thoughts of witches and devils and is the first one to blame the eldest' (Maingal). This echoes not only my earlier argument about Katherine, who recognises Thomasin's desire for rebellion and begrudges the fact that she never seized her own moment for escape from her Puritan prison, but also underlines the irony of Mercy's own association with Black Phillip. If the Devil serves as the witches' master in the film, then his enchanted whispers to the younger sister, especially, serve as yet another clever ploy to drive a wedge between Thomasin and her family, pushing her to emancipate herself by cutting ties in violent ways. In line with my theorisation of folk horror, Mercy's blatant animosity towards Thomasin speaks to the fact that the human agents function as the real antagonists in the film, their psychological cruelties relativising Satan's and the witches' otherwise abhorrent deeds.

line between the colonized past and national present [that] emerged from deliberate efforts to create a national mythology', whereby 'the Puritan past eventually came to underpin a broader national identity' (p. 39). This idea is echoed by Rhodes (2018) in that, '[o]ver three hundred years later, the events [of the Trials] still captivate us' (p. 3) and with them the concurrent oppression of women and the fear of their powers.

As such, if the story of Thomasin and her family can serve as both a seventeenth-century imprint of a biblical past and as an iteration of the American colonial past itself, then it comes as no surprise that its projected fears around national unity, its rules about public and domestic terrains, and, especially, its understandings of male/masculine and female/feminine obligations still have a hold over quintessential debates in the contemporary United States. The seeming urgency of reading *The VVitch* as a folk horror film, whereby past-on-present spectrality is embedded in the genre's fabric, testifies to this idea and further speaks to its success as a period piece for which, according to Walsh (2020), 'Robert Eggers has used fantastical source material to achieve a certain historical authenticity' (p. 144). If *The VVitch* is a *New-England Folktale* and American folk horror, in particular, negotiates the controversies of national American conditions, then the film succeeds in offering commentary on the violent histories of disenfranchisement of women and nature in the U.S., defined by the realities, fantasies, and repercussions of witch hysteria and ecophobia.

Lastly, because maternalism and the allegedly natural predispositions of womanhood continue to legitimise the subjugation of women's rights, resistance movements in the form of ecofeminism and postmaternalism must carry on disassembling paradigms of privilege that have been instrumental in the establishment of patriarchal orders in the United States and beyond. In this sense, if the witch cannot be created as a straightforward feminist figure in *The VVitch*, or ever, it is because the complex histories of witchcraft cast a dark shadow over the possibilities of female/feminine redemption, both in reality and fiction. Folk horror must thus allow for the diverse efforts of the many strands of feminism to serve as correctives to the gendered nature of the monstrous-feminine; until then, as Eggers' film demonstrates, any disruption of established social norms, such as prescribed binary and top-to-bottom structures of power dynamics and gender restrictions, will lead the folk into an abyss whence they must first examine themselves, their

humanity, and their obligations to the world. ‘What went we out into this wilderness to find?’ asks William at the beginning of *The VVitch*, and the film answers: the haunting, dark ecologies of women and the American land. ‘This wilderness will not consume us’, he continues. And yet, it already has.

BIOGRAPHY

Alexandra Hauke is currently a lecturer in American Studies at the University of Passau, Germany, where her research and teaching focus on indigenous studies, folk horror, ecofeminism, digital cultures, and American popular culture. She has written on law and legal cultures in Native American detective fiction, American ecofeminist gothic fiction, blackness in horror film, utopian idealism in dystopian literature, and self-branding on YouTube, and has co-edited essay collections on Native American survivance, twenty-first-century Canadian literatures and politics as well as the post-truth era in the United States.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, G. A. (2008) *The Specter of Salem: Remembering the Witch Trials in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Anolik, R. B. (2003) The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode. *Modern Language Studies*. 33 (1/2), pp. 24-43. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3195306?seq=1> [Accessed 24th April 2020].

Bader, C. et al. (2020) *Fear Itself: The Causes and Consequences of Fear in America*. New York, NYU Press.

Bartlett, A. (2016) Postmaternal Times and Radical Feminist Thinking. *Australian Feminist Studies*. 31 (90), pp. 486-500. Available from:

- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08164649.2016.1278154> [Accessed 27th April 2020].
- Buckley, C. G. (2019) Witches, “bitches” or feminist trailblazers? The Witch in Folk Horror Cinema. *Revenant*. 4 (*Gothic Feminisms*), pp. 22-42. Guest eds. Frances Kamm and Tamar Jeffers McDonald. Available from:
<http://www.revenantjournal.com/contents/witches-bitches-or-feminist-trailblazers-the-witch-in-folk-horror-cinema-chloe-germaine-buckley/> [Accessed 25th April 2020].
- Borgerson, J. L. (2008) On the Harmony of Business Ethics and Feminist Ethics. *Business and Society Review*. 112 (4), pp. 477-509. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8594.2007.00306.x> [Accessed 27th April 2020].
- Carr, E. (2013) The riddle was the angel in the house: towards an American ecofeminist Gothic. In: Smith, A. and Hughes, W. (eds.) *EcoGothic*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, pp. 160-76.
- Creed, B. (1993) *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London and New York, Routledge.
- Flanagan, C. (2008) The Superfund Gothic: Susanne Antonetta’s *Body Toxic: An Environmental Memoir*. In: Campbell, A. (ed.) *New Directions in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 44-61.
- Hauke, A. (2020) Dreaming of Leviathan: John Langan’s *The Fisherman* and American Folk Horror. *Revenant*. 5 (*Folk Horror*), pp. 167-194. Guest ed. Dawn Keetley. Available from: <http://www.revenantjournal.com/contents/dreaming-of-leviathan-john-langans-the-fisherman-and-american-folk-horror/> [Accessed 27th April 2020].
- Gage, M. J. (1893) *Women, Church and State: A Historical Account of the Status of Woman through the Christian Ages: with Reminiscences of the Matriarchate*, 3rd ed. New

York, Truth Seeker Company.

Groves, M. (2017) *Past Anxieties: Defining the Folk Horror Narrative*. Available from: <http://folklorethursday.com/urban-folklore/past-anxieties-defining-folk-horror-narrative/#sthash.GagK3gP1.dpbs> [Accessed 26th April 2020].

Heiland, D. (2004) *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction*. Malden, Blackwell.

Hillard, T. J. (2013) From Salem Witch to *Blair Witch*: The Puritan Influence on American Gothic Nature. In: Smith, A. and Hughes, W. (eds.) *EcoGothic*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, pp. 103-119.

Kamensky, J. (1998) Female Speech and Other Demons: Witchcraft and Wordcraft in Early New England. In: Reis, E. (ed.) *Spellbound: Women and Witchcraft in America*. Lanham et al., SR Books, pp. 25-52.

Maingal, L. (2020) *Thoughts on The VVitch*. Available from: <https://onegeekygal.com/thoughts-on-the-vvitch/> [Accessed 26th April 2020].

McCollum, V. (ed) (2019) *Make America Hate Again: Trump-Era Horror and the Politics of Fear*. New York, Routledge.

McConnell, F. (2009) *The Science of Fiction and the Fiction of Science: Collected Essays on SF Storytelling and the Gnostic Imagination*. Jefferson and London, McFarland & Co.

Mead, M. (2000) *And Keep Your Powder Dry: An Anthropologist Looks at America*. New York, Berghahn Books.

Morison, S. E. (1952) *By Land and By Sea: Essays and Addresses*. New York, Knopf.

Murphy-Geiss, G. (2010) Christianity and Mothers. In: O'Reilly, A. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of*

- Motherhood, Volume 1*. Thousand Oaks et al., SAGE, pp. 216-219.
- Parker, E. (2020) *The Forest and the EcoGothic: The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination*. London, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Phillips, M. (2016) Embodied Care and Planet Earth: Ecofeminism, Maternalism and Postmaternalism. *Australian Feminist Studies*. 31 (90), pp. 468-485. Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08164649.2016.1278153> [Accessed 20th April 2020].
- Reis, E. (1997) *Damned Women*. Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press.
- Rhodes, G. D. (2018) *The Birth of the American Horror Film*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.
- Scovell, A. (2017) *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange*. Leighton Buzzard, Auteur.
- Skoll, G. R. (2016) *Globalization of American Fear Culture: The Empire in the Twenty-First Century*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Smith, A. and Hughes, W. (2013) Introduction: Defining the EcoGothic. In: Smith, A. and Hughes, W. (eds.) *EcoGothic*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, pp. 1-14.
- Stephens, J. (2011) *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking: Feminism, Memory, and Care*. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Ulrich, L. T. (1980) *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*. New York, Vintage Books.
- The VVitch*. (2015) [Film]. Eggers, R. dir. USA: Parts and Labor.

Walsh, B. C. (2020) Colonising the Devil's Territories: The Historicity of Providential New England Folklore in *The VVitch. Revenant. 5 (Folk Horror)*, pp. 144-166. Guest ed. Dawn Keetley. Available from: <http://www.revenantjournal.com/contents/colonising-the-Devils-territories-the-historicity-of-providential-new-england-folklore-in-the-vvitch/> [Accessed 20th April 2020].

Wood, R. (2003) *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan ... and Beyond*. New York, Columbia University Press.