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MISCELLANY

SPECIAL ISSUE

Ecogothic, Monstrosity, and Climate Emergency /
Ecogótico, monstruosidad y emergencia climática

INTRODUCTION

THE ECOGOTHIC AS A CATALYST OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY: THE IMPACT OF MONSTROSITY*

Cristina Casado Presa & Imelda Martín Junquera**
U. Nebrija & U. León/GIECO-Instituto Franklin (UAH)

The present issue means an opportunity to discuss the application of Ecogothic as a theoretical approach to literary and filmic texts. This public demand responds to a growing tendency to expand the studies on ecocriticism towards new fields of research. It is also clear evidence of the human preoccupation about the future of the planet Earth in a world in permanent crisis: politically, ideologically, economically and foremost environmentally. Climate emergency has stopped being a threat and has become a reality with irreversible consequences. The effects of the so called "natural catastrophes" have derived in a growing awareness of the damage we have inflicted on nature. There is a real fear of meteorological phenomena or of the melting of the Polar ice caps as they impact on the world and may transform it dramatically even to the point that life may no longer be possible in it. In fact, current ecogothic fiction also focuses on the terror writers feel when they observe the lack of conscience and awareness humanity shows on climate emergency and the certainty that the world as we know it today is going to disappear at a near future, as apocalyptic narratives such as *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy have been announcing. Simon Estok in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (2018) states that: "We become agitated but remain passive "spectators to future ruin" rather than active witnesses" (49).

Since Simon Estok coined "ecophobia" to define "the contempt and fear we feel for the agency of the natural environment" (2009, 218), scholars from all over the world have debated and reflected on the concept in multiple ways and the debate continues open today. The articles in this issue attempt to demonstrate that this irrational fear comes from our anthropocentric view of the world and our failure to identify the representatives of the more than human world as allies in our preservation of the planet. Instead, human beings have traditionally transformed the environment to make life more comfortable for only one single species disregarding the others: the human being, and not even for all the representatives of the human species, since race has been understood as a parameter for separation and devaluation of certain groups of people based on the color of their skin. The idea of "the Other"

embodies chaos, the opposite of the order and control that defines the construction of the domesticated world as we have inherited it from a Humanist tradition. This other can be depicted taking a feature of his/her personality as seen from the eyes of the colonizer. Instances of bestiality or cannibalism from the part of this "other" have been the norm in most narratives written before postcolonial times. When connected with postcolonialism, the ecogothic deals with the alter-human, represented mostly in terms of monstrosity from an Anthropocentric perspective, as liminal creatures inhabiting a threatening third space such as forests, oceans, swamps, haunted houses or devastated landscapes. Witches, ghosts, vampires and other similar creatures are the dwellers of the magic and supernatural realm located in this feared third space. Elizabeth Parker in *The Forest and the Ecogothic* (2019) introduces the forest as a haunted place that provides shelter but also as a frightening site, such as in folk tales and she discusses how nature is used to provoke fear. In the same vein, current studies on blue humanities such as Serpil Opperman's provide a new setting for the ecogothic.

Thus, representations of women, queer or minoritized cultures as a monstrosity, as the abject, belong fully to the realm of the ecogothic thorough material feminisms which deal with the consideration and transformation of bodies by paying attention to the porosity and viscosity of matter addressed in Alaimo, Haraway and Braidotti's theories.

Again, Estok in his *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (2018) advocates for a more posthuman approach to nature, one that aims at eliminating such differences in terms of race, ethnicity or gender among human beings but also in relationship to the more than human world.

Ecogothic appeared for the first time in 2013 with the publication of the homonymous volume edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes. The introduction points out that their volume is "the first to explore the Gothic theories of ecocriticism" (1). The collection shows different narratives located in different geographies and historical times, like the articles included in this special issue which range from the Romanticism to contemporary times, thus, proving that this theoretical approach emerges as a necessity to understand the evolution of the relationship between the human beings and the more than human in terms of fear.

Smith and Hughes also discuss the differences with ecohorror which the editors consider a new literary genre deriving from classic gothic texts but engaging with the effect of mainly natural disasters on Earth, with a focus on apocalyptic narratives and films showing what humanity can no longer control. As Simon Estok affirms in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (2018) human beings are currently unable to control their own life much less their surroundings (10). The monster we have created

with our capitalist and neoliberalist practices threatens to engulf us, finally displacing our anthropocentrism, signaling the triumph of nature in ecogothic narratives.

Ecogothic has contributed greatly to boost the popularity of the Gothic literary genre as can be perceived by the increasing amount of collective works that have appeared in recent years, most of them included in the works cited of the contributors of this issue. Together with the collective volumes, the periodical publication *The Gothic Nature Journal: New Directions in Ecohorror and the EcoGothic* created and first published in 2017 has acquired an enormous reputation in the field. Lest not forget the number of Gothic conferences taking place in different parts of the world.

Thus, "Ding Dong, the Evil Witch is Not Dead: Monstrosity and Ecophobia in *The Witches of Westwood* and *Wytches*" by Cristina Casado Presa, examines the portrayal of witches as ecogothic monsters symbolizing nature's chaotic and uncontrollable forces. She argues that these witches challenge human-centered views of the environment, embodying nature's raw power in contrast to the structured world humans seek to impose. Central to this article is the concept of "ecophobia," an irrational fear of the natural world, which both works emphasize by depicting nature as a dangerous and decaying space. Her analysis ultimately underscores humanity's vulnerabilities and anxieties about the limits of its control over a powerful and often threatening natural world, encouraging a reconsideration of human-nature relations.

José Manuel Correoso Rodenas' "Land Property, Land Destruction: Ecogothic vs. Capitalism in Bram Stoker's *The Snake's Pass*" argues that Stoker uses Gothic motifs to address the destructive consequences of capitalism in rural Ireland, particularly the environmental degradation and social inequalities it fosters. The analysis centers on the "gombeen man," a vampiric, treasure-hunting capitalist figure that symbolizes the exploitation of land and community. Additionally, Dick Sutherland, an engineer employed by the gombeen man, is portrayed as a victim of this capitalist system. The article interprets the destruction of the bog as a metaphor for the erasure of Irish identity and the advancement of British imperialism.

Imelda Martín Junquera's "Et Verbum Caro Factum Est: Monstrosity and Transcorporeality in *Mexican Gothic*" analyzes Silvia Moreno García's novel through its engagement with ecogothic themes, and demonstrates how ecogothic literature functions as a decolonial force. Set in 1950s Mexico, the novel centers around an English family, the Doyles, who attempt to preserve their lineage through the exploitation of natural resources and indigenous labor. The novel employs traditional Gothic tropes, like the haunted house and monstrous figures, to comment on colonial exploitation and patriarchal oppression. The article also discusses indigenous resistance and women's solidarity as central to the characters' emancipation. Additionally, the article examines the concept of transcorporeality in the novel, which blurs the boundaries between human and non-human, particularly through the influence of fungi and mold on the characters' consciousness.

Aylin Walder's article, "Gothic Nature in Fantasy Fiction: The White Walkers as Dreadful Agents of Nature in *Game of Thrones*," examines the eco-Gothic themes in the television series *Game of Thrones*. Walder asserts that the show's use of Gothic elements –wild landscapes, monstrous beings, and pagan religions– serves to critique

anthropocentrism and colonialism while reflecting human anxieties about climate change. This analysis draws upon Parker's seven indicators of the Gothic forest, Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality, and Morton's hyperobject within the context of Haraway's Chtulucene.

Juan Ignacio Torres Montesinos' "The State of Nature: EcoGothic (Mo) Other in Catalina Infante's *Todas Somos una Misma Sombra*" offers an ecogothic interpretation of Chilean writer Catalina Infante's short story. Drawing on Thomas Hobbes' concept of the "state of nature," the article highlights how Infante portrays the connection between humanity and the environment, particularly within the context of the Anthropocene and its environmental crises. Montesinos suggests that Infante envisions a new social pact rooted in ecofeminism, where nature serves as a refuge and protector for women. In a world devoid of sunlight, the story explores how women adapt their bodies and ways of life to the perpetual darkness, thereby redefining the meanings of light and shadow. This ecofeminist perspective advocates for gender equality and the preservation of nature.

Lydia Freire Gargamala's article, "Rebellion and Wilderness: Female Agency and Irish Nature in Elizabeth Griffith's *The History of Lady Barton* (1771)," links female characters to the Irish wilderness in Griffith's Gothic novel. Gargamala argues that Griffith's portrayal of the natural landscape mirrors women's experiences within a patriarchal system, highlighting their marginalization and denial of agency. The analysis focuses on two key figures, Louisa Barton and Olivia Walter, whose struggles for freedom reflect the wild and unpredictable Irish landscape. Furthermore, the article challenges preconceived notions of Irish identity and its connection to English dominance, revealing a deeper, more complex depiction of the country.

In "*Tears in Rain*: An Ecogothic Hardboiled Tribute to Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*?" by Emilio Ramón García, Rosa Montero's novel *Tears in Rain* is considered through a postmodern ecogothic lens. Set in a dystopian Madrid in 2109, the novel addresses themes such as fear, the breakdown of identity, and the dehumanization of individuals portrayed as monstrous "others". Ramón explores how Montero's work critiques the impact of climate change and unchecked corporate exploitation of resources. The article further examines the roles of science, technology, and memory manipulation, considering how these elements contribute to the fragmentation of identity.

"None of Them Knows About Floods or Anything About the Rivers: Monstrous Kinships and Agency in Michael McDowell's *The Flood and The Levee*", by Gianluca Calio, critically examines Michael McDowell's "Blackwater" saga, showcasing how the Southern Gothic genre reflects the fraught and intricate relationship between humanity and the natural world. Central to this analysis is Elinor Dammert, a shapeshifting figure who rises from the Lost River after a flood, challenging conventional boundaries between humans and the environment. Calio contends that Elinor functions as an ecogothic figure, forging connections between people and the landscape. Her mission involves resisting environmental devastation, even resorting to violent means to protect the natural world.

Lastly, Irene Sanz Alonso argues in her article, "An Ecogothic Reading of Sea Monsters: *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) and *The Meg* (2018)," that we can categorize

these films within the ecogothic genre. Both films make use of traditional Gothic elements –enclosed spaces, monstrous creatures, and a pervasive sense of fear– to highlight the consequences of humanity's interference with marine ecosystems. Alonso contends that the films illustrate "ecophobia," a fear and disdain for the natural world, and examine how this fear justifies the destruction of animals and ecosystems that threaten human survival.

Building on the growing recognition of ecogothic, this volume aims to further enrich and advance this dynamic and expanding field. The essays presented here engage with key themes that align with current scholarly discussions, offering fresh perspectives on the complex relationship between human and non-human nature. By addressing these critical issues, the volume seeks to deepen our understanding of the intricate connections between ecological concerns and the Gothic tradition.

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INTRODUCTION

ARTICLES

DING DONG, THE EVIL WITCH IS NOT DEAD:
MONSTROSITY AND ECOPHOBIA IN
LAS BRUJAS DE WESTWOOD AND *WYTCHES*

Cristina Casado Presa*
Universidad Nebrija

ABSTRACT

Within the EcoGothic framework, this article examines how the graphic novels *Las brujas de Westwood* and *Wytches. Volume 1* depict the witch as a monstrous and abject figure that blurs the boundary between human and nonhuman nature. In these works, the witch embodies the chaotic and uncontrollable aspects of the natural world, disrupting conventional boundaries and redefining humanity's relationship with nature. This portrayal challenges the anthropocentric view that positions the environment as a resource to be dominated and exploited.

KEYWORDS: Witches, *Wytches*, Monstrosity, EcoGothic, Ecophobia.

DING DONG, LA BRUJA MALVADA NO HA MUERTO:
MONSTRUOSIDAD Y ECOFOBIA EN
LAS BRUJAS DE WESTWOOD Y *WYTCHES*

RESUMEN

Enmarcado en un punto de vista ecogótico, este artículo analiza las novelas gráficas *Las brujas de Westwood* y *Wytches. Volume 1* y su representación de la figura de la bruja como una entidad monstruosa y abyecta que desdibuja la frontera entre la naturaleza humana y no humana. En estas obras, la bruja encarna los aspectos caóticos e incontrolables del mundo natural, perturbando los límites convencionales y redefiniendo la relación de la humanidad con la naturaleza. Esta representación desafía la visión antropocéntrica que concibe al medio ambiente como un recurso destinado a ser dominado y explotado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: brujas, *Wytches*, monstruosidad, ecogótico, ecofobia.

In the words of Deanna Molnar, "Our cultural obsession with witches parallels our preoccupation with wilderness. This infatuation may provide insight into how we see our place in the natural world" (2019, par. 1). Over time, the figure of the witch has experienced significant transformations: she went from a wise woman who lived in harmony with nature and had an extensive knowledge of the healing properties of herbs and plants, to an evil creature in league with dark magic and the devil. Even nowadays, we still fear the witch because of her mysterious and untamed power, as well as her knowledge of nature's secrets. *Las brujas de Westwood*[1] and *Wytches*, both graphic novels released in 2014, reimagine the wicked witch, present a confrontation with the supernatural forces lurking in the dark forest, and insist on the interweaving between human experience and the natural world, portraying nature as a vessel of horror and a mirror of inner chaos. Building upon the complex history of witchcraft, this article analyzes these two graphic novels from an ecoGothic point of view and explores the witch as abject, a monstrous creature who embodies dark and untamed aspects of the natural world that disrupt the boundary between human and nature, challenging the anthropocentric view of the environment as a resource to be controlled and exploited.

1. ABOUT WITCHES

Witches' mythologies are very diverse. In every culture, there exists a woman who can manipulate the supernatural world and have immeasurable powers, but the perception of what a witch is changes depending on the historical era and the culture of those defining her. In some cultures, a witch is an insidious character associated with dark magic or evil spells. In other instances, the witch embodies wisdom and power, possessing knowledge of herbs, potions, and other healing remedies. Witches are considered to have held a profound spiritual and philosophical connection with the environment, as they saw the natural world as a manifestation of the divine's creative force and believed in the interdependence of all life. For them, the environment was not merely a resource but a companion deserving of respect, which has prompted the idea that witches were sort of earthly environmentalists, living in harmony with nature and using their expertise to sustain life (Crowley 2019).

Throughout history, the witch figure has experienced significant transformations but maintained a strong connection to the natural world. At the end of the Middle Ages, and especially during the Modern Age, respect for the wise woman muted into open hostility towards the witch, as they were believed to be able to cast spells and hexes, having received their powers from the devil. This belief led to the

Great Witch Hunts, which spanned from 1450 to 1750, and resulted in the trial, torture, and execution of thousands of women accused of witchcraft.

When it comes to the Great Witch Hunts, there does not seem to be a clear consensus on the origins, motivations, or conditions that can sufficiently explain the phenomenon of witchcraft. A notable decline in living conditions, a series of population uprisings and revolts (Federici 2004), and an environment filled with superstitions and internal conflicts (Henningsen 1981) influenced the setting in which the Hunts took place. This breeding ground also included a time of religious wars, the persecution of heretics, alarming inflation, food shortages, rapid population growth, and a significant increase in poverty and violence in broad strata of society (Levack 1995).

Furthermore, the Little Ice Age exacerbated extreme weather events that marked the Early Modern period in Europe. As Behringer explains, "while many blamed witches for various misfortunes, an agrarian society places significant importance on weather. Crop failure caused increases in prices, malnutrition, rising infant mortality, and, finally, epidemics" (1999, 339). Treatises aimed at identifying and punishing witches reflected this belief, with the *Malleus Maleficarum* being the most famous example. Written by two Dominican inquisitor monks in 1486, the volume is a witch hunter's manual that describes in detail who witches were, how to recognize them, and how to eradicate them. The *Malleus* accused witches not only of gathering on special dates to worship the devil in the form of a large black goat, but also of causing storms, ruining crops, poisoning wells, making livestock sick, killing babies, performing abortions, and spreading disease. Behringer argues that the Little Ice Age's social and cultural impact transcended mere physical hardship. It cultivated an environment of fear, superstition, and scapegoating, leading to the persecution of individuals believed to be manipulating the very forces of nature on which society depended for survival.

Barstow (1994) and other historians argue that the patriarchal desire to control female sexuality, rooted in traditional family and gender concepts, motivated the Witch Hunts. Federici (2004, 2018) supports this view, arguing that the Great Witch Hunts were a tool for enforcing patriarchal domination over women. She believes that the persecution of witches intensified gender divisions by instilling fear of female power in men and increasing state control over women's bodies, labor, and reproductive capacities. Ultimately, this reinforced a hierarchical and oppressive social order. Any woman who challenged patriarchal expectations in real or imagined ways was a target. Merchant elaborates on this idea, describing how dominant narratives have historically equated women with nature, portraying nature as virgin, pure, and light, a land that may be pristine or barren yet possess the potential for development. However, "as fallen Eve, nature is disorderly and chaotic; a wilderness, wasteland, or desert requiring improvement; dark and witchlike, the victim and mouthpiece of Satan as serpent" (2013, 32).

Thus, the association of the female body with knowledge –especially knowledge not commonly possessed by patriarchy and strongly connected with non-human nature– along with the defiance of traditional female gender roles, lead to the perception of these women as a threat and the subsequent labeling of them as witches.

2. FROM GOTHIC TO ECOGOTHIC

Both the historical reality of witchcraft and the witch in her folkloric and mythical dimensions have become a recurrent theme of artistic creation. While modern witchcraft is closely associated with Wicca, a nature-based religion, the stereotype of the evil witch has never left popular culture. Due to folklore and fairy tales, the image of the witch that often comes to mind is still that of a powerful yet malevolent figure –one who lurks in the depths of the forest with her black cat, likely concocting some evil plan, such as poisoning an apple to murder an unsuspecting victim. Since the 1960s, however, the Western collective unconscious has begun to question and redefine these iconographies, often analyzing the image of the witch from a feminist perspective as a representation of powerful women and their relationship with non-human nature.

Castro (2019) reflects on how the revival of Goddess movements, combined with the intersection of feminism and environmentalism, have revitalized the witch archetype and led to a reexamination of the tradition, folklore, and wisdom associated with it. These were not the traditional witches of old, but rather empowered women deeply connected to their bodies and the natural world –embracing life, trees, the sun, water, and nature itself. They were the embodiment of some kind of activism intertwining feminism, environmentalism, and nature-centered spirituality. Castro recalls that "as feminism and ecology began to converge, struck by the collusion between the exploitation of nature and the exploitation of women, the witches' in-tuneness with nature appeared as the model for a more respectful and less oppositional relationship to our non-human counterpart" (Castro 2019, par. 5). This vision is shared by authors like Callejo, who insist that witches have no connection with bloody rituals or satanic pacts and recognize themselves as "heirs to traditions of ancestral religions, the worship of the Goddess, and to connect with the language of sacred nature on solstitial dates, practices that have been persecuted and distorted over the centuries" (Ferrero Martínez 2021, 13-14). Sotelo (2021) adds that patriarchy has historically demonized and devalued mythical aspects of femininity, such as the knowledge of Mother Earth's healing powers, its connection with the moon's phases, and its representations in multiple aspects of an ancestral goddess. She considers these women's contributions to the deconstruction of these aspects, which implicate a narrative of healing and communion rooted in the forces and energies of the cosmos and the Earth. Conversely, alternative interpretations emphasize a more conventional feminine identity and celebrate the witch as a manifestation of the feminine principle, aligning her with nature and emphasizing her role as a life-giver. Authors such as Ehrenreich and English (2010) emphasize the connection between the witch and nature, reclaiming her image as a wise herbalist who helped communities using their skills as healers and midwives.

However, as Alaimo notes, "Ecocriticism, for the most part, has ignored monstrous natures, directing its attention toward texts that portray nature more favorably" (2001, 179). Undoubtedly, ecofeminist rhetoric has reclaimed the witch as a symbol of feminist empowerment and ecological activism, connecting the subjugation of women with the exploitation of nature. However, we must acknowledge

that patriarchy continued to reject and demonize the feminine principle it projected onto witches, frequently associating the witch figure with chaos, irrationality, and danger. Gothic fiction became a fitting setting for the witch, as she aligned with the genre's defining characteristics, such as medieval settings and haunted landscapes, as well as its supernatural elements and themes of horror and decay.

The Gothic imagination capitalized on the sublime –a quality that provokes awe and terror through vast, overpowering landscapes– and the uncanny, a blurring of familiarity and strangeness to create a sense of dread. According to Botting, the Gothic imagination showcased "threats associated with supernatural and natural forces, imaginative excesses and delusions, religious and human evil, social transgression, mental disintegration, and spiritual corruption" (1996, 1), and remained captivated by elements and practices deemed as negative, irrational, immoral, and fantastic. In this context, the witch persisted as a symbol of the feminine aspect, relegated to the dark corner of the collective unconscious as the embodiment of what must remain hidden, such as irrational wisdom, an overflowing sensuality, and an uncontrollable power.

As Deckard declares, "new approaches to the 'greening' of Gothic explore how ecoGothic represents cultural anxieties about the human relationship to the non-human world through uncanny apparitions of monstrous nature" (2019, 174). Ecogothic is a theoretical framework that examines the relationship between Gothic literature and environmental concerns. Smith and Hugues describe ecoGothic as "the Gothic through theories of ecocriticism" (2013, 3) and argue that Gothic literature, with its focus on anxieties and the darker aspects of human nature, provides a unique lens through which to explore ecological issues and explore Gothic themes like the sublime, the monstrous, and the uncanny in relation to environmental anxieties, such as pollution, climate change, and the exploitation of nature. The concept of "ecophobia" –an irrational fear and hatred toward the natural world– has made up much of the early works of ecoGothic literature and criticism. As Estok explains, "the ecophobic condition is a continuum that can embrace the possibilities of fear, contempt, indifference, or lack of mindfulness, or some combination of these, toward the natural environment" (Estok 2009, 1). Hillard (2009) conceptualized "Gothic Nature" and urged ecocritics to adopt Gothic criticism in their study of natural landscapes, while Morton's (2012) theorization of "dark ecology" pushed ecocriticism to engage with unsettling, polluted, and toxic environments, reflecting deep anxieties in society about nature.

Nature is also a place where fear occurs. Poland asserts that, "the EcoGothic provides a timely and important tool to interrogate environmental anxieties and to examine both the ecology in Gothic and ecology as Gothic" (Dang 2022, 117). Parker, whose work has significantly contributed to the field, believes that ecoGothic allows us to examine our darker, more complicated cultural representations of the non-human world, including our ecophobic anxieties and fears of nature. These examinations began by exploring the relationship between human and non-human nature, focusing on landscapes or natural spaces (Parker 2020, 36). In her seminal work, *The Forest and the EcoGothic* (2020), Parker dedicates a chapter to analyzing the "Gothicization" of nature by certain inhabitants. She identifies the witch as

one of the most prevalent monsters, "extensively linked to our cultural conceptions of the wilderness in the Western world" (140). She specifically refers to her as an "ecoGothic monster" (164), reinforcing Merchant's view of the witch as a "symbol of the violence of nature" (1980, 127).

3. THE WITCH AS A "MONSTER IN NATURE"

Over time, it has become increasingly evident that monsters are complex creations that mirror the prevailing social issues of their era. Cohen (1996) argues that monsters defy categorization, embodying difference and challenging established boundaries. He claims that "the monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" (4), thus representing forbidden practices and serving as outlets for transgression, and postulates that monsters police cultural borders and highlight anxieties about the Other. Likewise, he underlines how the monstrous body often becomes a site for anxieties surrounding gender and sexuality, and women who defy these norms risk portraying themselves as the monstrous Lilith or the Gorgon (9). Weinstock (2020) defines the monster as an entity that challenges and threatens our understanding of the world, ourselves, and the relationships between them, while acknowledging that these understandings can vary across different times and geographies.

According to Doble (2019), when it comes to witches, those othered bodies evoke a sense of the uncanny as well as the abject, which both repels and attracts us. These elements of fascination and fear manifest in the form of a witch, a unique and dreaded entity due to the uncertainty surrounding their capabilities, the boundaries of their power, and their potential threat to the power hierarchy. Doble writes: "witches, then, are monstrous in nature" (3), and indeed they are, in more than one sense.

Barksdale (2019) has studied the intersection of witchcraft, ecophobia, and masculinity in American literature and film. She considers the witch as "a figure for the ugly, the wicked, or the abject side of nature. She is a figure who is both marginal and marginalized –a non-normative threat to the social order. The witch figure is a force of nature and a part of nature" (3). Barksdale adopts an ecocritical perspective and examines works such as Robert Eggers's film *The Witch* (2016), L. Frank Baum's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), and Andrew Fleming's film *The Craft* (1996), and explores the displacement of such anxieties onto the othering of both women and nature. Barksdale views the witch as both the "discarded parts of nature" (1) and the "deviant and monstrous" (3), while she emphasizes how men have historically attempted to dominate and control both nature and women in order to assert their masculinity and alleviate existential anxieties.

4. *THE WITCHES OF WESTWOOD*

Male anxieties are at the forefront of *The Witches of Westwood*, where the main character, Jack Kurtzberg, author of the best-selling novel *Walpurgis Passion*, is dealing with creative block following his book's sudden success. His agent, publisher, film producer, and wife are pressuring him to complete a sequel, only adding to his struggle. However, when he receives the tragic news that his brother Jim has died in an accident, Jack decides to return to his hometown for a fresh start and to search for lost inspiration. Once he is back in Westwood, Jack will soon find that nothing is what it seems. Returning to his boyhood town forces Jack to confront nature's wildness and the dark history of the place in order to ensure his own survival.

At first glance, Westwood looks like a peaceful and quaint little town, with its collection of picturesque houses surrounded by white picket fences. The first pages reveal that this is a fragile façade. The graphic novel begins with a man running for his life while he screams, "I know what you are. I know you want to kill me" (2). Very soon, the man finds himself in the woods at the feet of five women, who proceed to attack him in a savage way and use him as a sacrificial victim to invoke the demon Baphomet.

Thus, *The Witches of Westwood* portrays witches as the embodiment of abjection, a concept Kristeva (1982) defines as that which "disturbs identity, system, and order. What does not respect borders, positions, or rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). The abject sits between two opposing categories, often relegated to the margins of society or completely rejected, closely linked to liminality and boundary violations, and it is distinguished by genuinely disturbing boundaries and limits, elicits a strong feeling of disgust, and emanates a sense of potential infection (Kristeva, 1982, 3-4). Creed (1993) argues that the formation of the monster as an abject body functions as a confrontation between the symbolic order and those who threaten its stability: "Patriarchal discourses define the witch as an abject figure, portraying her as an implacable enemy of the symbolic order" (76). The witches of Westwood, therefore, fall outside of the patriarchal system that traditionally defines women as other. They embody the ultimate male fear: powerful and uncontrollable females who threaten to break free of the margins to which they must be confined, or, as Berksdale claims, "her refusal to fall nicely into a category of social order, along with her supernatural powers, demonstrates how the witch … threatens the patriarchal system of organized (imagined) power" (2019, 3).

This threat is vividly depicted in the domestic scenes, where the witches, under the guise of suburban wives, wield cruel and violent dominance over their husbands. Fear has these men entrapped. A committee of husbands, under threat from their wives, greets Jack upon his arrival in Westwood. This introduction highlights the witches' control over the town and the precarious position of men who dare defy them. Exchanges like "I said go now or I'll kill you" (13) or pretended jokes like "I have to go home now, or my wife will cook me for dinner" (13) emphasize the power dynamics at play with an inversion of traditional gender roles.

However, the witches' abject nature blossoms in the scenes set in the depths of the forest. Creed (1993) affirms that the abject confronts the symbolic order,

posing a threat to its stability, and it is when they are in the wilderness that they fully embrace abjection, existing outside the patriarchal system and embodying a monstrous femininity that defies societal norms. The forest functions as a liminal space, a threshold where the ordinary rules of reality are suspended. Within the forest, normality gives way to the uncanny, where bloody ceremonies and dark magic unfold. The witches of Westwood perform rituals that involve sacrificing male victims in a gore fashion, and they exhibit an unrestrained sexuality, further cementing the forest's role as a space where societal conventions are turned upside down and dark desires reign. They chant: "We dance under the changing red shadows of a dead moon; we call on our brothers on earth to guide us on the Left path; we hear the wolves salute those who rise on the wings of the night; we bathe in the essence of aconite, henbane, belladonna; with the skin of the snake we cover ourselves; And on sorghum leaves and wood we ride as we fly into the world of shadows" (36-37). In other words, the witches merge with the non-human environment challenging human specificity and identity. Instead of remaining separate from nature, they become part of it.

Wilderness, represented in the novel by the dark woods surrounding the town of Westwood, should not be read in the traditional sense of Gothic fiction, i.e., as a metaphor for the feelings or moods of the characters, but rather as an adversarial force against the protagonist. Nature is not depicted as nurturing, but rather as a wicked entity intertwined with the witches' power.

The forest's dark nature permeates everything it touches, spreading like an infection through the presence of familiars, and animals like spiders. The witches' familiars attack Jack in his own home, and we see one of the witches playing with a spider moments before causing a mass suicide as a ritual payment to Baphomet for a supernatural revelation. These creatures act as conduits of the forest's malevolent power, bridging the gap between the natural and supernatural worlds. The infection underlines the forest's role as a living entity, capable of exerting its dark influence beyond its threshold.

Westwood, thus, "with its brightly colored houses, the pantomime of friendly neighbors smiling at each other and people strolling through the clean streets" (72) reveals itself as a precarious space, affirming human rationality while bordering the wilderness that challenges its stability. This tension between civilization and the wild forms the crux of the narrative, as it openly shows the inherent fragility of human civilization and the sublime experience in the wilderness.

Jack decides to confront the witches in the woods. It is then revealed that Jack and his brother summoned a demon at the witch stones located in the depth of the Westwood forest when they were children, and the witches of Westwood are nothing more than Jack's own creation, "characters of a bad story, puppets of an unconscious puppeteer" (89). Jack, as the story's creator, decides the ending: an angry mob arrives, apprehends, and burns the witches, "because in the stories the evil witches die at the stake" (95). We also discover that the man who was sacrificed at the beginning of the story was none other than Jack's brother, thereby completing the story's circle. Meanwhile, the few pages Jack penned for the *Walpurgis Passion* sequel mysteriously burn.

5. FROM WITCHES TO WYTCHES

Keeping with the old adage of "into the woods you shan't go," *Wytches. Volume 1* centers on the Rooks family and their entanglement with the ancient, primal wytches that inhabit the forests near their new home, the small town of Litchfield, New Hampshire. Charlie, the father, is a man with a past alcoholism addiction, looking for a new start for his family after his wife Lucy had a car accident that left her paralyzed, and their daughter Sailor went through terrible events related with bullying. She was relentlessly and viciously bullied by a girl named Annie, who went missing after she and Sailor had an altercation in the woods, which prompted the rumor that Sailor killed her.

Once again, the story opens with a sacrifice in the woods. In a prologue that takes place in 1919, a woman is trapped inside a tree and asking her son for help, as he observes the scene and asks her what she is doing there. As his mother explains that she has been "pledged" to the "wytches," and they are coming for her, we witness the child hitting his mother's face with a stone and incapacitating her, and muttering the words "pledge is pledge" (5), while the sound "chhhit chhhit chhhit" warns us that something is coming, and that these "wytches" might be something we have never encountered before.

The first chapter of the graphic novel, in effect, opens with a definition of the word "witch" in the manner of a dictionary entry –very close to the one in Collins dictionary– that covers many acceptations of the term, such as "a person, esp. a woman, having supernatural power as by a pact with the devil or evil spirits; sorceress; an ugly and ill-tempered old woman; hag; crone; a practitioner or follower of white magic or of Wicca" (2). However, the next page shows the same definitions completely scratched off, maybe by a claw, as Snyder boldly invites us to forget everything we know about witches. In his own words, "We're trying to really signal that the witches in our series are very different from the green-skin, goofy-hat, broom-riding hags that you see in other movies and books and comics" (Betancourt 2014, par. 10).

Accordingly, we learn that those who were persecuted, imprisoned and executed for witchcraft were not witches. Instead, they died protecting a secret: the fact that wytches –the real ones– exist, and they are ancient, mysterious, and deadly creatures that are rarely seen. They will do one's bidding, but in exchange one must "pledge" someone else's life by smearing the victims with a green liquid that identifies them as a sacrifice, and also attracts the wytches to them. And as we already know, "pledge is pledge."

If *The Witches of Westwood* dealt with male anxieties mainly related with sexuality, *Wytches* shows how fatherhood, traditionally seen as a role of guidance and protection, becomes a source of immense stress and fear. In *Wytches*, the father is not the hero who overcomes the monstrous threat, but rather a figure consumed by his own fears and failings. *Wytches* establishes from the beginning a family dynamic emphasizing the close relationship between Sailor and her father. Charlie is a graphic artist who creates stories about the adventures of a child whose grandfather owns a magic amusement park, where he projects the excitement of children's adventures but also the fears of childhood, elements that are central to the plot's development.

As Snyder states: "For me, ['Wytches'] is really about the terror that you feel as a parent at your own inability to protect your children from things in the world. You do the best you can, but you can't protect them all day every day, and the thing you really can't protect them from is the cruelty or the behavior of other people when you're not around" (Betancourt 2014, par. 7).

Thus, from the beginning of the story, Charlie has to live with the consequences of having endangered Sailor in the past while intoxicated, deal with the repercussions of Lucy's paralysis after her car accident, as well as worrying about the aftermath of the bullying suffered by his daughter, and the rumors that have followed his family to their new home. As strange incidents begin to occur around him, his terror transforms into a primal fear deeply rooted in nature. Very soon, he must confront the fact that something sinister and powerful is lurking in the woods of Lichfield, with a particular interest in Sailor.

Charlie's fears are not unfounded. The "pledging" process, which involves marking someone for the wytches, instills a constant sense of dread from the outset of the story. The ominous appearance of symbols and mysterious whispers surrounding pledges creates an atmosphere of impending doom for the chosen victims. In a flashback, we witness what actually happened to Annie, Sailor's bully, whom threatened Sailor with a gun in the woods, until something emerged from a tree and dragged Annie inside it. Annie's disappearance is the reader's first real encounter with the wytches that haunt the story, and create a sense of corruption of the land, and of nature as a corrupting influence.

The depiction of the woods surrounding the Rooks family's home is dark, twisted, and unsettling. Strange noises, distorted trees, and shadows give the sense that something malevolent is always watching. Right after moving to their new home, a deer enters the Rooks' home, but the initial awe gives way to horror, as the animal bites off its own tongue, and spits its bloody remnants.

Likewise, the unseen influence of the wytches can manipulate memories and perceptions, leaving characters uncertain of reality itself, and experiencing a growing sense of paranoia and fear. Sailor develops a bump on the side of her neck, which she occasionally sees as an open eye, and at night, she hears her name called from the woods. Meanwhile, Charlie experiences visions of his own deteriorating body bearing the words "here." This apprehension culminates in Charlie's worst nightmare, as the wytches kidnap Sailor, prompting him to search for her. Meanwhile, Lucy's memories of Sailor appear to have vanished.

The search for his daughter leads Charlie to learn that the inhabitants of Litchfield are eager participants in the power exchange with the creatures in the woods. As Sheriff Petal explains: "We are all selfish creatures, and they are the gods of selfishness. They can smell it in us" (103).

The wytches live beneath the earth, emerging from the forest to feed on human flesh in exchange for granting their followers power and longevity. As Charlie learns, no one knows exactly their origin. For some, "they are evolution gone wrong. Mutations from thousands of years ago, maybe formed apart ... in the ground. They are above us in the food chain. Kids is their favorite. Someone rubs pledge on you and the wytches come" (85). Their subterranean existence aligns

them with the earth and its primordial forces, suggesting that they are ancient, pre-human entities.

Snyder's wytches are depicted as abject. They are neither human, nor are they entirely otherworldly. They exist in a liminal space, deeply connected to the earth and the natural world, yet operating outside of its known laws. However, while the witches of Westwood seem to have stepped out straight from the pages of the *Malleus Malleficarum*, Snyder's are monstrous others that exist beyond the boundaries of human civilization.

The wytches are feral and predatory. They do not simply wield the forces of nature; they are part of it, creatures made of mud, bark, and bone. They exist as a natural part of the forest, reflecting a symbiotic relationship with the land. As Snyder points out, "the wytches are so elementally scary because they are so unknown and unfamiliar. Even their eyes are designed to be these large black reflective pupils that hide in trees and look at you through holes in trees. They have no sympathy and no mercy, they give you what you want to get what they want," and admits he wanted to move away from a gendered design of them, focusing instead on a design of "unfamiliar, asexual, and predatory" creatures (Thompson 2014, par. 21-22), although we must point out that they are still referred to as "she." The graphic novel's ending is particularly bleak, but Snyder gives us enough hints to know that the story is not over. We learn that Lucy pledged Sailor in order to walk again, and that she is a descendant of the young child we met in the prologue, and who pledged his own parents to escape the horror of Lichfield's wytches' burrow, as his own parents had conceived him as a pledge. The wytches provoked Lucy's traffic accident, prompting her to pledge Annie. However, her pledge proved insufficient, leading her to pledge her own daughter instead. Thus, *Wytches* offers no resolution or triumph over the forces of nature. Instead, Charlie sacrifices himself and pledges Lucy, so Sailor can escape and find a group of witch hunters, aptly named "The Irons", but the ending strongly suggests that the wytches will continue to hunt and consume those who cross into their territory.

6. WITCHES, NATURE, AND HUMAN DOMINANCE

While both graphic novels deliver familiar tropes of supernatural terror, they also engage deeply with themes of ecological dread and humanity's troubled relationship with the natural environment. Both *The Witches of Westwood* and *Wytches*, offer a contrasting view to the ecofeminist rhetoric of the witch as a symbol of feminist empowerment and ecological activism, emphasizing the darker and more unsettling aspects of the natural world. The woods in the analyzed works serve as a symbol of humanity's fraught relationship with nature. On one hand, nature is a source of life and sustenance; on the other, it is a site of danger and death. This ambivalence is central to the concept of ecophobia, where nature is both feared and desired, with the deep woods serving as a liminal space where the boundaries between human and nonhuman blur. The witches, and especially the wytches, are deeply connected to the natural world, embodying the primal and untamed aspects of nature.

In *The Witches of Westwood*, the witches' relationship to nature is one of manipulation and control through their rituals and sacrifices, while the wytches represent more than simple supernatural villains; they symbolize ecological forces beyond human control, embodying both ecological anxiety and the fear of human insignificance in a world governed by nature's brutal, indifferent power. Thus, witches –and wytches– are presented as complex figures that encapsulate the intersection of supernatural fear, environmental concerns, and the sublime.

At a surface level, *The Witches of Westwood* and *Wytches* offer many similarities. They present an unsuspecting group of characters who move to an apparently idyllic location in order to start anew, and where the wilderness becomes not just a scenery for horror, but an active force that threatens human survival and identity. However, they develop in opposite ways.

The Witches of Westwood is, at the end, What Valerie Plumwood (1993) defines as "disabling story." In her own words: "The reason/nature story has been the master story of western culture. It is a story which has spoken mainly of conquest and control, of capture and use, of destruction and incorporation" (196). In *The Witches of Westwood*, men are lured into the forest, a place where the energy of the witches disrupts and redefines traditional gender roles, and then becomes a testing ground for masculinity, where those who enter often meet their demise. The overflowing sexuality of the witches' rituals emasculate men around them: both their husbands turned into obedient familiars and Jack, who is facing impotence in the form of creative block, and only overcomes it by burning the witches once he has depowered them by revealing that they are nothing but figments of his imagination. If as Barksdale states: "witches, specifically the wicked witches, reveal where the different axes of domination between women and nature intersect" (38), by extension, the bewitched Westwood forest undermines the affirmation of human superiority by threatening the very distinction between the human and the non-human. Thus, Jack, a writer, an embodiment of the patriarchal reason and logic, kills the witch and purifies the forest, as Berksdale points out, as a consequence of the "fear the male characters felt when nature and witch-women threaten their sense of authority, masculinity, and sovereignty" (14). As a result, at the end the witches are no longer a threat, since they have been contained and incorporated into the dominant culture as mere characters of a book written by a man, that is, commodified objects ready to be consumed, which ensures the domestication of both wild women and wild nature, which don't pose a threat to patriarchal hegemony anymore. The potential peril that ensues from the tension between civilization and the primal has been averted.

On the other hand, *Wytches* engages with themes of ecological apocalypse, suggesting that the natural world, in the form of the wytches, will eventually reassert its dominance over humanity. The graphic novel portrays nature as a force that cannot be tamed or contained, and which will inevitably rise up to reclaim its territory. This apocalyptic vision is grounded in a deep sense of human vulnerability, as the Rooks family find themselves powerless against the overwhelming force of the wytches and the wilderness they inhabit.

Throughout the graphic novel, Snyder emphasizes the futility of human efforts to control or escape nature. The Rooks family's attempts to flee from the

wytches only serve to draw them deeper into the forest, mirroring humanity's inability to escape its dependence on and vulnerability to the natural world. The wytches' ultimate victory over the Rooks suggests that nature will always have the upper hand, no matter how much humans seek to dominate it, and emphasizes their fragility in the face of environmental forces that are beyond their control.

The ending of *Wytches* is particularly poignant in this regard. Contrary to *The Witches of Westwood*, the novel concludes not with the triumph of human reason or power, but with the Rooks' capitulation to the wytches. Sailor's fate is left in the air, and we don't know what will happen when and if she meets "The Irons", but at the end of *Wytches. Volume 1* the message is clear: Humanity's attempts to control Nature are ultimately doomed to failure, and the natural world will always reclaim what is rightfully its own.

7. THE WITCH AS AN ECOGOTHIC MONSTER: FEAR, POWER, AND THE CHAOTIC FORCES OF NATURE

Thus, both *The Witches of Westwood* and *Wytches* show the re-emergence of the evil witch as an ecoGothic monster, a figure that embodies both human anxiety about the environment and the chaotic, uncontrollable power of nature, while invokes fear and fascination, illustrating the dynamic tension between humans and nature, and the consequences of human intervention in the natural world. They also work as a reminder of the lingering fears of witchcraft particularly when faced with inexplicable phenomena. The folklore of witches permeates both texts, and the portrayal of nature as both a victim and a perpetrator of horror reflects a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of human and environmental systems, as well as the potential consequences of disrupting that balance. In both graphic novels, the artwork plays a critical role in amplifying the eerie, monstrous nature of the titular creatures.

In *The Witches of Westwood*, El Torres openly acknowledges that his perspective on witches resembles a "mythical monster," and reinforces the monstrosity of the graphic novel's nominal witches by inserting recreations of Goya's engravings between its four episodes, and claiming that his Westwood witches originate from the witch who "tries to cook Hansel, poisons Snow White, flies on a broomstick, and you see her on Halloween posters" (2014, 104).

The linework used to portray the witches is often sharp, raw, and aggressive. The graphic novel depicts the witches as beautiful and oversexualized women, clad in tight and revealing clothes. Their facial expressions, often characterized by wide, unsettling grins or snarling features, give them a predatory and malevolent appearance.

The illustrations' use of shadow and light instills a sense of menace in the witches, particularly when they are in the woods, illuminating only parts of their bodies, implying that they conceal much of their power and inhabit locations beyond the reach of ordinary humans. In this sense, the forest takes on a life of its own, as the trees have roots and branches that seem to reach out like claws, and it feels as monstrous as the witches themselves.

Additionally, ritual sacrifices, dismembered bodies, and other gory elements are depicted in vivid detail often showcasing the witches' power in violent, bloody ways. The brutality of their actions is a clear reminder of their monstrous nature, making them not just manipulative and powerful but also physically dangerous.

In the case of *Wytches*, a very distinct visual style, combined with an atmospheric color palette, contributes to a sense of dread and terror throughout the story. They render the wytches in a grotesque, inhuman manner, with distorted, elongated limbs, sharp features, and gaping mouths, giving them an otherworldly quality that distances them from any sense of humanity.

The use of shadows and deep blacks makes the wytches appear as if they are emerging from the darkness itself. Often, only parts of their bodies or faces are visible, hiding their full form and enhancing their sense of menace, which plays with the reader's perception, leaving much to the imagination and making them even more terrifying because they are not fully seen or understood.

The backgrounds in *Wytches* are often abstract, with swirling, chaotic patterns which blur the line between reality and nightmare, enhancing the disorienting nature of the wytches, as if their very presence warped the environment around them. Colors further intensify the monstrous presence of both the witches of Westwood and the wytches. The use of harsh, contrasting colors –deep reds, greens, and yellows– create an atmosphere that mirrors the physical corruption the monstrous beings bring. The texture adds a sense of decay and rot, particularly in the case of *Wytches*, which echoes the creatures' corrupting nature.

Together, these artistic choices create nightmarish worlds where monstrous creatures exist, as the visuals do not just depict their appearance, but evoke the primal fear they represent, conjuring a visceral reaction from the readers.

8. TIMES OF CRISES, TIMES OF WITCHES

We are currently facing a modern ecocultural crisis, illustrated by numerous threatening, interconnected, and deeply self-reinforcing challenges, including extreme weather events, critical changes to Earth systems, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem collapse. These issues stem from a variety of concerns, including fossil fuel addiction, the imperatives of cheap energy, and the intricacies of human and non-human bonds.

Since the 2010s, there has been an increasing literary and artistic production centered around anxiety about climate and environmental change, and we can argue that this production and the fears associated with it are deeply interconnected with the rise of the fictional witch figure that we have witnessed for years now. We have observed that the depiction of the witch often portrays her as a wise and powerful figure, possessing knowledge of the natural world and its rhythms, and the capacity to utilize this knowledge for healing and environmental protection. Witches can also serve as a symbol of resistance against the destructive forces of modernization and industrialization, often portrayed as detrimental to the natural world. They are able to wield nature's power and punish those who seek to destroy or exploit it, serving as a reminder of the dangers of ignoring the natural world and the importance

of respecting and protecting the environment. In any case, they are a force to be reckoned with.

To name only a few, witches have populated TV shows like *American Horror Story: Coven* (2013), The reboot of *Charmed* (2018), *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2019), *A Discovery of Witches* (2020) or *Sanctuary: A Witch's Tale* (2024-present), films like *The Witch* (2015), *The Love Witch* (2016), and the revision of the classic *The Craft*, entitled *The Craft: Legacy* (2020). They are also popular in comic books. When it comes to Marvel comics, we must mention Scarlet Witch, who masters chaos magic and reality-warping powers, which has immense destructive potential, and Agatha Harkness, always tiptoeing the line between hero and villain. Zatanna is one of the most powerful sorceresses in DC comics. She wields real magic by speaking spells backwards. Morgaine, also from the DC universe and inspired by the Arthurian legend, is a sorceress who often opposes heroes such as Wonder Woman and Superman. The Three Witches, also known as the Maiden, Mother, and Crone, are the witches in DC Vertigo's *The Sandman*. Conversely, the witches of Dark Horse Comics feature Willow Rosenberg, a character from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, or Baba Yaga, a Slavic folklore-inspired figure who wields immense power and terror in the *Hellboy* universe. Of course, we can't forget the original teenage witch Sabrina Spellman by Archie Comics.

The proliferation of witches' narratives during times of crisis, such as the climate emergency today and the Little Ice Age in the 16th and 17th centuries, must be considered as an indicator of social, economic, and psychological stress. The exploration of witches' narratives in both historical and contemporary contexts reveals profound insights about societal responses to crises. By understanding how fear, scapegoating, and power dynamics play out during times of instability, we can better navigate the challenges posed by climate change today.

In conclusion, witches' narratives frequently encapsulated fears of the unknown and the breakdown of social order. Today, narratives about witches or witch-like figures may emerge in response to the perceived chaos brought on by climate change, reflecting anxiety about losing control over nature and society. Once again, the unruly aspects of nature connect with the witch's embodiment of gender, power, and fear. The witch's monstrous nature resurfaces, embodying cultural fears and anxieties about the environment and the boundaries between human and non-human nature. By examining these connections, we can see how the themes of crisis, fear, and control recur in witch narratives across different historical contexts, revealing much about societal responses to environmental challenges.

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LAND PROPERTY, LAND DESTRUCTION: ECOGOTHIC *VS.* CAPITALISM IN BRAM STOKER'S *THE SNAKE'S PASS*

José Manuel Correoso Rodenas
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Abstract

In 1890, the future author of *Dracula*, Bram Stoker, published one of the most undervalued, yet innovative and interesting novels among his literary productions: *The Snake's Pass*. Beyond the narration of the love story between Arthur and Norah, the novel depicts a Western Ireland scenario in which the chrematistic aims of the characters coalesce with the destruction of the landscape and, in consequence, the destruction of the environment, for a treasure is said to be hidden in the bog. Thus, the conflict coming of the extemporaneous ownership of the land (Arthur is English) leads to a questioning of how the ambition based on capitalistic-industrialist impulses (the treasure-hunt is rational and machine-ridden) means the destruction of the environment and the perversion of the community that had traditionally been attached to that part of the country. The goal of this article is to explore how Stoker ciphered all these elements, creating an original literary product that announces some of the key conflicts in the British Isles (land property) when seen through the lens of modern criticism.

Keywords: Land property, Environmental Destruction, Balance of Power, Progress, Irish Gothic.

PROPIEDAD DE LA TIERRA, DESTRUCCIÓN DE LA TIERRA:
ECOGÓTICO *VS.* CAPITALISMO EN *THE SNAKE´S PASS* DE BRAM STOKER

Resumen

En 1890, el futuro autor de *Dracula*, Bram Stoker, publicó una de sus novelas más minusvaloradas, aunque de lo más interesante e innovador de su producción literaria: *The Snake's Pass*. Más allá de narra la historia de amor entre Arthur y Norah, la novela muestra un escenario en el oeste de Irlanda en el que las aspiraciones monetarias de los personajes se coaligan con la destrucción del paisaje y, en consecuencia, con la destrucción del medio natural (puesto que hay un supuesto escondido en la turbera). Así, el conflicto derivado de una propiedad de la tierra por parte de un foráneo (Arthur es inglés) lleva a reflexionar cómo la ambición basada en el progreso capitalista e industrial (la búsqueda del tesoro se hace con máquinas) lleva a la destrucción de la naturaleza y a la perversión de la comunidad que tradicionalmente había vivido en el lugar. El objetivo de este artículo es explorar cómo Stoker acrisoló todos estos elementos creando un original producto literario que anuncia algunos de los conflictos centrales que afectan a las Islas Británicas (la propiedad de la tierra) desde el punto de vista de la crítica moderna.

Palabras clave: propiedad de la tierra, destrucción de la naturaleza, equilibrio de poderes, progreso, literatura gótica irlandesa.

"When a man takes a farm from which another has been evicted, you must shun him on the roadside when you meet him, you must shun him in the streets of the town, you must shun him at the shop-counter, you must shun him in the fair and at the marketplace, and even in the house of worship... you must shun him your detestation of the crime he has committed... if the population of a county in Ireland carry out this doctrine, that there will be no man... [who would dare] to transgress your unwritten code of laws"

Charles Stewart Parnell, addressing a gathering at Ennis
(September 19th, 1880) [Qtd Jordan 1994,286]

1. INTRODUCTION

The aforementioned quotation introduces some of the key conflicts and tragedies that are going to be explored in the following pages. As Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) states, the reaction against the unfair situations provoked by capitalist impulses such as land concentration is to be considered an ethical duty. The eviction of a farmer means a cell within the (quasi-organic) community that then suffers the possibility of developing an infection that threatens to expand. Bram Stoker's (1847-1912) *The Snake's Pass* (1890) will revolve around many of these questions, depicting a scenario in which the historical trauma Parnell was addressing in 1880 aesthetically manifests. As seen below, all the elements included in Parnell's speech have a literary reflection in the novel that is going to be discussed. The law, the conundrum tradition-progress, or the moral conception of communality will be some of the ideas included in the different sections Stoker included in his novel.[1] In addition, as seen in the following paragraphs, the theoretical devices proposed by modern criticism will allow us to focus on other aspects that were covered with a lesser degree of interest during the transitional moment of late 19th century (e.g. environmental destruction).

Since its literary beginnings, gothic literature has showed a crucial concern towards the representation of land property, and the possible implications this may have for the aesthetic evolution of the characters, plots, narrative premises, etc. Horace Walpole's (1717-1797) *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)[2] expresses how the gothic curse that affects Manfred and his descendants is provoked by an illegitimate access to the property of the lordship of the castle. In consequence, the conflict between possession and dispossession has historically become central in order to understand how Gothicism has addressed secular problems such as those of power equilibrium and a (potential) balanced distribution of the means of production (in

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[1] Although we will refer to *The Snake's Pass* as a novel, the categorization of the text's genre has led to interesting discussion, such as Nicholas Daly's (1999).

[2] In the particular case of Ireland, scholars such as Jarlath Killeen have pinpointed that this "gothic" conflict has affected the country since even before the rise of literary Gothicism, tracing its roots back to the mid-17th century (2005, 28-54).

gothic narratives, almost exclusively land). To this, the situations of a lack of balance caused by the colonial relations established during the 19th century can be added, of which Ireland was a victim.[3] In consequence, we have a territory whose land is being doubly vampirized (using a Marxist denomination) by an unequal distribution of land and by the forceful presence of a foreign authority aligned with alien elites. In *The Snake's Pass*, Arthur Severn (the main character and narrator) becomes the (English) landlord of a vast property in Co. Clare. In order to avoid an unnecessary expansion of the discussion, this article mostly analyzes the notions of land property and of destruction of the environment in the following pages. Other features, such as the ethical construction that leads to the climatic situation, or the constant presence of machinery, although mentioned, will not receive the detailed attention that a future, independent study can provide.

1.1. A (Not Only) Marxist Theoretical Introduction

As mentioned, the interrelations between the Gothic and capitalism root back to the mere origins of the genre in the 18th century, for the publication of the first novels coincided in time with the advent and the social ascension of capitalistic industrialists. Robert Adrian Herschbach, in the context of his doctoral dissertation (focused on the exploration of American 1980s-1990s Gothic), briefly discusses how the anxieties that would become proper of the Victorian Era (or even of his lifetime)

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[3] Something that scholars like Maureen O'Connor have highlighted in relation to other gothic classics authored by Irish (or Anglo-Irish) writers (i.e. Charles Robert Maturin [1780-1824] or Oscar Wilde [1854-1900]): "The use of gothic elements within the [Irish] national tale complements critical discussion of *Dorian Gray*'s incorporation of gothic tropes and techniques, offering the basis for correspondences between Wilde's text and the gothic novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, written in 1820 by Charles Maturin. Interestingly, Maturin was Wilde's uncle by marriage. Certainly, the character of Melmoth, frozen in an unbearable immortality, driven by guilt across time and space, in search of an elusive expiation, figures significantly in the creation of Dorian Gray. Eagleton sees the embodiment of the paradox of Anglo-Irish relations in Melmoth, whose story functions 'as an allegory of this strange condition in which exploiter and victim are both strangers and comrades, and, indeed, in the person of Melmoth himself, inhabit the same personality'" (2004, 197-198). Eóin Flannery has also evaluated how Irish colonial past shows ecocritical implications: "A presiding concern of the British colonial polity was the need conclusively to assimilate all of its Celtic peripheries, including Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. The sustained colonization of Ireland began in the sixteenth century and continued into the early seventeenth century with a series of settler plantations in the south, east and north of the island. It was a period of conquest and settlement that, as Jane Ohlmeyer concludes, involved: 'strategies [which] though often couched in the rhetoric of civility, effectively amounted to a form of imperialism that sought to exploit Ireland for England's political and economic advantage and to Anglicise the native population' (28-29). However, when we reach the eighteenth century, the constitutional countenance of Ireland has altered. By this period Ireland had become a formal kingdom and was possessive of its own parliament –a fact that not only differentiated it from contemporary, and many subsequent, British colonies, but supplements the catalogue of contradictions that besets Irish colonial history. We shall see that the cosmetics of constitutional parity of esteem too often mask the endurance of colonial subjugation" (2015, 162).

had already been aroused decades before: "globalization also was not an entirely new concept; the idea of an increasingly networked, interconnected and business-driven world, one in which national boundaries would become increasingly supplanted, was in vogue around the turn of the previous century" (2002, 2).[4] The arrival of the 19th century meant a further degree of assimilation of what the postulates of both terms had in common, specially bearing in mind that this was the primal moment of the economic and geographic expansion of both gothic fiction and capitalism. In consequence, the new discussions that were incorporated to the social debate used the cultural panorama as a source for references.

Social (or political) theorists like Karl Marx (1818-1883) or Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) explored what the new liberal, industrial system had in common with some of the archetypes of the literary Gothic, such as vampires,[5] as Marx would develop in his *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (1867-1894). However, beyond this effective metaphor, Marxism had produced in 1848 an earlier mention that contributes to link the postulates of abusive consumption to the purposes of the present article. The *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, in the sections devoted to the exploration of the different vices that the bourgeoisie had brought to the modern world, states how capitalism had also provoked a "vampiric" approach to the environment, as it had done to proletarians:

> The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation to rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground[6] –what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labour? (2012, 78)[7]

As the 19th century advanced, these "vampiric" features of capitalism were emphasized, for also the environment was seen as vulnerable for the first time (at least in some of its representations), shaping the direction and application of ecocritical languages, leading to much more contemporary revisions such as Andrew Smith and William Hughes' seminal essay *Ecogothic* (2013), or more specific approaches

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[4] Something that Edith Wharton had already announced in the preface to her ghost stories (1997, 9).

[5] For a pedagogical application of the Marxist metaphor of the vampire, see Jess Morrissette (2019).

[6] This notion is completed by the idea Marx and Engels express in the previous paragraph and which is also related to the purposes of this article: "The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands" (2012, 78).

[7] All the references to the *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* have been obtained from the English version included in the critical edition published by Yale University Press in 2012. See works cited for the complete bibliographical note.

such as Elizabeth Parker's *The Forest and the EcoGothic. The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination* (2020).

In coalition with the aforementioned ecogothic postulates, some of the crucial theoretical assumptions that we need to bear in mind before approaching *The Snake's Pass* are those of the (recently developed) scholarship focused on the capitalistic implications of the Gothic (both literary and cultural). This tendency can be clearly appreciated in the late 20th and early 21st centuries through the contribution of recent scholars such as Gail Turley Houston (2005) or Amy Bride (2023). Houston has mentioned that "With the rise of capitalism and the concomitant demise of the household as the center of the economy, the subject became fragmented and compartmentalized, a self haunted at home as well as at work" (3), which is what happens to the most relevant characters in *The Snake's Pass*: Arthur, the Joyces, Murdock, and Dick Sutherland. Gothic theorist Nick Groom, in his encyclopedic new history of the vampire (Yale University Press, 2018), establishes how blood and gold can be understood as partner matters. In consequence, the urge vampires traditionally experience to obtain blood from their victims can be comparable to the capitalistic impulse industrialists (and other patrons) feel toward proletarians.[8] In a Marxist-like metaphor, Groom parallels the blood of the worker with the blood of the vampiric victim: both of them are irreplaceable for the survival and the maintenance of the *status quo* of the "monster." As vampires' victims produce the vital support for revenants, workers' efforts produce the gold (monetary benefits) that are the foundation of the capitalist system. In order to conclude this summarized overview of the theoretical framework in which the present article is incardinated, we cannot obviate the forthcoming publication authored by Jon Greenway under the title *Capitalism, a Horror Story. Gothic Marxism and the Dark Side of the Radical Imagination* (2024). There, Greenway offers a review of the cultural history of capitalism, addressing the topic covering the different implications and manifestations it has historically had, from economy to philosophy. The sections devoted to analyzing how "capitalist culture" has influenced (and has been influenced by) the evolution of gothic literature and visual arts are especially relevant for the topics explored here, for the author states connections between (capitalist) economic growth and oppression-related violence, between the expansion of Western society and the destruction of the environment worldwide, ideas that will be revisited in the following paragraphs.

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8 See Olga Hoyt (1984), who has also discussed the vampiric implications of consumerism, using Augustin Calmet's (1672-1757) *Traité sur les apparitions des esprits, et sur les vampires, ou les revenans de Hongrie, de Moravie, &c* (1751) as a source. As an introductory blood-sucking activity Calmet's vampires perform, prior to the development of industrialism, we can find that he mentions that several vampires in Hungary returned from their tombs to share their families' meals, their revenue (1751, 37-39).

1.2. The Shaping of *The Snake's Pass*

Not as widely known and studied as *Dracula* (1897),[9] *The Snake's Pass* was originally published in 1890, simultaneously in the United States (Harper & Brothers) and in the United Kingdom (Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle & Rivingston), although the chapter entitled "The Gombeen Man" had appeared in 1889 in the magazine *The People*. Between 1890 and 1891, the novel was extensively reviewed in different periodicals, with approaches that vary from fierce criticism for an (unreal) excess of reliance on popular sources (*The Speaker: The Liberal Review*, 1890 [qtd. 2015, 267]) to the acclamation of the narrative homodiegetic technique that Stoker discloses (*Murray's Magazine: A Home and Colonial Periodical for the General Reader*, 1891 [qtd. 2015, 270]). As it will be emphasized later, the confusion of the folkloric (legendary) and the factual (historical) is one of the foundations to structure the narration,[10] for the legend of Saint Patrick and the King Serpent triggers the action towards the industrial exploration of the bog, conditioning the behavior of some of the characters, especially Phelim Joyce and Murdock. This legend, well-known since the early Middle Ages, has enjoyed many different versions, as Roy Flechner (2019) has recently outlined. However, bearing in mind Stoker's cultural context and his academic education at Trinity College, it is believable to think that he may have followed Lady Wilde's (1821-1896) version, included in her volume *Ancient Legends Mystic Charms & Superstitions of Ireland* (1887). Irish literature is deeply connected to the folkloric, and it has shaped many textual traditions within the Anglo-Irish literary context, as Anne Markey states:

> Drawing attention to their shared association with superstition, transgression of rationality, fascination with the supernatural, and repetitive recourse to familiar tropes and formulaic narrative conventions, critics have repeatedly argued that folklore is a significant source for Gothic tropes and themes. (2014, 94)

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[9] Derek Gladwin complained in 2016 about the apparent lack of attention the novel had received: "Despite it being a substantial literary work about the Irish bog, *The Snake's Pass* had received relatively little critical attention until the mid-nineties" (59).

[10] Indeed, one of the villagers, Moynahan, narrates how his father had witnessed the French hiding a treasure near Carnacliff. In consequence, the legendary Saint Patrick, fighting against the snakes, meets the historical French and Irish revolutionaries fighting against the British Empire (arguably in events related to the Battle of Killala –1798– and the Irish Rebellion of 1798). Niall Gillespie, while analyzing the literary aftermath of Irish radicalism in the late 18th and early 19th century, offers a clear summary of the rebellion: "The 1798 rebellion began on 23 May. Lasting about 120 days, it ended in failure for the Jacobins. Ill-trained rebels armed with pikes and antiquated or defective arms stood little chance against the modern armaments and well-disciplined soldiers of the British Empire. Conservatively, it is estimated that at least 25,000 people died in the rebellion. The violence was overwhelmingly that of the state, with a least 90 per-cent of the casualties being rebels or perceived rebel sympathizers. To appreciate the scale of this, roughly the same amount of people were killed in absolute numbers, and in a shorter period of time than during the terror in France" (2014, 65).

Bram Stoker extensively relies on the conventions of gothic literature for the narration included in *The Snake's Pass*; thus, this assessment will become true to sustain the premise on which the novel relies.

Exploring the history of *The Snake's Pass* already shows many of the elements that will constitute the main topic of the following pages. For instance, it can be considered among Bram Stoker's pieces of imperial fiction,[11] paving the path for the concept of "reverse colonization" that will be structural in his best-known novel, *Dracula*, as Stephen D. Arata suggests:

> A concern with questions of empire and colonization can be found in nearly all of Stoker's fiction. His quite extensive body of work shows how imperial issues can permeate and inform disparate types of fiction. Stoker's *oeuvre* apart from *Dracula* can be roughly divided into two categories in handling of imperial themes. First, there are works such as "Under the Sunset" (1882), *The Snake's Pass* (1890), *The Mystery of the Sea* (1902), and *The Man* (1905) in which narratives of invasion and colonization, while not central to the plot, intrude continually upon the main action of the story. Legends of French invasions of Ireland in *The Snake's Pass*; attacks by the Children of Death on the Land Under the Sunset in the fairy tales; accounts of the Spanish Armada, Sir Francis Drake, and, in a more contemporary vein, the 1898 Spanish-American War, in *The Mystery of the Sea*; allusions to the Norman invasion of Saxon England in *The Man* - in each work, seemingly unrelated narratives of imperial expansion and disruption themselves disrupt the primary story, as if Stoker were grappling with issues he could not wholly articulate through his main plot. And, as his references to the Armada and to Norman and French invasions suggest, Stoker is everywhere concerned with attacks directed specifically against the British. (1990, 625)[12]

Several of the main characters that compose the narratological universe of *The Snake's Pass* will have to confront the notion of "reverse colonization," from Arthur (who visits Clare as a foreign tourist/traveler: "I accepted the cordial invitation of some friends, made on my travels, to pay them a visit at their place in the County of Clare" [Stoker 2015, 9])[13] to the villagers around Carnacliff (who finally incorporate Arthur to their socio-economic landscape, via his marriage with Norah and his

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[11] After having published *The Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions in Ireland* (1879) and *Under the Sunset* (1881). In this last collection of short stories, Stoker already relies on the narrative mixture of folklore and reality, something that will reappear in *The Snake's Pass* and *Dracula*. 1890, not in vain, would also be the year of publication of the original version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (see the aforementioned chapter authored by Maureen O'Connor).

[12] See also Lisabeth C. Buchelt (2012, 119-120).

[13] A visit that is never paid but whose mention also contributes to link the plot of *The Snake's Pass* with the aforementioned postulates related to land property. Assuming that Arthur had med these connections during the months he spent travelling across Europe, it can also be assumed that they belong to the same socio-economic class to which Arthur has accessed after being the beneficiary of Great Aunt's will (potentially, absentee owners): "When the will was read, it was found that I had been left heir to all her property, and that I would be called upon to take a place among the magnates of the country" (2015, 9).

acquisition of Murdock's land. Completing Arata's positions in the aforementioned quotation, Lisabeth C. Buchelt states that the "imperial" approach of *The Snake's Pass* should also be addressed in (mostly) plain colonial terms, following Arthur's point of view. As the early modern European colonists around the world felt they had to "decipher" the newly encountered territories,[14] Arthur feels he has acquired understanding of the new reality lying before him: "He [Arthur] is confident that he is able to 'decode' the Irish rural locations' meaning and the rural characters' intentions and desires in spite of the apparent lack of (British) sophistication and (British) education" (2015, XVI). Like the explorers of new worlds, Arthur uses his background and education (and his imperial superiority) in order to relate to western Ireland. However, as seen in Arata's 1990 essay, the power of the land, the mixture of the real and the folkloric will haunt him back, and he will become trapped in Clare to the extreme of becoming one with the Shleenanaher.

2. *THE SNAKE'S PASS*: ECO-GOTHIC AND CAPITALISM

Everything begins with a tourist vacationing through the west of Ireland: "As my time was my own, and as I had a week or two to spare, I had determined to improve my knowledge of Irish affairs by making a detour through some of the counties of the West on my way to Clare" (Stoker 2015, 9). This assessment, although banal at first sight, speaks to many of the concerns that are going to be explored in the following sections. Arthur, the "Occidental" tourist in *The Snake's Pass*, is enjoying a benefit (and a custom) that was nonexistent prior to the expansion of the social improvements the industrial revolution (and the workers' movements) brought: spending a period of time only devoted to leisure ("a real holiday" [Stoker 2015, 7], as Arthur would express). An economy-derived (and economy-driven) activity, tourism has had a transcendental reflection in the Arts (literature among them). On the one hand, in relation to the objectives of the present article, it has contributed to the negative modification of the environment, ciphered in the notion of "Gothic Tourism," which, in the words of Emma McEvoy, "has been integral to the Gothic aesthetic from the very beginning" (2016, 4). On the other hand, as Arthur Severn expresses at the beginning of the narration, the possibility of spending time only enjoying the surrounding environment led to positive reevaluations of, among other elements, the landscape:

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[14] Applicable to Ireland through scholarly analyses such as Jarlath Killeen's (2005, 29-36; 2014, 3). Mark Doyle has extensively contributed to assess the relations between the question of Irish colonization and the existence of *The Snake's Pass*. The "Irish Question" is a property issue, rooting back to the English conquest of the island and the plantation system: "It all comes down to the manner in which England conquered Ireland. Beginning in the 1550s, after centuries of trying to pacify their 'wild Irish' neighbors militarily, successive English rulers embarked on their nation's first major colonization scheme. The strategy was simple: the state would seize land from rebellious Irish lords, give or sell it to more trustworthy English and Scottish settles, and then wait for civilization to take root (2015, 273-274).

The whole west was a gorgeous mass of violet and sulphur and gold –great masses of storm-cloud piling up and up till the very heavens seemed weighted with a burden too great to bear. Clouds of violet, whose centres were almost black and whose outer edges were tinged with living gold; great streaks and piled up clouds of palest yellow deepening into saffron and flame-colour which seemed to catch the coming sunset and to throw its radiance back to the eastern sky. (Stoker 2015, 5-6)[15]

However, the landscape to be found around Carnacliff, where Arthur is forced to seek refuge because of the storm mentioned in the quotation above, is not a derivation of the picturesque views he is enjoying on his journey (and the "grand-touristic" views the reader assumes Arthur has enjoyed in continental Europe). On the contrary, Stoker's main character is going to be confronted with a situation of crisis derived from the conflict(s) about land property and the progressive degradation of the bog, the natural basis which sustains the Shleenanaher.[16] In the words of Derek Gladwin,

On the surface, a bog appears to be firm land [...], and yet, it does not provide solid footing [...]. Bogs also shift without warning, almost like avalanches, squashing and suffocating anyone or anything in their paths. Covered in mist, bogs produce a miasma effect, clouding reality and fiction. (2016, 1)

This introductory definition to Gladwin's essay *Contentious Terrains. Boglands, Ireland, Postcolonial Gothic* perfectly summarizes the actual landscape (natural and social) to be found at Carnacliff. The shifting bog, threatening the existence of the villagers (specially Murdock and Phelim) constitute the natural scenario for a foggy, miasmatic, unsolid social structure, "[...] at the crossroads between civilization and 'nature,' where policies and inhabitants often pursue separate ends" (Gladwin 2016, 38), based on the prevalence of the gombeen man and the submission of the tenants. Thus, what Stoker builds around his fictional shifting bog is a narration in which the gothic conventions and language are used as a narrative device to set

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[15] The picturesque West that Stoker is displaying in this narration is deeply connected with the descriptive and setting narrative traditions that began in the late 19th century and have lasted to the present day, becoming Ireland's most distinctive and "searched for" scenario, with fiction being a remarkable reflection of an actual phenomenon (i.e. tourism, with Arthur being a pioneer). As notable examples, we can mention classical works such as John Ford's (1894-1973) *The Quiet Man* (1952), John McGahern's (1934-2006) *Amongst Women* (1990) or, more recently, Conor McPherson's (born in 1971) dramas or Martin McDonagh's (born in 1970) award-winning *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022). In relation to *The Snake's Pass*, Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch has stated that "From the start, *The Snake's Pass* provides the reader with a powerful word image of the West of Ireland, the novel's setting. Through his 'focalizer,' Arthur Severn, Bram Stoker vividly captures the typical geographical characteristics of the region and its distinctive characteristics of human habitation. [...], by the end of the nineteenth century it had transformed into a symbol of Irish authenticity that would become a cornerstone of national identity [...]" (2015, 311-312).
[16] The negative landscape addresses the notion that Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey express (2016, 5).

a social drama. Murdock, the villain, occupies his castle on top of the hill, while his power, based on the property of the land, is menaced by the possibility of this land to disappear. The shifting bog of *The Snake's Pass* also encompasses that halfway scenario between reality and fiction that Gladwin was mentioning, for it is home to the aforementioned legend of Saint Patrick and the King Serpent.

2.1. The Gombeen Man: Environmental Vampire / Environmental Terrorist

If there is a gothic character within *The Snake's Pass*, that is Black Murdock, the gombeen man.[17] This character is narrowly linked to the classical villains of the gothic novel, and it also works as a magnificent precedent for Count Dracula. In the same way the Transylvanian aristocrat has subjugated the surrounding populations through the threat to their lives, their descendants, and their souls, Murdock has performed his authority via setting an economic sword of Damocles over his neighbors. Both are vampires, for both are extracting the blood (literally or metaphorically, as seen below) from their victims, and both are extremely (and vitally) linked to their respective terrains: Dracula travelling within the actual land of Transylvania, Murdock fighting against the odds to find the treasure hidden in the bogland. Murdock is the Marxist vampire that has been described in the introductory paragraphs, for he has used the conventions of progress and of the modern world in order to impose his power over the rest of the characters. Unlike Dracula, Murdock is able to survive in the late 19th century, for he is a product both of the capitalistic era and of the imperial dominion over the country. The aristocratic decadence of the Transylvanian is substituted by social and economic adaptability by the gombeen man. Also, unlike the forthcoming Dracula, Murdock fits in Marx's definition of the capitalist danger for nature, for his treasure thirst provokes the actual modification of the terrain in the vicinity, with his industrial-led actions the trigger for final destruction of the bog (Stoker 2015, 229-230).

After arriving at Carnacliff during the storm, Arthur is witness to the confrontation between Phelim and Murdock, a conflict that has money and land ownership as a background. The description offered by an old man is the first glimpse of Western Irish idiosyncrasy that Arthur receives:

> He's the man that linds you a few shillin's or a few pounds whin ye want it bad, and then niver laves ye till he has tuk all ye've got –yer land an' yer shanty an' yer holdin' an' yer money an' yer craps; an' he would take the blood out of yer body if he could sell it or use it anyhow. (Stoker 2015, 27)

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[17] According to the explanatory notes introduced by Lisabeth C. Buchelt in her critical edition of *The Snake's Pass*, this term is an "Anglicization of the Irish *gaimbín* from the phrase *airgead a chur ar gaimbín*, 'to lend money at interest'" (2015, 27 footnote 15).

Thus, Murdock has become the "evil man in the castle" that everyone has to fear, but also the last resource to which everyone will be forced to turn sooner or later. It is in this dependence that the villagers have on Murdock where the first source of his power lies, with the second being the remoteness and the particular characteristics of Carnacliff. As the aforementioned old man continues explaining to Arthur, Murdock has all the power of a usurer and none of their responsibilities or obligations, for "a ushurer lives in the city an' has laws to hould him in. But the gombeen has nayther law nor fear iv law" (Stoker 2015, 27). So, Murdock is taking advantages of both the old and traditional and the new and regulated worlds. This alternative system, this legal bog in which Murdock lives is a reflection of an actual problem affecting Ireland during most of the 19th century, as Heather Laird states:

> Traces of alternative courts and other subversive legal practices that can be found in numerous official and non-official accounts of rural Ireland provide evidence that alternative law has functioned as a fundamental component of Irish agrarian agitation since at least the emergence of Whiteboyism in the 1760s. In "The Irish National League and the 'unwritten law'," Donald Jordan offers a brief overview of these traces, drawing our attention to Select Committee Reports from 1825, 1831-2, 1852 and 1871 The Select Committee of 1825, for example, was informed by the Cork administrator of the Insurrection Act of 1814 that previously there had been "committees sitting when there was some great work to be done, as the burning of a house, or the murder of a man; the matter was discussed and decided there." The archives of the Department of Irish Folklore at UCO contain written records of oral testimony concerning agrarian violence chat occurred during the same period. Much of the violence recounted in this testimony is interpreted as just retribution in response to obvious injustices or acts that transgress accepted norms of behavior. (2005, 25)

As seen, the "unwritten law" that Laird highlights was more strongly applied when land-based issues were under consideration. Consequently, those like Phelim Joyce had a double-edged source of distress: on the one hand they had to fear the state and the official laws[18] and, on the other, living in a remote area of western Ireland, they are also subject to the vicissitudes of gombeen man, a remnant of pre-state societies. As a result, as the encounter between Phelim and Murdock at the tavern proves, land- and money-based Gothic was a daily reality for villagers (both real and fictional) in many areas of the island.

As mentioned before, one of the main differences between the gombeen man and the classical vampire is his poisonous relation towards nature, an element he also aims to subjugate. Murdock and Phelim act as counterparts in their relation

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[18] An "official law," to which Murdock pledges when convenient, like transferring his undesirable property to Arthur: "At Dublin Mr. Caicy met me, as agreed; and together we went to various courts, chambers, offices, and Banks –completing the purchase with all the endless official formalities and eccentricities habitual to a country whose administration has traditionally adopted and adapted every possible development of all belonging to red-tape" (Stoker 2015, 199).

to the environment and of what the environment can mean for the progress of the community. While Murdock is obsessed with the treasure (his only reason for occupying Phelim's land), Joyce, as a modern Robinson, aims to colonize the terrain, even if conditions are not initially positive for economic activities:

> The fertile land is left unworked as the Gombeen searches it for a chest of gold reputedly secreted in the area [...]. The diligent farmer, Joyce [...], is left to survive on what has become perceived as an unreclaimable or unimprovable tract of land: the bog itself. (Hughes 2015, 289)

Murdock, through his capitalist absenteeism, is becoming the (eco)-gothic villain. His victims are not only his neighbors, but also his country. As Smith and Hughes state for their definition of the Ecogothic (2013, 5), the gombeen man becomes an agent of increasing concern about how the environment should be managed. Murdock's "environmental terrorism," as seen below, marks a no-return point for the narration, for the destruction he is causing will be permanent, and will also have a significance in the future life of the survivors, specially the newlywed Severns.

2.2. Dick Sutherland: Agent and Victim

As mentioned before, the treasure-hunt that Murdock is organizing on his newly acquired property is conducted as a rationalistic expedition. In consequence, the gombeen man needs a product of the industrial era in order to be successful in his objectives: a technician, someone who can control the material conditions necessary for the treasure to be found, someone versed in science, technology, and modern procedures. Thus, again, *The Snake's Pass* depicts a scenario in which legend and reality coalesce, for this technician is hired (stablishing a formal commercial relationship between the master and the employee)[19] to find a treasure whose existence is, to a great extent, based on a legend. Science, then, is devoted to serve superstition.[20]

The necessary agent for this mission will be Arthur's friend Dick Sutherland ("a young engineer named Sutherland" [Stoker 2015, 52]), an Irish College of Science graduate.[21] As it will be disclosed in the following lines, Dick will play a double role within the narration. Along with his intervention as the necessary agent Murdock relies on in order to find the treasure (he knows how to manage the bog),[22]

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[19] Becoming the paid-wage labourer Marx and Engels announced.

[20] Something that, according to Derek Gladwin, was not exceptional or exclusive to Stoker's narration: "In nineteenth-century Gothic writing, for example, scientific theory and technological innovation were often used to validate various forms of excess and social decadence" (2016, 87).

[21] Presumably, the Royal College of Science for Ireland.

[22] And he can explain the nature of the bog, and understand the (possible) gothic implications it may have: "'Only a matter of specific gravity! A body suddenly immersed would, when the air of the lungs had escaped and the *rigor mortis* had set in, probably sink a considerable distance; then it would

Dick will also become a metaphor for the conflicts that capitalism brought. As the *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* states, the rise of the bourgeoisie corrupted the sentimental relations that had been traditionally established among individuals (Marx and Engels 2012, 12), and this includes friendship; these relations have been turned into monetary relations, in which economic preeminence marks superiority in status. This is exactly what happens to Dick (in relation to Arthur). Formerly friends and classmates, now both men will become collaborators (over the treasure) and competitors (over Norah).[23] As mentioned before, when the narration opens, Arthur has recently inherited a vast fortune so, in capitalistic terms, he has acquired an upper social position over Dick, who is a decently-talented man of science and an industrious worker. This will be the main source for Dick's victimhood, for Arthur's monetary power will be used to move Norah's romantic interests towards himself:

> Was it on my account that you, a rich man, purchased the home that she loved; whilst I, a poor one, had to stand by and see her father despoiled day by day, and, because of my poverty, had to go on with a hateful engagement, which placed me in a false position in her eyes? (Stoker 2015, 142)

Thus, the pre-existing camaraderie between Arthur and Dick is blown up (as the mountain will) due to a modification in the land property scheme existing at Carnacliff, a modification that has been undoubtedly propitiated by the monetary superiority of the main character and narrator. As seen, even the most banal conflict in *The Snake's Pass* is related to the central issue of the novel: property and, more specifically, land property.[24]

Thus, Dick represents the duality that the industrial revolution brought for western societies. On the one hand, his talent is necessary, as seen below, for the achievement of the industrial and monetary purposes of the novel and, on the other, his social class (origin-and economy-based) constitutes a barrier for the complete fulfilment of his vital needs. Love (Marx's sentimental relation) is interrupted due to the pernicious intervention of the bourgeois power. As for the objectives of this article, as the next section will explore in detail, Dick becomes an agent of land

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rise after nine days, when decomposition began to generate gases, and make an effort to reach the top. Not succeeding in this, it would ultimately waste away, and the bones would become incorporated with the existing vegetation somewhere about the roots, or would lie among the slime at the bottom'" (Stoker 2015, 61).

   23 Being Norah more closely related (in class terms) to Dick than to Arthur, as Phelim states: "'We're not gentlefolk, sir, and we don't understand their ways. If ye were of Norah's an me own kind, I mightn't have to say a name; but ye're not" (Stoker 2015, 153).

   24 A central problem to Irish culture discussed and highlighted as early as, at least, 1887 (see Morris). The aforementioned Derek Gladwin offers an interesting summary in his bog-related evaluation of *The Snake's Pass*: "Unequal distribution and ownership of land existed for several centuries under colonial administration. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the battle for land ownership, which equated to political legitimisation, reached its peak around the time of Prime Minister William Gladstone's second Land Act of 1881" (2016, 56).

destruction. Murdock's avarice, and his own monetary needs constantly push him to continue with the exploration of the bog, triggering its final shifting. So, in terms of gothic economic relations, Dick becomes an accomplice, even a scab. Property inequality leads him to betray the purest feelings he is able to experience, destroying the landscape that is (as seen) so dear to Norah, and collaborating with the gombeen man, who has caused the ruin of the Joyce family. However, the narrative conventions of *The Snake's Pass* do not adhere to the postulates of literary naturalism. In consequence, the character of Dick, resigned to the unenlightened destiny of being economically unable to pursue happiness, enjoys a redemption that also has a restoration of the environment surrounding Carnacliff at its center:

> Then he went on to tell me of the various arrangements effected – how those who wished to emigrate were about to do so, and how others who wished to stay were to have better farms given them on what we called "the mainland"; and how he had devised a plan for building houses form them –good solid stone houses, with proper offices and farmyards (Stoker 2015, 210-211).

This paternalistic, pre-liberal improvement of the life conditions of peasants, provoking a lesser emigration, can also be analyzed through the eco-Gothic postulates that have been followed in the whole article. As Dick confesses in the following lines, these houses and farms are to be built relying on the existence of limestone in the vicinity (Stoker 2015, 211), thus provoking a new modification in the landscape (beyond simply the modification that the newly-built constructions would mean). According to William Hughes, this final action in which Dick Sutherland becomes an agent is provokingly capitalism-related: "In part this [the use of limestone] implies the replacement of irregular Irish methods (subsistence farming almost) by the regularities of English capitalism and a division of the productive from the commercial" (2015, 295). So, the imperial conflict Bram Stoker[25] also envisions in *The Snake's Pass* is solved through the preeminence of the Anglo-Irish over the properly Irish, being the bourgeoisie finally exultant after having taken emotion from their connections, after having re-valued the economic system of Carnacliff, and after having subjugated the industrial worker, for now the proletarian Dick has a mission, a new purpose for his life.

2.3. The Treasure, the Mountain, and the Industrial Revolution

Finally, this section focuses on analyzing the main implications *The Snake's Pass* has towards the expansion of the notion of "ecogothic": the treasure-hunt that leads to the destruction of the Shleenanaher. The recreation of Arthur and Dick's

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[25] In his own words: "[...] a philosophical Home-Ruler [...]" (1907, available at https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/68779/pg68779-images.html#Page_8). For more information, see Buchelt 2015, xiv-xv.

friendship, and of Arthur's access to land property is scattered with a rosary of details about how the treasure of the King Serpent is searched for. As mentioned in the introductory sections of this article, this aspect of the novel is the main source of "ecogothic" anxiety, for characters (and readers) have to confront how industrialization unrelentingly advances, and how modernity erases the most distinctive view of the traditional Western Irish landscape, the bog.[26] As also mentioned, Dick Sutherland's expertise in engineering will be used by Murdock (and later by Arthur) as a weapon to attack the mountain, to vampirize it, extracting the golden blood (or the bloody gold)[27] it contains.

Shortly after Arthur and Dick reunite, the latter explains how Murdock had reached and hired him in Dublin, and rapidly proceeds to explain the apparent simplicity of his strategy to find the treasure: "The simplest thing in the world; just carry about a strong magnet – only we have to do it systematically" (Stoker 2015, 64). This is the first mention on how science (progress) will be used in *The Snake's Pass* to intervene with Nature. Although the use of a magnet may seem a very non-invasive intervention (it is, if compared with later actions, beginning with the stakes that are hammered into the ground [Stoker 2015, 64-65]), the reader cannot obviate that here the gothic villain is using his minion to explore what he is going to take (i.e. remember classical gothic villains and their explorations of damsels in distress before the physical assault).

Shortly after Arthur decides to become Dick's companion at the mountain,[28] the language of this attack against Nature is heavily emphasized: "We had attacked the hill some two hundred feet lower down than the bog, where the land suddenly rose steeply from a wide sloping extent of wilderness of invincible barrenness" (Stoker 2015, 97). As mentioned above, the two men, under the auspices of Murdock, stab and rip the earth in order to find its precious bowels. This will be completed with the final explosion that Dick performs on the mountain: "The moment the cartridge exploded the whole of the small clay bank remaining was knocked to bits and was carried away by the first rush" (Stoker 2015, 127), which provokes a visible excitement in the engineer, the victorious imperial and industrial agent (Stoker 2015, 126).[29] The disturbing essence of this message highlights the sense of land-related "Gothic-ness." However, the confrontation between men and the environment is having an unforeseen counterattack, for their actions are already affecting the bog, which (in a similar, yet more disturbing way as Dick) is becoming the multidimensional character Derek Gladwin assesses (2016, 58): attacked (victimized) but not defeated, awaiting its violent redemption. The central trope of the narration, and what better exemplifies the social and economic, land-ownership derived conflicts of *The Snake's Pass* coalesce

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[26] Also seen as a marker of the imperial conflict. See Wynne (2005, 323).

[27] Remember Nick Groom (2018).

[28] Again, the social differences between these two appear: while Dick remains the paid wager, Arthur is performing his "assisting" task as an entertainment, as a complimentary activity during his holiday.

[29] Participating in Timothy Jones' "carnival" (or carnivalesque) Gothic (2015, 36).

in the physical destruction of the natural environment. Although Bram Stoker would be far from the present-day postulates of ecocriticism,[30] he sets a narration in which the earth, wounded by the capitalist and industrial urge of modernity, fades away (Stoker 2015, 237). The bog, representative of everything that is properly traditional or Irish literally disappears, opening the gate for the full anglicization of Carnacliff. The legend acquires a new sense through the destruction of the hill: the new Saint Patricks are finally exiling the serpent from the Shleenanaher.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, as seen in the previous paragraphs, *The Snake's Pass* is an outstanding example of an overview of the different approaches and questions that are currently addressed by ecocriticism, socio-criticism, and eco-Gothic. The context in which the novel was conceived was of a high social and imperial clash, leading to the confrontation (internal and international) that manifested during the first half of the 20th century. We can see Stoker's narration showing a world that was rapidly changing, rapidly shifting (like the bog at the end of the story). In relation to the objectives that were planned at the beginning of this article, we have clearly proved how concepts such as land-property or social class are a structural component within the novel, and these (along with industrial progress, etc.) relate in a negative way to the construction of the landscape and the environment at and around Carnacliff. As seen, the connections between *The Snake's Pass* and the notions related eco-Gothic and "capitalist" Gothic are more than patent. An attentive reading, as offered above, contributes to the expansion of knowledge about this limitedly-discussed crucial narration to understand the rise of Anglo-Irish fiction, but also to foresee the portrayal of industrialism-related concerns in the late 19th century.

The characters that populate *The Snake's Pass* are clear representatives of these perverted relations. Arthur is the modern, bourgeois traveler and tourist, an exponent of a higher social class which has partially risen thanks to the expansion of the industrial revolution, and who is using the postulates Marx and Engels denounced to increase his status and wealth (through a new property and a marriage with a local to socially sustain that property). Murdock is the gothic villain, a man taking advantage of the two worlds in which he lives (thus, announcing Dracula), halfway between the traditional Irish custom of the gombeen man and the modern and regulated British state. Finally, Dick Sutherland is the most clearly multisided character in *The Snake's Pass*: a commoner by birth, raised to a higher social position through science and education, while still subject to the (often invisible) impositions that the capitalistic era had brought.

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[30] The main evidence is his positive view of the future through the newly-built limestone houses. For an exhaustive reevaluation of Victorian ecocritical sense, see Dewey W. Hall (2017).

Ireland is host to a long-lasting tradition which is deeply connected to folklore, one that Bram Stoker knew beforehand; in consequence, Irish culture is rooted in a deep connection to the environment and the earth. The propositions of ecocritical notions that affect the cultural implications of the evolution of Irish representations is highly necessary and extensively contributes to a further understanding of the true reality of Irish cultural lore. *The Snake's Pass*, as seen, can be ciphered as a crucible for all of this, for it summarizes imperial anxiety, class relations, and the destruction of the land exemplified through the physical destruction of the bog, one of the most distinctive Irish scenarios. During Stoker's lifetime there was still a long road to Ireland's sovereignty, and this novel is a good marker of the different milestones/obstacles that had to be passed/overcome for Ireland to arrive at its desired destination. Although Stoker never had Marxist or ecocritical postulates in mind, he was able to create a narration in which the main questions that have excited these theoretical approaches are, if not totally addressed, beautifully presented.

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ET VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST: MONSTROSITY AND TRANSCORPOREALITY IN *MEXICAN GOTHIC*

Imelda Martín Junquera
Universidad de León (GEHUMECO)
GIECO-Franklin Institute (UAH)

ABSTRACT

Mexican Gothic by Silvia Moreno García analyses the social situation of Mexico of the 1950s. A female gothic heroine guides the reader from a quiet town to a haunted house located in a remote village. She unveils the secrets of the Doyle's family, hidden behind the walls of the manor and in the crypt, and investigates the relationship of the members of the house with the house, while they keep her trapped inside. Noemí, the protagonist is helped by the ghost of Ruth, a deceased member of the family, and both women together end the rule of the patriarch of the family, Howard Doyle. The final collapse of the house and the death of the members of the family means an end to the colonial period of the area leaving the local inhabitants and the surrounding environment free from submission. The aim of this article is to show how ecogothic serves as a theoretical approach to denounce the submission of the human and the more than human by means of colonial practices beside demonstrating that the real monsters are the colonizers.

KEYWORDS: Decolonial Thinking, Haunted House, Monstrosity, Sorority, Transcorporeality.

ET VERBUM CARO FACTUM EST: MONSTRUOSIDAD Y
TRANSCORPORALIDAD EN *MEXICAN GOTHIC*

RESUMEN

Mexican Gothic de Silvia Moreno García analiza la realidad social de Méjico en los años 50 del siglo XX. Una heroína gótica guía al lector desde una tranquila ciudad hasta una casa encantada situada en una villa remota. Esta heroína desvela los secretos de la familia Doyle, escondidos tras las paredes de la casa y en la cripta e investiga la relación que la familia tiene con la casa mientras la mantienen secuestrada en ella. A Noemí, la protagonista de la novela, la ayuda el fantasma de Ruth, una de las parientes de la familia ya fallecida, y las dos juntas acabarán con el poder del patriarca de la familia, Howard Doyle. La caída final de la casa junto con la muerte de los miembros de la familia significa el final de un periodo de colonización de la zona y libera a los habitantes oriundos y al medio ambiente circundante de la sumisión previa. La intención de este artículo es demostrar que el ecogótico sirve como enfoque teórico para denunciar la sumisión de los seres humanos y más que humanos por medio de prácticas coloniales, además de dar razones que apoyan que los verdaderos monstruos son los colonizadores.

PALABRAS CLAVE: pensamiento decolonial, casa encantada, monstruosidad, sororidad, transcorporalidad.

Mexican Gothic is a novel by the Mexican-Canadian writer Silvia Moreno García set in the Mexico of the 1950s. The reader knows it is Mexico where the novel takes place from the first page, in which a costume party to which the protagonist, Noemí Taboada attends is described in detail. Silvia Moreno García also mentions the folkloric China Poblana costume, a popular one in Mexican costume parties. This party sets the atmosphere for the development of a Gothic narrative because it grows the expectations of the reader of this type of narratives for an uncanny event to take place. In fact, in his introduction to *Selva de fantasmas: el gótico en la literatura y el cine latinoamericanos*, Gabriel Andrés Eljaiek Rodríguez states that Latin American gothic normally starts with a party or a family dinner as part of the transculturation process that takes place in these narratives. Transculturation as a concept first appeared in Fernando Ortiz's *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar* (1940) to explain the process of cultural exchange that occurs when two cultures enter in contact. They both lose some elements and acquire others from the other culture at the same time a new third culture is born as a hybrid from elements of the other two. In Latin America, the process has resulted from the imposition of colonization so, this transculturation has not been a pacific process but, in most instances, a painful one where a deep feeling of loss and a necessary reaccommodation have been the norm. Ángel Rama in his *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (1984) applies this concept to the cultural and literary influences that create intertextuality in the narrative genre of the novel. Along these pages, I point out some of the most significant cases of narrative transculturation and discuss them under the light of ecogothic theory.

After getting back home from the costume party, Noemí learns she must go on a quest to visit her newly married cousin, Catalina, who has sent Mr. Taboada a confusing letter in which she doesn't seem to be either much physically healthy or mentally sane. Except from the fact that she is Mexican, actually a descendent of indigenous population, "My father is from Veracruz and my mother from Oaxaca. We are Mazatec on her side" (Moreno García 2020, 29) Noemí, the heroine of this story, shows all the typical features of a European or American gothic character, such as her curiosity and intrepid character as well as her decisiveness to unveil the secret hidden behind the mysterious letter her cousin has sent to her family. She has even been brought up in a comfortable home with the protection of her parents who belong to the new bourgeoisie of the country, much like the aristocratic linage of the protagonists of classic gothic novels. She is also a very intellectual woman, dreaming of obtaining her father's permission to study Anthropology instead of looking for a man to get married. She accepts the mission because her father promises her to agree to her desires if she first goes to investigate about her cousin's new home and her husband's family. Her cousin, Catalina, however, like most fairy tale heroines, has lost her mother; a mother who was European as she came from France. Catalina at the beginning of the story represents the Jungian archetype of the damsel in distress who has to be rescued from evil hands, much like the characters of the fairy tales she adores: Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and even Bella from *Beauty and the Beast*. Actually, this last fairy tale is Catalina's favorite and Noemí makes a very accurate comparison between the staff at High Place with the one in the fairy

tale as they all seem to be haunted by supernatural forces: "The staff at High Place was almost invisible, like in one of Catalina's fairy tales. *Beauty and the Beast*, that had been it, had it not? Invisible servants who cooked the meals and laid down the silverware. Ridiculous" (59). Noemí goes even further in her description of the domestic workers: "Lizzie, Mary, and Charles, who, like the porcelain locked in the cabinets, had been imported from England many decades ago" (59). She compares them with inanimate objects, devoid of agency, behaving like automated machines performing the tasks for which they are trained. At this stage, Noemí still refuses to acknowledge that some kind of spell has been thrown on the house, like in the fairy tale just mentioned but the thought of magical or supernatural events taking place crosses her mind for an instant.

Catalina and later Noemí are trapped in High Place after the first marries into the Doyle's family unknowingly of the troubles she will bring upon herself and her cousin. Contrary to fairy tales, rescue will not come in the form of a prince, as confinement and abuse are not exerted by stepmothers but by a preternatural force, whose attitudes are typical of colonialism and sexism. In this narrative, the protagonists will have to manage to escape by their own means, helped by a local healer and a member of the captors' family, Francis, who far from being the charming prince represents more the sacrificial lamb for the family. The character of Francis subverts the structure of fairy tales, as he performs the role of the victim that has to be saved from his uncle's thirst for power and youth. In fact, his own mother accepts and supports the sacrifice of his son for the perpetuation of the linage.

Noemí also learns soon that the wild intimidating forest of fairy tales in her particular case means salvation instead of entrapment while the house, the embodiment of civilization, is the dangerous environment that threatens to engulf her. In fact, El Triunfo, the village closest to High Place and to which she has been forbidden to go, is described in very positive terms: "It took her a while, therefore, to realize that she was headed into a forest, for El Triunfo was perched on the side of a steep mountain carpeted with colorful wildflowers and covered thickly with pines and oaks" (15), compared to the later depiction of the house, with the mist and darkness that governs High Place.

This family in whose manor the narrative is set, the Doyle's, comes from England, and they pretend to be aristocrats by creating their own heraldic symbol: "The ouroboros." "The snake eats its tail. The infinite, above us, and below" (86). It is not casual that the snake is the element of nature selected to represent the family as it is an animal that inspires fear, which is the same feeling the family attempts to instigate in the locals to impose control. The snake also changes its skin like Howard Doyle who moves from one body to another at ease to survive and create a feeling of immortality. Ironically, Doyle, the family name, a very popular one in Ireland, has a Viking origin and was given to foreigners with a darker skin because it means: "dark stranger." Silvia Moreno may also have had in mind the British writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, father of Sherlock Holmes when she wrote the story, thus, the reference to the name.

The combination of cultural and natural elements in the narrative contributes to the gothic character of the narrative. The first example is the description

of the house covered in mist and bearing similarities with the house of Usher in Poe's well-known short story "The Fall of the House of Usher:" "It was so odd! It looked absolutely Victorian in construction, with its broken shingles, elaborate ornamentation, and dirty bay windows" (20). Then, the drowsiness of the guests and next, the vision of a woman buried alive scratching her coffin, again bring echoes of "The Fall of the House of Usher and another popular E.A. Poe's story "Ligeia:" "Wood. She could smell damp earth and wood, and when she raised a hand, her knuckles hit a hard surface and a splinter cut her skin. Coffin. It was a coffin. The cloth was a shroud. But she wasn't dead. She wasn't. And she opened her mouth to yell, to tell them that she wasn't dead even when she knew she'd never die" (183).

From a posthuman perspective and following Donna Haraway in her influential *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), the concept of naturecultures finds its maximum exponent in *Mexican Gothic*, a novel in which the boundaries between culture and nature, human and the more than human not only dissolve but reorganize. The plant and animal species involved in this exchange restructure their physical and psychological essences producing a new type of monstrous entity difficult to define in human terms. This regrouping reaches a point in which the animal and plant species in connection depend on each other for their survival and their expansion, aiming to maintain control over the territory and the human and animal species that inhabit it. The house itself seems to become a living being at least in the mind of Noemí who perceives the changes taking place within the walls of her room: "The wallpaper was peeling, revealing underneath sickly organs instead of brick or wooden boards. Veins and arteries clogged with secret excesses" (116). But the house does not become a monstrous being by itself, it is the reflection of the oppression of the undead, of the ghosts inhabiting it that causes the transformation: "She followed the beating of the heart and a thread of red on the carpet. Like a gash. A line of crimson. A line of blood. Until she stopped in the middle of the hallway and saw the woman staring back at her" (116). Ruth and Agnes, trapped in the family crypt scream through the walls of the house, yell for help to finally rest in peace and to put to an end the abuse they are subjects to.

Apart from the question of gender which proves fundamental in this novel, race and ethnicity acquire outmost relevance during the development of the plot. The characters are divided in two different families. Apart from the Doyles, already mentioned as an old aristocratic European linage that represents the old colonial power which is disappearing little by little, the other family, to which Noemí, the main character belongs to, the Taboada, marks the beginning of a new bourgeoisie in a Mexico finally liberated from Spanish, French or English colonial impositions. Thus, Silvia Moreno García sets purposefully the location to point out the struggle towards decolonization that Mexico was undertaking at that time, the 1950s.

I attempt to expose how decolonization and ecogothic function indistinctively and as a combination in this narrative to expose and battle patters of oppression towards human beings and nature attempting to submit and control them, especially the ones related to women and indigenous peoples. Contrary to the most generalized opinion of critics, I consider Latin American gothic, a product of narra-

tive transculturation, as unique and liberating as a decolonial act when we take into account the type of narrative we are dealing with.

This article aims at showing how ecogothic works as a decolonial force exposing and condemning situations of abuse in traditionally minoritized communities and ecosystems. The imposition of a colonial regime causes the alteration not only of the lives of the human beings but also of the more-than-human, animals and plants included as María Lugones argues in her essay "Towards a Decolonial Feminism" (2010). Ecogothic narratives as this one include a claim for wilderness preservation against the introduction of alien and foreign natural species which eventually bring about the disappearance of the local flora and fauna.

In terms of ethnicity, Catalina is preferred by the Doyle's over other local women because she has European blood but the house, which becomes a character itself and a very monstrous one, likes Noemí's strength better. She even has a royal name as in English Catalina is Catherine. The patriarch of the family, Howard Doyle, realizes Noemí has more indigenous blood than Catalina, so he constantly makes racist remarks to make her feel uncomfortable and remind her of her inferior position in comparison to his own family: "He pointed at her. 'Both your coloration and your hair. They are much darker than Catalina's. I imagine they reflect your Indian heritage rather than the French. You do have some Indian in you, no? Like most of the mestizos here do'" (29). Like his father, Virgil Doyle is a predator, ready to fall upon his prey, first Catalina, then Noemí. He is expected to inherit the manor and the silver mine which has been closed for decades but they intend to reopen it. They plan to submit the will of the locals with the gloom, which traps and annihilates the consciousness of everyone that approaches High Place. Apparently, Howard Doyle even brought earth from England, supposedly to assure himself that his roses would bloom. Of course, there is a hidden meaning behind the roses as they metaphorically stand for the children he expects to raise to perpetuate his linage in America. In his attempt to become immortal both literally and through the expansion of his family, the truth is that he was carrying with him the fungi, the mold that heals wounds and brings eternal life. The fungi functions as the metaphorical view of colonization from the point of view of Silvia Moreno-García as it suppresses the will and agency of the people who enter in contact with it. The novel does not engage in questions of mycophobia, or the fear of infections from fungus; it is the way the mold affects the brains of the people that inspires terror: "The shifting mold was mesmerizing. It rearranged itself into wildly eclectic patterns that reminded her of a kaleidoscope, shifting, changing. Instead of bits of glass reflected by mirrors it was an organic madness that propelled the mold into its dizzy twists and turns, creating swirls and garlands, dissolving, then remerging" (191). The fact of losing control of their consciousness as the gloom invades them, the awareness of its agency provokes a clear feeling of ecophobia. The fear of losing "the integrity of their human body and the human subject" (28) towards the agency of the nonhuman element as Simon Estok argues in "Corporeality, Hyper-consciousness, and the Anthropocene: ecoGothic: Slime and Ecophobia" (2020) threatens those who enter in contact with the gloom and fight to survive as it prevents them from leaving the place and condemns them to remain narcoticized like the domestic workers are.

As terrifying as it sounds, Noemí, the protagonist of the story learns that the Doyle's have already used this type of control in the past until the mine workers managed to start a rebellion in which most of them were killed. What happens is a controlled extermination of the indigenous population, of all the local inhabitants who were working in the family mine. María Lugones claims in "Towards a Decolonial Feminism" that "indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species-as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild" (2010, 19). This is the status they acquire in *Mexican Gothic*: Howard considers the natives beasts and treats them accordingly: he gives them a lower status than the other species and uses them for his own profit. He is in control of everything and everyone, even the landscape that surrounds the manor. On top of that, it must be highlighted in an exercise of environmental justice that the practice of mining deteriorates not only the health of the workers but also the landscape, and disrupts the life of the animal and plant species surrounding the area. Noemí in her train voyage to El Triunfo observes how the landscape was turning from being bucolic to becoming threatening and wild: "At the bottom of the mountains, farmers tended groves and fields of alfalfa, but there were no such crops here, just the goats climbing up and down rocks. The land kept its riches in the dark, sprouting no trees with fruit" (Moreno García 16). It is most likely that this is the effect of mining in the area, that the trees would bear no fruit and only goats would inhabit the land; other farm animals would not be able to survive in such landscape nor the crops. The land had been so exploited and abused that the remainder was in clear decay. While this power is exerted, the locals are mere observers, they do not have the agency to intervene and stop the environmental destruction of the area: mining is another way of imposing a colonial power.

As I have just explained above, in this attempt to exercise control over the people and the land, Howard Doyle alters the landscape, even importing earth from England, to successfully cultivate the mushrooms and make the fungi grow and expand to humongous proportions. This would be the start of the gloom, the grotesque combination of the mold growing in the house with the neuronal connections of Howard's first wife, Agnes who ends her days buried alive in the family crypt. Agnes is referred to as the mother since the energy to have everyone under control comes from her imprisoned mind. She embodies Donna Haraway's concept of naturecultures already explained and represents the motif of the undead together with Ruth, ever present in Gothic narratives. According to María Lugones, "the European bourgeois woman was not understood as his [man's] complement, but as someone who reproduced race and capital through her sexual purity, passivity, and being homebound in the service of the white, European, bourgeois man" (2010, 743). Agnes was locked in a coffin to maintain her mind conscious, contributing to the creation of fungi and bees for the survival of the family. The creation of the gloom comes from Howard's obsession to be in control, to have the power and possess the secret of eternal life. David Punter in *The Literature of Terror: The Gothic Tradition* expresses that this search is typical of the literature of Romanticism: "the forbidden knowledge which the romantic ostensibly seeks is similar to that of the alchemists: the knowledge of eternal life, the philosophers' stone, those kinds of knowledge which will make men gods" (1996, 105).

Doyle enslaves everyone around him, not only the mine workers but also his family and the family doctor whom he brought from England must be serving his own purpose. His son Virgil and his nephew Francis are conceived in order to serve as bodies, as vessels into which Howard can be transmuted when his body grows too old to allow him to live: "We're special. The fungus bonds with us, it's not noxious. It can even make us immortal. Howard has lived many lives, in many different bodies. He transfers his consciousness to the gloom and then from the gloom he can live again, in the body of one of his children" (212). When Francis explains to Noemí his function in the family he refers to himself as an orchid: "I was grown like an orchid. Carefully manufactured, carefully reared. I am, yes, like an orchid" (249). The monstrous body of Howard Doyle, imperfectly healed from his own daughter's attempt to murder him has patiently waited for Virgil, his son, and for Francis, his nephew, to become adults and, thus, he has contemplated the deterioration of his sick body while seeking to enlarge the family with new members who can serve as bodies to transmute into and hold his consciousness in the future. This is where the sentence of the title comes from: it was pronounced every time Howard's consciousness moved from one body to another, the birth of a new human being as when Jesus Christ was born.

Virgil, however, has traced a different plan which includes letting his father die and take his place as the master of the house and controller of the surroundings. After he marries Catalina and takes her to High Place, his expectations of her adaptation to the house are lowered as she is suffering, feeling suffocated in the atmosphere of the building and especially her room. Her husband pretends she has the female malady. Her illness is disguised throughout the novel first as hysteria, the classic mental illness associated with the fact of being a woman, then with tuberculosis which Noemí doubts and asks the local doctor for a second opinion, distrusting her cousin's husband. Catalina also had to stay at the house because of the condition of women in Mexico in 1950. At that time, the confinement of a woman to the domestic realm was also a question of the preservation of a moral code. They were not allowed to own property or to vote, women rights were nonexistent. The fact that Catalina is the product of miscegenation reinforces the fact of her lower status compared to the Doyle's.

Virgil's family were attempting to have descendants and Catalina was brought for that purpose into the house and locked upstairs in her room as a Bertha Mason, lest she decided to run away or get acquainted with the locals. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen affirms in the introduction to *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, "the woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role risks becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith ("die erste Eva;' "la mere obscuré"), Bertha Mason, or Gorgon (1996, 9). Catalina is restrained in her room and forced to ingest food contaminated with fungi because she does not surrender to the influx of the house. She refuses to give in and accept the physical and mental submission her husband's family demands of her. Her resistance makes her sick, unable to fight against the controlling forces of the house, rendering her submissive and docile to her husband and his family.

In the letter asking for help that Catalina sends Mr. Taboada, her uncle, she complains about her husband's treatment towards her. As she is a woman, she is

thought to be exaggerating and when Noemí asks about her cousin's health, her own father replies: "It's not as if your cousin hasn't had a tendency toward the melodramatic. It might be a ploy for attention" (7). But Noemí gives credit to Catalina and also considers the fact that she is an orphan. In the letter she sends, she is concerned about being poisoned and ill-treated at the house. The telegram describes the house as a classic American Gothic setting: "This house is sick with rot, stinks of decay, brims with every single evil and cruel sentiment" (7). Catalina also describes her captors as cruel and unkind, calling them: "these restless dead, these ghosts, fleshless things" (7). She claims that there is something in the walls that prevents her from getting better: "The walls speak to me. They tell me secrets. Don't listen to them, press your hands against your ears, Noemí. There are ghosts. They're real. You'll see them eventually" (50). This supernatural presence invades the space of the house, including the greenhouse, the cemetery and the family crypt. Everything seems to be under the influence of a strange powerful presence that Noemí and Catalina acknowledge and deeply fear, although they ignore the manipulation to which they are being subjected.

The realm of the supernatural curiously makes its appearance through the dreams that Noemí experiences in her room. Upon her arrival to the house, she starts feeling something or someone is observing her but she cannot describe it. What she realizes however is that she loses control of herself in her dreams and engages in sexual practices with Virgil. When he wakes her up, he constantly tells her that she has been sleepwalking. These dreams are premonitory of the events that would take place later and of the sexual molestation that she would end suffering if she does not react quickly and escapes from the house. A voice constantly reminds her to open her eyes, to wake up from the drowsiness state the house puts her in. Noemí eventually understands the messages the voice is sending to her and joins forces with Ruth, the ghost of the house, who supposedly killed herself after shooting the rest of the members of the family, most of whom died as a consequence of the attack. Although Ruth is portrayed as a monster by her relatives, Noemí learns from a local healer, the curandera Marta Duval, the truth of Ruth's suffering: how her lover Benito, was horrendously murdered by her family because he belonged to a lower class, therefore, not accepted by her family. Apart from the fact that Benito was an indigenous inhabitant, her uncle had already arranged her marriage to her own cousin, Michael, whom she despised deeply. Ruth had to serve a purpose in the family like every other member: to produce an heir, another body for Howard's future transmutation.

The supernatural elements contribute to highlight the unfair treatment inflicted on the local workers and native inhabitants as they show who the real beasts are: the colonizers. As Gabriel Andrés Eljaiek Rodríguez argues in *Selva de fantasmas: el gótico en la literatura y el cine latinoamericanos* the monstrous other is located in Europe, in the old continent, where many of the narratives take place or where many protagonists come from (2017, 58).[1] Undoubtedly, in *Mexican Gothic*,

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[1] Original in Spanish: "El otro monstruoso está en Europa, en el viejo continente, lugar donde se desarrollan muchas de las narraciones o provienen muchos de sus protagonistas" (2017, 58).

the Other, the alien and the monstrous is represented by Howard and Virgil Doyle, originally from England. They embody the decadence of a colonial past imported from the old continent imposed on the indigenous people and especially on women. Even the women in the family have suffered a forced submission to the patriarch to the point of losing their lives to provide him pleasure. Consanguinity has been the norm in the family because they have procreated through incestuous relationships, until they have realized their mistake. Thus, Howard and Virgil Doyle attempt to preserve their decaying linage which is about to disappear by bringing new women to the house to use them as the vehicle to perpetuate their blood: "On occasion you need to inject new blood into the mix, so to speak. Of course my father has always been very stubborn about these things, insisting that we must not mingle with the rabble" (237). A clear case of female oppression, the example of Catalina and Noemí brings attention to how Mexican (and Latin American at large) female bodies have been historically sexualized, erotized and exoticized as they are in this novel: treated as commodities, they are the colonial product to satisfy the lust of the colonizer. Noemí finds herself in this position after a conversation with Virgil: "Dark meat, she thought. Nothing but meat, she was the equivalent of a cut of beef inspected by the butcher and wrapped up in waxed paper. An exotic little something to stir the loins and make the mouth water" (236). Depriving the Doyle's of an ability to procreate, Silvia García Moreno almost makes a political statement for their disappearance: their survival feels anachronical in a postcolonial era like the 1950s.

Noemí sees through her visions the history of the house, visited by the female ghosts of the family but also product of her own hallucinations provoked by the mushrooms which connect with her in a transcorporeal manner; these fungi enter her subconscious through the air and the food she ingests and their materialities fuse inhabiting in her, becoming her parasites. The human and the more than human intrude into each other, Alaimo's transcorporeality, in this case, highlights the consequences of interfering with the environment as the mold invades the space of the other animal and plant species reigning over them. Then, natural elements are intimidating and colonizing because they take the space of the indigenous plants and inhabitants and kill them. As Estok points out, "We have initiated what can only be understood as an Anthropocene ecoGothic in which the monstrous Nature we have created now threatens our very survival" (2020, 27). This is exactly the case in High Place, Howard and Virgil in their human exceptionalism believe they are entitled to possess everyone and everything else. Their depravation takes them to even ingest human flesh, to become cannibals eating the dismembered bodies of their own children hoping to reach eternal life: "A communion. Our children are born infected with the fungus and ingesting their flesh means ingesting the fungus; ingesting the fungus makes us stronger and in turn it binds us more closely to the gloom. Binds us to Howard" (280). This connects them with the figure of the vampire drinking the blood of his victims to survive, maintain his eternal life and become more powerful. David Punter in *The Literature of Terror: a History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Volume 1 the Gothic Tradition* analyses this gothic creature, by taking Lord Ruthven from John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* as the model and makes its characteristics extensive to Bram Stocker's *Dracula*. The first

feature that he points out is the sexual potential of the vampire which Howard Doyle also possesses: "what Ruthven exercises over his victims is a kind of *droit de seigneur,* that kind of absolute sexual privilege which is a concomitant of absolute power, and which is at the same time a predictable object of middle-class fantasies" (104) and continues explaining where the thirst for blood comes from, it is the need to prevent the definite loss of his aristocratic status: "he is dead yet not dead, as the power of the aristocracy in the early nineteenth century was dead and not dead; he requires blood because blood is the business of an aristocracy, the blood of warfare and the blood of the family" (104). The Doyle's had lost all their money and depended on seducing rich female heirs to obtain enough money to reopen the mine, the source of their past wealth that they still exhibit ostentatiously in their cabinets and recover the high status they had once enjoyed.

The connection with *Dracula*, both the character and the novel, goes further than the search for eternal life through the consumption of human blood or flesh. Many contemporary literary critics have studied the imperialistic character of Bram Stoker's narrative. They identify the vampire with colonialism and contemplate its defeat at the hands of the locals as a solid proof of the urgency to make disappear such systems of imposed power. However, a deeper analysis of the influence of Dracula on *Mexican Gothic* in colonial terms exceeds the scope of this work.

In connection with these descriptions and comparisons between the figure of the vampire and the characters of Howard and Virgil Doyle, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen in the introduction to his volume *Monster Theory* defends that monsters "are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" (1996, 6). I must insist here that the monsters and the beasts in *Mexican Gothic* are the colonizers. Silvia Moreno García subverts the traditional portrayals of indigenous inhabitants of the American continent in canonical literature as savages and cannibals to transform them into victims in the hands of an English abusive colonizer.

At the beginning of the novel, Noemí disregards the idea of the house being haunted although she is an avid reader of anthropology related to witchcraft, and she has knowledge of Mexican and indigenous traditions. Identifying as mestiza, she represents a bridge between the scientific knowledge imported from Europe and the US and the indigenous traditional wisdom derived from the observation and understanding of nature. This is why she also trusts Marta Duval. This curandera, a classical figure of Mexican tradition, appears as the key to liberate the two women, as a representative of silenced indigenous knowledge opposed to medical doctors and offering a change in cultural epistemologies: from the powerful European inherited knowledge to a traditional focus on nature which reveals more effective than any of the medical remedies Dr. Cummings or Dr. Caramillo provide Catalina or Noemí. She prepares the tincture that prevents the house from abducting these two women. The inclusion of traditional elements means a clear tropicalization of the gothic genre and the collapse of the house means the final disappearance of a colonial system that had been imposing its laws for centuries over the indigenous ones. Sandra Vizcaíno and Inés Ordiz in the introduction to their volume *Latin American Gothic in Literature*

and Culture support this claim: "the Gothic in Latin America is very much rooted in local realities and histories, and often linked to different processes of modernization. These include the colonization and occupation of the region by Europe or the United States; the formation of the new nation-states following the wars of independence; and the collapse, failure, exhaustion, and absence of national projects that lead to violence, inequality, and exclusion." (Vizcaíno-Ordiz 24). Colonization carries the suppression of local stories and culture, thus, creating ignorance to allow the imposition of its own values and education. The government of Porfirio Díaz in Mexico (1877 to 1880 and 1884 to 1911) allowed the establishment of foreign businesses, a new colonial system in which the lower classes suffered exploitation which eventually led to the Mexican revolution.

Even though the question of class struggle does not belong much in American literature and it is better reflected in European writing, this novel, however, shows the combination of race and class issues as it portrays the struggle of native workers of a silver mine to protect their rights over the exploitation of the Doyles, the owners. Howard Doyle constantly exerts the power over the rest of the local inhabitants of El Triunfo. Even the name of his house, High Place, provides the clue of how important he thinks he is. "The superimposition of power by the colonial administration in the American tropics is partly achieved through epistemic violence wherein the local culture, belief systems, languages and narratives are eradicated or forced to become covert" (Edwards 2016, 20).

The analysis of the monstrosity of the house as a projection of the monstrous personality of the patriarch of the Doyles exceeds the aim of this article although it belongs fully to the Gothic genre, in a clear homage to the motif of the Doppelgänger as it appears in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* or even "The Fall of the House of Usher."

Duplicity or duality also mark the relationship between Ruth and Noemí. While Catalina is kept in bed, vulnerable and malleable, Noemí gathers her remaining strength to fight against the attempts of the house to submit her and learns to trust the ghost of Ruth, whose presence, as I have already discussed, wanders the house as her consciousness has been trapped in it after dying. Both women connect and join forces to battle their destiny when Noemí realizes that Ruth has been and still is a prisoner just like her. Even being part of the Doyle family, Ruth wouldn't dare to contradict the will of her father and when she rebels against him and tries to kill him shooting him as well as the rest of the family, she discovers that the great strength Howard has acquired eating his own kin and the fungi that heals wounds, saves him. Unfortunately, not only Howard survives but takes revenge against Ruth forcing her to fatally shoot herself although it would be more accurate to say that she stayed undead as the narrator describes:

> She realized that what she had been seeing, the voice whispering to her, urging her to open her eyes, was the mind of Ruth, which still nestled in the gloom, in the crevices and mold-covered walls. There must be other minds, bits of persons, hidden underneath the wallpaper, but none as solid, as tangible as Ruth. (233)

Ruth guides Noemí through the house, warns her to stay alert and open her eyes, as I have already pointed out, and tells her that the secret of the house is located in the English cemetery. They complement each other as Noemí ends the work that Ruth could not finish by destroying the family and with them the whole house.

The reference to fairy tales continues along the whole story, even at the end, with Francis lying unconscious, Noemí recalls the recurrent kiss scene that brings a happy ending to most fairy tales. As the mock wedding had taken place before the collapse of the house, the novel cannot end in marriage and the final sentence they lived happily ever after not make sense. The subversion of the structure and plot must continue and it is necessary to point out that, in this case, the dormant or kidnapped maid has been substituted by a poor man, unable to contradict his mother or uncle and who has resigned himself to give up his life for a higher cause: the survival of his linage through his uncle's possession of his body to be able to procreate with Noemí.

The fact that the narrative ends triumphantly in the liberation of Catalina marks a distinction in colonial terms. The two women liberate themselves from the oppression of race and gender with the help of another woman, Ruth, and ruin the plans of the patriarch of the family. The death of Howard, of the monster, marks the end of oppression in High Place and even the undead women, Ruth and Agnes, get freed from the service they were still paying to the family as they were maintaining the gloom, therefore, Howard, alive with their subconscious. The escape of the protagonists means a process of decolonization, of running away from old rancid practices imposed on the colonial subjects and involves a change of mind from the part of the colonizer, represented by the only survivor: Francis Doyle, as well as a restoration of the surroundings, of the environment, including plant and animal species that had been destroyed first with the exploitation of the silver mine from the time of the Spaniards, then with the controlling gloom that had deprived the inhabitants of the house and the mine workers of their human agency and integrity making them behave erratically.

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GOTHIC NATURE IN FANTASY FICTION: THE WHITE WALKERS AS DREADFUL AGENTS OF NATURE IN GAME OF THRONES

Aylin Walder
University of Cologne

Abstract

By applying Elizabeth Parker's seven theses (2020) to *Game of Thrones* as the keys to identifying Gothicised spaces, I assert that the icy and eerie environment north of the Wall manifests as Gothic Nature insofar as it fulfills all seven ways in which nature can become a Gothic threat: the northern space represents a hostile environment, associated with a postcolonial past, and connected to the human unconscious. The second part focuses on the creation of the White Walkers as Nature's agents and their portrayal as dreadful entanglements that alter (non)human life. Introducing the notion of transcorporeality, the dualism human/nonhuman is deconstructed –since the White Walkers aren't naturally born but created out of sacrificed human babies. The White Walkers and their army become one singular monstrous hyperobject that foregrounds how humanity is "at the mercy of larger forces of nature" (Smith and Hughes 2013, 6). The story reflects our responsibility for climate change. Following Gothic tradition, the dark ecology (Morton 2016) in the saga blurs "the lines between the terror sublime and the uncanny" (Tibbetts 2011, 5), thereby, the agency of Gothicised Nature is foregrounded and the White Walkers are established as mirrors for our anxieties about the future of our planet.

Keywords: *Game of Thrones*, White Walkers, Gothic Nature, Transcorporeality, Hyperobject.

NATURALEZA GÓTICA Y FANTASÍA: LOS CAMINANTES BLANCOS COMO AGENTES DEL MIEDO DE LA NATURALEZA EN JUEGO DE TRONOS

Resumen

A través de la aplicación de las siete tesis de Elizabeth Parker (2020) a *Juego de Tronos* como herramientas para identificar espacios góticos, sostengo que el gélido y aterrador entorno al norte del Muro se configura como una manifestación de la Naturaleza gótica, ya que cumple con las siete características en las que la naturaleza puede convertirse en una amenaza gótica. El espacio norteño se presenta como un entorno inhóspito, vinculado a un pasado postcolonial y relacionado con el inconsciente humano. La segunda parte del análisis se enfoca en los Caminantes Blancos como agentes de la Naturaleza y su representación como fuerzas terribles que transforman la vida (y la no vida) humana. Al introducir el concepto de transcorporealidad, se desmantela el dualismo entre lo humano y lo no humano, pues los Caminantes Blancos no son fruto de un nacimiento natural, sino que se originan a partir de bebés humanos sacrificados. Los Caminantes Blancos y su ejército constituyen un hiperobjeto monstruoso que resalta cómo la humanidad está "a merced de fuerzas mayores de la naturaleza" (Smith y Hughes 2013, 6). Esta narrativa refleja nuestra responsabilidad en el cambio climático. En consonancia con la tradición gótica, la ecología oscura de la saga, difumina lo que Morton considera "las líneas entre el terror sublime y lo siniestro" (Tibbetts 2011, 5), destacando la agencia de la Naturaleza gótica y presentando a los Caminantes Blancos como un reflejo de nuestras ansiedades sobre el futuro del planeta.

Palabras clave: *Juego de Tronos*, caminantes blancos, naturaleza gótica, transcorporaleidad, hiperobjeto.

While *Game of Thrones*[1] starts out as a political fantasy drama, primarily concerned with who sits on the Iron Throne, the narrative gradually reveals that these political mind games are ultimately inconsequential in the face of the imminent threat 'beyond the Wall.' When several characters realise that the White Walkers pose a real danger, their task becomes to convince the South and political players such as Cersei Lannister that the Walkers and "the army of the dead [are indeed not] a story made up by wet-nurses to frighten children" (*Eastwatch* 00:25:18-00:25:24). Similar to the Southerners, contemporary society is lulled into a denial mentality based on a false sense of security of being in control of Nature.[2] However, unstoppable desertification, species extinction, and natural forces like earthquakes not only visualise how far away we actually are from controlling Nature as such, or any consequences of anthropogenic climate change for that, but also inspire emotional responses that range from "anxiety, horror, terror, anger, sadness, nostalgia [... to] guilt" (Schell 2017, 177). Even though most cultural products can enable us to work through the emotional complexity climate change brought about, it is especially "the negative sublime" (Botting 2014, 69) that re-enchants Nature as evading our control, just as the Gothic monster causes a return of repressed emotions.

In the context of anthropogenic climate change, an investigation of how the ecoGothic in form of Gothicised Nature enters fantasy fiction can hence enlighten the effectiveness of the dark sublime in tackling questions of and working through emotions related to climate catastrophes. In the dark/negative sublime, Nature is established as animate and marked as chaotic, monstrous, and beyond our control. Thus, Gothic Nature becomes "a symbolic whole" in stark contrast to human nature, which enables a re-mystification that foregrounds the anxieties and concerns "that haunt our relationships to the non-human world" (Parker 2020, 20). With their aptness for distorted images of extratextual reality, the 'return of the repressed' is a trope the Gothic shares with Fantasy; that is, both can open and reveal those emotions "that are often ignored and/or repressed" (Baker 2012, 39). Thereby, the uncanny manifests itself through a displacement of desires, drives, or fears onto liminal or hybrid figures that (re)invoke anxiety when an impression revives what has been previously suppressed or when surmounted beliefs are re-established. As Fantasy and Gothic reveal "hidden anxieties concealed within the subject" (Jackson 2009, 38), these figures –often represented by monsters such as ghosts, vampires, or

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[1] Throughout this article, the abbreviation *GoT* will be used to refer to the HBO adaptation *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019). In addition, 'White Walker' and 'Night King' will be abbreviated to 'Walker' and 'King' respectively when used in succession.

[2] The capitalisation of *Nature* serves to acknowledge the difference between Nature as a space, where the nonhuman defies human control, and nature as a place that humans have been cultivated (Parker 2020, 7-8). Besides, I use the term *space* to refer to "landscapes of fear" (30) whilst *place* is used for cultivated landscapes.

demons– are associated with culture's dark side and heavily influenced by the Gothic aesthetics of "past, decay and death" (Wester and Reyes 2019, 4). Both the trope of the monster and the uncanny are hence not unique for Fantasy nor for Gothic. However, Fantasy worlds not created in Gothic mode differ in representation from those fantastic narratives that are Gothicised.

As Ulstein demonstrates in her article, Fantasy shares with Gothic a strong opposition towards an "anthropocentric view of the world" (2015, 7). However, whereas Gothic creates an anti-anthropocentric worldview by evoking a dark sublime through a sentient, monstrous Nature, Fantasy generally builds anti-anthropocentric worlds by rendering the nonhuman essential –without necessarily focusing on a darker environment. When Nature in Fantasy does become Gothicised, it then manifests as either "an avenging force, eliminating troublesome humans" (Tyburski 2013, 147), a space that is filled with horror-evoking monsters, or one that was idyllic before but became dark by human interference. While the control of the human over Nature is questioned, the Gothic mode moves the dark sublime to the centre of the Fantasy story, which enables the deconstruction of the anthropocentric notion of a controlled nature. In contrast to this anthropocentrism, Gothic Nature as the negative sublime represents Nature "as a space of crisis" (Estok 2018, 3) and disorder by which the ecoGothic evokes ecophobia –an inherent human anxiety and discomfort based on humankind's inability "to control and order all nonhuman Nature" (Parker 2020, 23). The application of ecocriticism to Fantasy in Gothic mode can hence uncover "dystopian ecological visions" (Smith and Hughes 2013, 4) in a "darker, more sublime environment" (5).

To demonstrate how Gothicised Fantasy is equipped to address climate change concerns, I outline below how in *GoT* the arctic space north of the Wall is transformed into Gothic Nature. In this, I base my findings on Parker's seven markers for the Gothic forest (2020) and illustrate how her theory on woodlands can be applied to any other form of Nature –here, a fantastic version of arctic spaces.[3] Based on Alaimo's *transcorporeality* (2010), I further elucidate how the Gothic notion of consumption promotes climate change as a *hyperobject* (Morton 2013) in the Chthulucene (Haraway 2016).

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[3] Based on Cohen's theses on the monster (1996) and Murphy's elaborations on horror (2013), Parker establishes the following seven markers for the Gothic forest: the forest is "against civilization," "associated with the past," "a landscape of trial," "a setting in which we are lost," "a consuming threat," "a site of the human unconscious" and "an antichristian space" (2020, 47).

1. THE ANTHROPOS AND WILDERNESS BEYOND THE WALL

1.1. Nature and "wildings" As Antithesis to Civilization

Based on Derrida's thoughts on *différence*, Parker establishes that the difference between *human* and *Nature* is grounded in the human being related to the notion of *civilisation*, which is "constructed in terms of *order*," while *Nature* is constructed "in terms of *chaos*" (2020, 48; original emphasis). This contraposition then relates to ideas of *control* insofar as a civilisation's quality of being an ordered place is established through human control over nature while Nature as a space of chaos is marked as such due to humanity's inability to exert control here –thus, Nature becomes the antithesis to civilisation based on the degree of control one can exert. Accordingly, Gothic Nature in *GoT* is for once established through various characters commenting on being unable to control the space beyond the Wall. For instance, when Jon Snow is on patrol with Qhorin Halfhand, the latter remarks: "You can't tame a wild thing. You can't trust a wild thing. [...] Wild creatures have their own rules, their own reason. You'll never know them" (*The Old Gods and the New* 00:10:03-00:12:40). In a similar vein, Maester Aemon explains how dangerous it is that the Night's Watch "can't properly patrol the wilderness" (*Lord Snow* 00:50:45); after which the camera cuts to a panning shot of the landscape north of the Wall (00:51:32). In accord with the Gothic tradition, the images are dark coloured, showing a misty scenery of snowy hills and forests up until the horizon. The only sound is the howling of the wind, evoking an eerie feeling. With wild Nature stretching out as far as the eye can see, without any markers of the human, the Wall becomes the border between civilisation and wilderness.

Besides establishing the North as an untameable terrain, the dualistic notions of *civilisation* and *Nature* are further incorporated through the portrayal of the people living beyond the Wall. While an audience may recognise the Free Folk as a distinct civilisation, *GoT* invests considerable screen time in coding them as non-human Nature that exists in opposition to 'conventional' human civilisation. Hereby, the show follows the master narrative of centric systems that differentiate "between a privileged hegemonic group awarded full agency status," i.e. the South, and "excluded peripheral groups who are denied agency" (Plumwood 2002, 29), i.e. the Free Folk among others. Following a pattern of establishing those living north as uneducated, the subsequent conversation between Ygritte and Jon illustrates the superiority those living more south assume for themselves:

> *Ygritte*: Is this a palace?
>   *Jon:* It's a windmill.
> *Ygritte*: Windmill. Who built it? A King?
>   *Jon*: Just some men who used to live here.
> *Ygritte*: Must have been great builders sticking stones so high.
>   *Jon*: [...] If you're impressed by a windmill, you'll be swooning if you saw the Great Keep of Winterfell.
> *Ygritte*: What's swooning?

Jon: Fainting.
Ygritte: What's fainting?
(*The Bear and the Maiden Fair* 00:40:25-00:41:57)

Furthermore, the people north are generally portrayed as undisciplined and referred to as "wildling bastard[s]" (*And Now His Watch Is Ended* 00:38:54) and "wildling whore[s]" (*Blood of My Blood* 00:20:20). That these people, inhabiting 'uncivilised' Nature, have a different perspective of themselves is highlighted when Ygritte refers to her people as "The Free Folk" (*The Old Gods and the New* 00:19:13) –though we are already in season two, this is the first time the audience hears the expression. Ygritte elaborates: "Do you think we're savages because we don't live in stone castles? We can't make steel as good as you, that's true, but we're free. Someone trying to tell us we can't lie down as man and woman, we shove a spear up his arse. [...] Girls would claw each other's eyes out to get naked with you" (*A Man Without Honor* 00:16:56-00:18:34). While her words emphasise a difference in perspective, i.e. the Free Folk not seeing themselves as chaotic and undisciplined but simply as free, Ygritte's choice of words also highlights a particular rudeness and primitivism that relates to Parker's marker of Gothic Nature embracing our "fear that the primitive setting creates the primitive human" (2020, 48). The nature of the Free Folk then becomes particularly apparent when Mance Rayder, the leader of the Free Folk, explains to Jon:

> Do you know what it takes to unite ninety clans? Half of whom want to massacre the other half over one insult or another. They speak seven different languages in my army. The Thenns hate Hornfoots, the Hornfoots hate Ice River clans, everyone hates the cave people. So you know how I got moon-worshippers and cannibals and giants to march in the same way? [...] I told them we're all going to die if we don't walk south. (*Dark Wings, Dark Words* 00:24:24-00:26:48)

In addition to furthering the narrative of the 'uncivilised' Free Folk, the introduction of giants and cannibals serves to reinforce the notion that Nature beyond the Wall is "a fearful space inhabited by threatening characters" (Smith and Hughes 2013, 9) that aim to transgress the status quo; a transgression that is quite literal insofar as the Free Folk attempt to cross the Wall –an endeavour that would ultimately transform the life of all those living south.

As shown, *GoT* gothicises Nature by setting it against civilisation through dialogues and particular camera shots. Hereby, the Wall is established as the symbolic border between place and space, between civilisation and Nature, between Self (Southerners) and Other (Free Folk). Considering the Free Folk's endeavour to transgress the material border of the Wall, these dualisms concerned with "the question of boundaries" (Parker 2020, 49) are exposed as inherently constructive, malleable, and unstable.

1.2. Trial and Education in Hostile Nature

        Linked to Nature being set against civilisation is the marker of Gothic Nature as a space of trial; i.e. a harsh environment that both threatens human survival as well as it offers education. First, *GoT* incorporates this by highlighting the brutality of the space beyond the Wall. Second, the knowledgeable Free Folk and Bran's journey beyond the Wall establish the educational purpose of Gothic Nature. When Alister confronts Jon and his friends before they swear their loyalty to the Night's Watch, he points towards the difficulty of surviving beyond the Wall as follows:

> The wildlings who fight for Mance Rayder are hard men, harder than you'll ever be. They know the country better than we do. They knew there was a storm coming in so they hid in their caves and waited for it to pass and we got caught in the open, winds so strong it ripped one hundred foot tall trees straight from the ground, roots and all. If you took your gloves off to find your cock to have a piss, you lost a finger to the frost and all in darkness. [...] You're boys still and come the winter, you will die. (*Cripples, Bastards, and Broken Things* 00:42:03-00:44:30)

Alister then further hints at him and his companions resorting to cannibalism, after they had eaten their horses that died from the cold. Here, the show simultaneously demonstrates Nature's lethality and the adaptive ability of the Free Folk to 'read' Nature, which ensures their survival. In the same vein, Jon gets lost when on patrol beyond the Wall in *The Old Gods and the New*, being at Ygritte's mercy, who knows her way around the arctic terrain and is thus able to find shelter from the cold. It becomes apparent how Nature "challenges one's skill in both internal and external survival" (Parker 2020, 50) as well as how difficult it is "to maintain sanity, whilst simultaneously staying alive in the wild" (51) since the need to eat one's companions can easily bring someone on the verge of lunacy. The scenes above demonstrate how the main task for those entrapped in Gothic Nature is "essentially to stay alive just long enough so as to be able to escape this environment" (51).

        In addition to the establishment of Nature beyond the Wall as harsh and testing, Bran becoming the Three Eyed Raven draws the focus on Gothic Nature "instilling education" (Parker 2020, 51). The first time the audience can grasp the knowledge that Bran will gain through the sight –i.e. the ability to see "things that haven't happened," "[t]hings that happened long before" as well as "things that happen right now" (*Dark Wings, Dark Words* 00:46:23) –is through Bran's first dream of a raven with a third eye on its forehead (*Cripples, Bastards, and Broken Things*) that reoccurs during the whole Tv show and ultimately leads to Bran's precognition of his father's death (*Fire and Blood*). While obtaining this knowledge is linked to the space beyond the Wall insofar as it is there the Three Eyed Raven is located, the ability of the sight is also closely intertwined with Nature, in particular with the weirwoods.[4] Just

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    [4] Weirwoods are trees that have both red foliage and a sad facial expression carved in red into their white trunks.

as the Three Eyed Raven is entangled with the roots of an old weirwood, also Bran's visions are linked to these trees. Before being educated by the Three Eyed Raven, Bran is overwhelmed by an accumulation of various visions when he touches the face of a weirwood (*Valar Dohaeris* 00:00:00-00:03:17; *The Lion and the Rose* 00:24:43-00:28:17): the screen shows the shot of a sundown behind a weirwood mixed with images of Ned Stark, a flock of ravens, the Iron Throne covered in snow, Bran's fall from the tower, King's Landing, and an undead girl in the woods. Depending on the episode, the audience is already familiar with some of these shots. The scenes of Bran's visions and glimpses of the past are thereby always announced by the cawing of ravens, entangling the knowledge of the Three Eyed Raven with the weirwood and the flocks of ravens, i.e. Nature. The intertwining of comprehensive knowledge, weirwoods, and ravens thus establishes a form of knowledge that transcends the boundaries of the human.

Further, the notion of the North as an educational space informed by more-than-human knowledge is also linked to the way Bran acquires the knowledge about the Three Eyed Raven's location in the first place (*The Lion and the Rose*): Having entered his direwolf Summer's mind, Bran is guided by her to a weirwood. By establishing a connection with this tree, Bran gains the vision that reveals the Three Eyed Raven's weirwood on a ridge. In addition to emphasising that it is ultimately the more-than-human knowledge system that enables Bran to find human-transcending education, *GoT* introduces also other people in the North as able to warg, i.e. being able to "enter the minds of animals" (*Lord Snow* 00:25:41). Through the ability of "thinking across bodies" (Alaimo 2010, 4), the show establishes a Chthulucene where everything –the trees, the human and the animal– is intrinsically linked. While the Anthropocene presents the human as the dominant actor, humans in the Chthulucene of *GoT* "are with and of the Earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this Earth are the main story" (Haraway 2016, n.p.). In a similar vein, the inherent interconnectedness between various bodies enables a reading through the lens of Alaimo's notion of *transcorporeality*, assuming the corporeality of the human always being "intermeshed with the more-than-human world" (2010, 2), marking the human as inextricably linked to the environment. Through Bran and the wargs as such, 'becoming each other' is thus a reality in the Chthulucene of *GoT*.

The visually most striking representation of Nature beyond the Wall as instilling education then occurs when Bran and his companions finally arrive at the weirwood from his vision. Approaching the weirwood with whose roots the Three Eyed Raven is entangled, the camera follows the group as they climb a ridge, battling against the wind; the ambient sound of swooshing wind underscoring the harshness of the environment. At the tip of the ridge, a panning shot reveals a single weirwood that stands adrift, dark clouds behind it. As the sun breaks through just behind the weirwood, clothing it in bright light, upbeat music starts playing (*The Children* 00:31:54-00:33:00). The weirwood becomes the light in the dark –a place of education amidst a space of primitivism. Throughout season six Bran stays with the Three Eyed Raven to learn from him, ultimately becoming the new Three Eyed Raven.

At the height of Bran's journey, the educational setting once again becomes hostile, marking Gothic Nature as a space one needs to survive in long enough to

escape it once more. After Bran touches the roots of the Three Eyed Raven's weirwood unsupervised, he finds himself in front of the same weirwood –only at a different time (*The Door* 00:35:49-00:39:57). Jump cutting between Bran and an army of undead he walks through, eerie music starts playing while the camera pans over a horse, revealing the Night King[5] atop. The moment the King touches Bran's arm, the latter wakes up screaming and brand-marked; due to this marking, the King is then able to enter the space under the weirwood. The shift from being under the Three Eyed Raven's protection to being under attack by the King is linked to Bran's ultimate transformation to the new Three Eyed Raven after the old one's death. Consequently, though Bran acquires the human-transcending knowledge through his exposure to the Chthulucene of Gothic Nature, it is his ability to also leave this space alive that ultimately rewards him as he is transformed from a boy to a more-than-human being. However, as Bran overcomes the boundaries of human knowledge, *GoT* establishes not just any kind of Chthulucene but a Pagan one.

2. PAGAN TRANSCORPOREALITY IN THE ANTICHRISTIAN CHTHULUCENE

2.1. Old Gods and New Gods, Or Cosmogonic and Chaogonic Religions

Following the markers above, the notion of the North being antichristian allows to prove the applicability of Parker's other theses (2020); i.e., Gothic Nature as an antichristian space becomes associated with the postcolonial past and the human unconscious. Applying Parker's elaboration on Gothic Nature as antichristian, it is essential to differentiate between the secondary world of *GoT* and the extratextual, Christian ideology woven into the narrative. Although the two dominant religions in Westeros –that of the Old Gods and that of the New Gods– are both polytheistic and therefore do not resemble monotheistic Christianity, the textual representation of these competing religions is still informed by extratextual, Christian beliefs. In the following, I will demonstrate how the North becomes antichristian not through a direct juxtaposition with a fictional version of Christianity but through its association with the ecocentric religion of the Old Gods which is informed by an anthropocentric fear of Nature; in contrast, the religion of the New Gods is linked to cultivated nature.[6]

Generally, religion divides the world into "ordered and sacred" versus "disordered and profane" (Parker 2020, 60) which mirrors the juxtaposition of Nature as chaotic with human civilisation as ordered. In other words, religion is

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[5] The Night King is first White Walker ever created, with a head formed like a crown.
[6] For further reading on Christian doctrine, see Moltmann's *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (1985), James Nash's *Loving Nature* (1991) or Roderick Frazier Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind* (2001).

cosmogonic in that it assumes that it sustains order, and Nature is *chaogonic*, meaning "world-destructive" (Beal 2001, 41). Besides the portrayal of the North as hostile and home to the primitive human, the idea of "cultivated, and colonised" human place versus "wild, and uninhabited" (Parker 2020, 60) space is further reinforced through the religions of the Old Gods and of the New Gods. The comparison of Old and New is thereby closely tied to Nature and the border of the Wall, which becomes evident, for instance, when Jon must go beyond the Wall to stand in front of a weirwood to take his oath before the Old Gods (*You Win or You Die*). This is further contextualised when Osha explains to Bran that the Old Gods "are the only gods" beyond the Wall that can see him as "[... t]he Old Gods have no power in the South. The weirwoods there were all cut down a long time ago. How can they watch you when they have no eyes?" (*The Pointy End* 00:36:48-00:37:53).[7] First, through Osha's statement, the Old religion becomes again associated with Nature, i.e. the weirwoods, and is thus linked to the space beyond the Wall –while the New Gods stand for order and cultivated nature, the Old Gods are closely connected to chaos, cannibalism, and hostile Nature (see section 1.1 and 1.2). This existential linkage between the Old Gods and the weirwoods then establishes a "nature-religion" (Hutton 2009, 328) that mirrors the Christian imagination of Pagan belief systems.[8] Second, Osha's remark on how the South as a place of order pushed back Nature's chaos by cutting down the weirwoods resonates with Christian exploits of Nature grounded in the latter being "devoid of the divine" (Parker 2020, 61) and thus antichristian; leading to the assertion of a "divinely decreed" (61) subjugation and organisation of chaogonic Nature and the propagation of the demonised forest.[9]

Reflecting the "demonisation and exploitation of the natural world" by Christianity, *GoT* realises the imagination of "a dangerous and specifically Pagan love of the forest" through the representation of Nature as marked by "darkness, sin, perdition, and alienation" (Parker 2020, 60). For instance, in *What Is Dead May Never Die*, Lord Commander Mormont states to Jon that the wildlings serve more vicious gods; emphasising the association of the space beyond the Wall with something dark and wicked. Further, Osha refers to Bran's visions as "black magic" (*The Bear and the Maiden Fair* 00:44:50), and as Bran becoming the Three Eyed Raven is linked to the space beyond the Wall, the show establishes the North as a hostile space of evil. The pejorative depiction of the religion of the Old God as a profane and wicked "nature-religion" thereby represents a subjacent incorporation of the popular imagination of Paganism in *GoT*, through which Nature is marked as an antichristian space in the

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[7] While the books mention weirwoods in the South as part of the cultivated nature –a mere symbol rather than a sublime presence as in the hostile North–, the Tv show emphasises their complete deforestation.

[8] Besides Hutton's elaborations on the shift from Paganism to Christianity (2009), see also Hanegraaff (1998); both of which are Parker's foundation for her reading of the Gothic forest as antichristian.

[9] See White (1967) or Conradie (2016) for readings on Christian exploits and Christian critique of the same.

show. In alignment with the Christian dualism of divine versus evil, civilisation versus Nature (Moltmann 1985; Beal 2001), *GoT* relates one religion to primitive Nature and another to educated civilisation. Consequently, the fear of the evil forest, linked to Christian doctrine and "contemporary ecophobic anxieties" (Parker 2020, 59), enters the story through the construction of an "*anthropocentric*" worldview in contrast to Paganism as an "animistic, *ecocentric* religion" (61; original emphasis).

2.2 The Arctic Devil Is None Other Than Us

Related to the juxtaposition of Christian place and Pagan space is the devil who "is met in the woods" (Parker 2020, 64); a devilish monster that serves to re-enchant Nature by obscuring "the lines between the terror sublime and the uncanny, the rational and the irrational [...] –indeed, between the living and dead" (Tibbets 2011, 5). In the series, the figure of 'the devil in the woods' enters the narrative through the White Walkers. As the Walkers are not only monstrous, human-resembling entities that transgress the line between life and death but also become the means through which *GoT* establishes an interconnection between the 'non-human' and the human, Nature is re-enchanted while the inherent constructiveness of the human dominance over 'non-human' Nature is demonstrated.

In *Winter Is Coming* (00:01:20-00:07:15), the audience is pitchforked into an eerie scene: as a group of riders enters a snowy pine forest, the camera presents the viewer with the Wall rising high above the riders, followed by a cut into the forest beyond the Wall. In this scene, primarily coloured in black and white, the only sound discernible is that of the wind howling and the horses snorting. As a rider (Will) dismounts his horse, he comes upon a spiral of amputated human limbs whose red blood stands out against the white snow. Joining the others, the commander (Royce) orders Will to go and scout the area. Then, a dark figure, of which the viewer can only see glowing, ice-blue eyes (a White Walker), appears behind Royce and kills him. Subsequently, the screen focuses back on Will looking at the black silhouette of a girl who the audience can recognise from when she was pierced to a tree trunk. When the girl turns around, she reveals her white face with blood dripping from her mouth and eyes glowing in ice-blue. Will starts running, and the camera cuts between him fleeing from the girl and the other rider (Gared) fleeing as well; the natural sounds of the shots, mingled with background music that produces a tensed atmosphere, are dominated by snarling and growling coming from the Walkers. Upon meeting, Will witnesses another dark figure appearing behind Gared, who then decapitates him with a long sword. After the Walker hurls Gared's head to Will, the screen turns black, and the title sequence starts.

Setting the overall mood for the scenes featuring the White Walkers, it is especially noteworthy that this is the first sequence of the whole show as well as one of only a few that are set before the title sequence –foreshadowing the general importance of these shots for the entire narrative. It is here that the audience is first confronted with the sublime Wall as well as the eerie Nature stretching out beyond it. From the outset, Nature beyond the Wall becomes a space of the uncanny where

"anything that 'should' be inanimate [...] seems to be living" (Parker 2020, 72). Just as the Gothic in general focuses on transgression, Nature conflated with the Walkers is Gothicised when the boundary between living and dead is first transgressed by the undead girl. Following Smith and Hughes' remarks on ecoGothic, *GoT* thus establishes "nature as haunted house" (2013, 9) –a traditional trope of the Gothic– through the "malevolent presence" (Tyburski 2013, 149) of both the Walkers and the undead girl. Imbricating both uncanny figures with Nature by connecting their appearance on screen with ambient sounds like the howling of the wind and snarling noises, normally associated with animals, *GoT* introduces not only a monster in the forest but a "monstrous version ... of nature" (Smith and Hughes 2013, 11). Insofar as the girl was dead but then appears to be alive once more, the transcorporeality of animate, human matter and inanimate, corpse matter allows for a dark ecology to enter the story as it breaks with boundaries of life and death/human and Nature. Thus, *GoT* already mirrors Grosz's understanding of "the body, not as an organism or entity in itself, but as a system [...] functioning within other huge systems it cannot control" (qtd. in Alaimo 2010, 10) in its first sequence. Besides, while the Walkers are closely intertwined with Nature, the wicked practice of creating spirals out of undead human matter further hints at their capacity to think in a way society most often than not only deems possible for the human. Their representation not only follows Gothic's tendency "to depict nature as a living, acting alien other" (Parker 2020, 27) but also reflects the notion of Gothic "as a system that [...] turns people into objects" (Wester and Reyes 2019, 12). Thus, it is illustrated how the "ability to make things happen [or] to produce effects" (Bennett 2010, 5) is indeed shared by all matter.

Four seasons later, the audience is placed back beyond the Wall, close to the wildling Craster's settlement. As his last boy is born and taken into the woods, the scene ends with the camera tilting up to an aerial shot of the baby laying in the snow, his screams growing louder (*Oathkeeper*, 00:40:00-00:42:46). This scene is then connected to another one (00:49:10-00:51:32) that begins with an establishing shot of a snowy cliff, only vaguely perceptible through a snowstorm that colours the screen in a bluish white. The camera cuts to a White Walker riding on an undead horse. There is no background music, only the sounds of the wind howling and chains rattling; subsequently, the camera pans around to show the viewer the baby in the arms of the Walker. Thereafter, the camera cuts to a long shot of a valley and, while the rider appears in the left corner, peaked blocks of ice placed in a circle are shown in the right one. In an aerial shot, the audience follows him into the circle, in the middle of which an ice-altar stands. As the baby is placed on the altar and the camera zooms out, the Night King enters the circle. With the camera placed back on the altar, the King's blurred hand reaches for the boy. In a reverse-angle shot of the baby's face, a spiky, long nail then taps his cheek: the cooing stops, cracking is audible, the eyes of the baby turn glowing blue, and a new Walker is created. The Gothic fear of "material and psychic invasion [by] a force of contamination and dominance" (Byron 2012, 372) is here related to Bennett's proposal of material agency that foregrounds a belief in sameness, as "everything is connected" (2010, xi). The entanglement of the human and Walker thereby highlights how permeable the

border between identity and alterity is. The baby starts as part of the human Self. By his contact with the King, however, he is contaminated and turned into a part of the undead Other. The creation of the Walkers then promotes an ecoGothic reading of the entanglement of human and monstrous Nature which relates to the "sense that our monsters, secretly, are none other than *us*" (Parker 2020, 9; original emphasis).

Negating that Nature as well as what waits for us in it is just "passive, inanimate" (69) matter, the show refuses Nature "to be backgrounded" and instead moves it "violently into the foreground" (70). Further, the Walkers enable a re-enchantment of untameable Nature by transgressing the human-Nature binary as they represent ecoGothic's accentuation of "the mutual entanglements of agentic matter" (Estok 2018, 79). Going back to Alaimo's "thinking across bodies" (2010, 4), the entanglement of the human population with the Walkers emphasises how Bennett's notion of *vibrant matter* as the agency of inanimate matter and Alaimo's *transcorporeality* –i.e. the "interchanges and interconnections between various bodily natures" in "a world of fleshy beings with their own needs, claims, and actions" (2010, 2) –meshes well with Gothic Nature. Even though Bennett includes all matter and Alaimo's theory only fleshly matter, considering both approaches enables a well-rounded reading of the portrayal of the Pagan Chthulucene in *GoT*.

2.3. Demonic Druids and The Post-Colonial Unconscious

As demonstrated above, Parker ties the notion of Nature being Gothic closely to its depiction as an antichristian space based on the dualism between Christianity and Paganism, especially the "Pagan love of the forest" (2020, 59). Connected to this 'ungodly' love for Nature is the Druid who is portrayed as just as vile as the Gothic Nature they serve. The representation of the Druids being "profane, wicked and antichristian" (59) is thereby established as they become "associated with human sacrifice" (62) turning the priests of Gothic Nature into the stereotype of the "demonic druids" (Hutton 2011, 418). In *GoT*, the demonic druids enter the story through the figures of the Children of the Forest.

When Bran and his companions are beyond the Wall, they are rescued by a human-resembling figure called Leaf, her skin coloured greenish and structured like tree bark, who proclaims that "The First Men called us the Children, but we were born long before them." (*The Children* 00:37:49); here, the infantilisation employed by the First Men suggests an attempt to establish a superior position for themselves among the indigenous population of Westeros. Later, Bran's vision reveals how Leaf and the other Children created the Night King (*The Door* 00:16:05-00:17:50): the sequence is set at the place where the baby boy was turned before –however, where the icy altar stood, a heart-shaped weirwood stands. In an aerial shot, a whispering group of the Children is shown huddled together, and when Leaf gets up the camera focuses on a spearhead in her hand. As she walks towards the screen, the viewer sees a half-naked man bound to the tree trunk. While the man's wail of pain is discernible, the shot is focused on his naked breast touched by the Child of the Forest's left hand, the other slowly pushing the spearhead into his flesh. The moment the man's

body absorbs the blade, background music begins playing and the scene cuts to an extreme close-up of the man's eyes turning blue, followed by a cracking sound and his skin turning an ice-grey colour. The scene ends with Leaf explaining: "We were at war. We were being slaughtered. Our sacred trees cut down. We needed to defend ourselves. From you. From men" (0:17:32-0:17:50).

Besides establishing the Children as demonic Druids that practice human sacrifice and 'black magic,' the sequence also connects the creation of the White Walkers to the postcolonial unconscious –another marker for Gothic Nature. The First Men are the first humans that set foot on Westeros; to whom Leaf refers when she explains to Bran that she and the other Children created the Walkers as a weapon in a war against men. Before their arrival, only the Children and other non-humans such as giants roamed the continent. However, the First Men crossed a land-bridge from Essos and claimed Westeros for themselves. Cutting down the sacred trees of the Children, i.e. the weirwoods, which nearly eradicated these trees in the South, the First Men domesticated and changed Nature to nature. Further, the First Men slaughtered the Children which almost drove them into extinction –only the small group that Bran meets is left.[10] Sharing the same fate of annihilation in the South, the weirwood and the Children are not only both inherently entangled with Pagan Nature beyond the Wall but also enable a reading informed by colonialism.

By introducing a colonial history to *GoT*, northern Nature as the White Walkers' point of origin evokes the Gothic fear of "the return of the past" (Hutchings qtd. in Parker 2020, 50). Related to the Horror technique "to thematically evoke our more bloody histories, which themselves come to haunt us" (50), the Walkers return after thousands of years to now haunt their creators, the Children, just as much as all human population. While the Gothic uses the uncanny to represent repressed fears, the ecoGothic evokes the return of repressed ecofears. In the show, the uncanny liminality of the Night King allows for a return of the repressed knowledge of the colonial history of the First Men and their crimes against the Children as well as Nature. Just as the end of the Holocene and anthropogenic climate change is not only connected to technical advancements or exploitations of Nature but has become recognised as especially tied to colonialism and slave trade (Yusoff 2018), the colonisation of Westeros by the First Men is what ultimately led to the climate monsters' creation. This confrontation with the interrelation of colonialism and climate change may evoke the return of repressed ecofears in the audience as *GoT* mirrors extratextual imperialism and "the crimes [...] against the 'Indians' and against the wilderness" (Parker 2020, 50). Further, the idea of civilisation equaling *ego* and

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[10]   The simplified portrayal of Westeros' history in *Game of Thrones*, compared to the detailed elaborations in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, doesn't detract from my findings but should be noted. Leaf's remark refers to the long war between the Children and the First Men, but their later peace is only briefly hinted at in *Spoils of War*. Similarly, the First Men's conversion to the Old Gods and the shared ancestry of Northerners and Free Folk are only alluded to. Other colonial powers like the Andals are mentioned but not explored. While Westeros' history is more complex than depicted in *GoT*, the postcolonial undertones persist. See Martin (2014) for further readings.

Nature equaling *id* not only establishes Nature as the shadowy dark counterpart to civilisation, but also highlights that Nature is just as uncontrollable by human civilisation as the id is by the ego –marking Gothic Nature as a symbol for "the darkest elements of our [unconscious] psyches" (55). That Nature and its agents, i.e. the Walkers, are both uncontrollable is particular evident when Jon takes Daenerys to a cave where he shows her ancient wall paintings created by the Children: "They were here together, the Children and the First Men. [...] They fought together against their enemy. Despite their differences, despite their suspicions, together. And we need to do the same if we are to survive" (*Spoils of War* 00:19:50-00:25:38). Thus, even though the Children as Nature's protectors planned to use the Walkers against their colonisers, they proved to be beyond their control.

3. GOTHIC CONSUMPTION AND EERIE HYPEROBJECT

While the entanglement of the First Men and the White Walkers demonstrates how any matter shares and imbricates origins, which further deconstructs the dualism of inanimate and animate matter as well as the juxtaposition of Nature and human civilisation, the narrative also emphasises how "both civilisation *and* Nature are each in danger of consuming –and being consumed– by the other" (Parker 2020, 53-54). As shown above, the Children as representation of the Pagan Druid tied to Nature felt threatened by the First Men, i.e. the colonisers. The Walkers, however, turned on them as well and a circle of consumption was created that ultimately threatens all matter. Hence, *GoT* creates "a setting in which we fear being *eaten*" (54; original emphasis). This fear of being consumed, i.e. losing one's mind and body, is what Parker identifies as another marker of Gothic Nature. She further emphasises that in Gothic Nature it is not the human who is the consumer but instead they are represented as the "endangered species" (Alaimo qtd. in Parker 2020, 53) with Gothic Nature being "cast as the edacious monster" (Parker 2020, 53). By marking all non-Nature life as endangered and Nature or the Walkers as superior, the anthropocentric idea of human control and Nature's sole existence to support human life is questioned in *GoT*. Hereby, the Walkers become the embodiment of Alaimo's transcorporeality, characterised by their capacity for independent action and the pursuit of a singular objective: the construction of an undead army with the intention of consuming all 'lively' matter.

However, the Walkers and their army grow out not to be singular monsters but "an all-encompassing monstrous environment" (Tyburski 2013, 148) that relates them to what Morton termed *hyperobject* (2013). Hyperobjects are things, events and concepts that are 'hyper' and "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (Morton 2013, 1) –even though we understand what they mean, we cannot grasp them. Generally, hyperobjects are viscous, non-local, "involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to" (1), are independent of human-thought and linked to the ending of the world "rendering both denialism and apocalyptic environmentalism obsolete" (2). The Walkers are 'hyper' in the sense that: they are viscous and stick to the human; they start out as local but quickly

transcend borders of any kind, i.e. the Wall, and are thus a non-local entity; they slept "beneath the ice for thousands of years" (*The Pointy End* 00:38:48-00:39:29) and hence transcend human temporality; and if not defeated, they could very well lead to the end of time.

This hyper-threat for human life is then perfectly illustrated in the episode *Hardhome* (00:28:55-00:56:12), in which Jon and two friends travel to Hardhome, a settling of the Free Folk, to convince the elders to allow the Free Folk to join the fight against the White Walkers. In return, Jon wants to take them south, so they are protected from the Walker's army. As the natural sound of the sequence is interrupted by dogs barking and the wind crescendoing, the camera pans over the gathered Free Folk and tilts up the cliffs surrounding Hardhome. With continuous rumbling, the camera shows an avalanche forming at the edge of the cliffs that enshroudes everything in front of the settlement's gate. The sounds outside Hardhome fall silent. When an elder peaks through a hole in the gate, the tension is heightened by reverse-angle cuts until a roaring crowd of undead becomes visible. Following the ensuing battle, Jon is being carried towards life-saving boats, when the loud shriek of a Walker directs the attention back up the cliff. After a cutaway to the cliff in a high-angle, thousands of undead come running and jump off the cliff's edge: following their fall, the camera tilts down showing the undead rising and charging after Jon and his friend. After they have made it to the boats, melancholic music starts playing while the camera cuts to a long shot of the beach that alternates with extreme close-ups of the Free Folk dying on shore –a mess of grey. The scene then closes with the Night King coming to a halt at the end of the jetty, the shoreline behind him piled with dead bodies. After jump-cutting between Jon and the King, the screen rests on the King raising his arms with the camera zooming in on him in unison; an insert shot pans over the piles of dead Free Folk, whose bodies start twitching. Cutting back to the King with his arms at maximum height, another insert close-up of the dead shows them opening their glowing, blue eyes. From an over-the-shoulder shot of Jon, the dead are seen rising again and, from an aerial shot of the shoreline, the sheer magnitude of the Walkers' army's body count is unveiled. With the sound of the wind and water sloshing, the screen turns black.

Just like hyperobjects in the real are overwhelming in their sheer magnitude, something Gothic Nature aims to recreate, the boundlessness of the undead as never aging but ever growing overwhelms not only the characters in the show but may affect the audience as well. *GoT* creates a monster that not only "reject[s] humanity as expendable" (Tyburski 2013, 147) but also "mirror[s] our fears about the fate of our civilization and the planet we call home" (149). Through a Gothicised Chtchulucene, *GoT* demonstrates how we are at Nature's mercy. While the White Walkers were presented as something intangible, as shadows in the night that are neither dead nor alive, neither nonhuman nor entirely human, they are now displayed as a force of Nature –an avalanche suffocating everything in its grasp, killing and then reviving it in a different form. As representations of Nature, the Walkers "become[...] an avenging force –or, even more monstrous, an alien entity utterly indifferent to the fate of humanity" (Smith and Hughes 2013, 11). Foregrounding Nature's uncontrollability, the show re-enchants us as an audience by evoking the

ecoGothic though the Walkers who trouble our "state of fear and denial concerning our environmental crisis" (Gonder qtd. In Parker 2020, 59).

5. CONCLUSION

Game of Thrones is a prime example for how the Gothic mode can enter Fantasy: creating a manifold storyline that foregrounds an inherent interconnectedness of all matter, the Anthropocene is negated in favour of a Gothicised Chthulucene, in which "we come face to face with our alienation from nature" (Tyburski 2013, 150). By applying Parker's markers for Gothic Nature, I illustrated how *GoT* is a story that reflects the responsibility of colonising forces for contemporary anthropogenic climate change by interlacing the White Walkers as arctic, climate monsters with Westeros' colonial past. Thereby, the space beyond the Wall unites various dualistic notions: it is at the same time antithesis to civilisation and a place of education; the human is consumed but also finds its history; it is the domain of the devil and the ground of the sacred. Through the disorienting Nature beyond the Wall, eco-anxieties are awoken that may enable the audience to reflect on their own relation to nature. Similar to apocalyptic fiction, *GoT* "tap[s] into our deepest fears by stripping away [all] sense of 'order, stability, meaning and permanence,' and replacing it with a vision of destructive chaos" (152) whereby the show portrays how life itself is disintegrated. The impalpable threat of the Walkers creates a horrific Chthulucene that foregrounds feeling "immersed, lost, and frightened" (Parker 2020, 44). The ever-present threat of consumption through the return of the Walkers, i.e. the return of the repressed, establishes a negative sublime that denies the audience to distance themselves from the non-human, inanimate planet. Through the interconnection between Nature, indigeneity, the monster, and the human, *GoT* dissolves the human-Nature binarism and thus highlights how the human is an inherent part of Nature just as Nature is an inherent part of the human. At "a time when global warming turns the sheltering ice and starving bears into victims of hubris rather than the monsters of the yore" (Smith and Hughes 2013, 6), the Walkers as arctic Gothic monsters confronts us with arctic Nature striking back –an apt trope to expose human complicity in climate change insofar as the winter-bringing Walkers are "none other than *us*" (Parker 2020, 9; original emphasis). Besides warning us that this crisis, in Jon Snow's words, "isn't about living in harmony. It's just about living" (*The Dragon and the Wolf* 00:19:41), the end of *GoT* foregrounds the importance of humanity banding together in the 'fight' against climate change whilst emphasising the inevitability of facing 'our' colonial past in order to do so.

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THE STATE OF NATURE: ECOGOTHIC (M)OTHER IN CATALINA INFANTE'S "TODAS SOMOS UNA MISMA SOMBRA"

Juan Ignacio Torres Montesinos
Universidad de Granada

Abstract

This paper analyzes "Todas somos una misma sombra," a short story by Chilean writer Catalina Infante published in 2018. The story describes the evolution of a community where men extinguish and women, as a joint shadow, walk to interweave with nature. Sun has vanished so the analysis is conceived from the ecogothic premise of fear to climate disorder. Such an alteration is the symbolic result of the ecosocial system of Anthropocene. The study considers the archetype of the state of nature proposed by English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. It expresses the fear human beings experience before reaching a pact to live in society. Catalina Infante's text describes an itinerary of be-coming where women's perception of nature is summarized by the idea of (M)other. Due to a new social pact based upon ecofeminism, the primary perception of otherness turns into the comprehension of nature as mother. The sense of shelter creates an imperative of preservation. "Todas somos una misma sombra" condenses those arguments and shows the theoretical suitability of the state-of-nature concept to analyze ecogothic literature.

Keywords: Ecogothic, State of Nature, Shadow, Ecofeminism, (M)other, Preservation.

EL ESTADO DE NATURALEZA: MATERN(ALTER)IDAD ECOGÓTICA EN
"TODAS SOMOS UNA MISMA SOMBRA" DE CATALINA INFANTE

Resumen

El presente artículo analiza el relato "Todas somos una misma sombra" publicado en 2018 por la escritora chilena Catalina Infante. Incluido en el libro homónimo, el texto narra la evolución de una comunidad donde los hombres se extinguen y las mujeres inician un periplo que las lleva a fusionarse con la naturaleza. La indagación parte de la desaparición del sol como premisa ecogótica. Profundiza en la idoneidad teórica del estado de naturaleza para abordar la perspectiva literaria del ecogótico. El mito del estado de naturaleza fue postulado por el filósofo inglés Thomas Hobbes como fundamento previo del pacto social. Describe un ámbito de comportamiento humano que genera miedo. Enlaza con el relato de Catalina Infante y el miedo tras el simbolismo de una anomalía medioambiental derivada del periodo de Antropooceno. El relato sugiere un nuevo pacto social sobre postulados de ecofeminismo donde la naturaleza percibida como otredad se convierte en un espacio de refugio que responde a la idea de madre y postula un imperativo de preservación.

Palabras clave: ecogótico, estado de naturaleza, sombra, ecofeminismo, matern(alter)idad, preservación.

"Todas somos una misma sombra" is a short story published by Chilean writer Catalina Infante in 2018 and included in the homonym book. The story describes the vital social evolution of women in a community after the sun has disappeared. In their be-coming,[1] and after men have extinguished, they walk and conform to a joint shadow. As women wander on, Anne Williams' interpretation of the concept of *(M)other* is central to lens female gaze in the text. This analysis considers the *state of nature*, a political myth developed by the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. It interprets the suitability of the concept in order to explain ecogothic causes and motifs. This issue favors the literary-thought dialogue between a classic work in English letters and Catalina Infante's story. As a result, the study on "Todas somos una misma sombra" relies on ecogothic parameters related to the Hobbesian state of nature and delves into Ecofeminism postulates to resignify the social pact in the era of Anthropocene. So, from the original element of fear, the state of nature contributes to explain a communitarian perspective of ecogothic. "Todas somos una misma sombra" is thus an expression of ecowriting describing the role of nature in social structures. For the purpose of analysis and comprehension, the title, "Todas somos una misma sombra," is translated into English as "Everyone of Us, Women, Are the Same Shadow".

1. THE STATE OF NATURE AND THE ECOGOTHIC LITERATURE

The sun disappearance is a climate disorder provoking fear. This fact allows "Todas somos una misma sombra" to fall within the domain of ecogothic literature. In the reflections on inherent aspects, Guan Xia declares that nature is "the ecological home for humanity" (Guang 2015, 56). In her depiction of American female writers, Stacy Alaimo claims that "nature has also been a space of feminist possibility, an always saturated but somehow undomesticated ground" (Alaimo 2000, 23). Nature is also a space where fear is likely to occur. With regard to fear deployment in Gothic fiction, Fred Botting affirms that "nature appears hostile, untamed and threatening" (Botting 2014, 4). So, ecogothic, as a literary category, is determined by a fear-provoking situation in nature, which, sometimes, it proves to be a climate anomaly or disorder. In this context, interviewed by Trang Dang, Michelle Poland considers that "the ecoGothic provides a timely and important tool to interrogate environmental anxieties and to examine both the ecology *in* Gothic and ecology *as* Gothic" (Dang 2022, 117). Elizabeth Parker alludes to the introductory chapter in *EcoGothic* by Andrew Smith and William Hughes, where ecoGothic is delimited as "not a genre but a lens: it is a *way* of looking things, it is a mode of deconstruction" (Dang 2022, 115). From a synthetizing approach, Andrew Smith and William Hughes estimate that "the Gothic seems to be the form which is well placed to capture

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[1] Be-coming (rather than becoming) is an interpretation that comprehends both women's itinerary along nature and the process to reach a new self.

these anxieties and provides a significant point of contact between literary criticism, ecocritical theory and political process" (Smith, Hughes 2013, 5).

Applying this set of considerations to Catalina Infante's "Todas somos una misma sombra," the ecogothic anomaly is primordially conditioned by the disappearance of the sun, "cuando el sol desapareció" (Infante 2018, 159). The disorder in nature emerges abruptly by unmentioned causes. The narrator begins to tell their story once the star has vanished. The absent sun, missing but not extinguished, is the metonymy of the threatened nature. Sun is an eco-crucial element since, as well as water, pre-conditions the planet existence. Sunlight is considered to be a part of nature and the ecosystem is overcome by the lack of equilibrium. This certitude engenders fear in humans. Catalina Infante expands his description on nature failing causes to the social domain. The climate-related issue of sun vanishing illustrates the concomitant with human agency in Anthropocene and it also refers to a disordered system in society. The geological period of Anthropocene is portrayed as the display of unrestrained human capacities over nature and society. As an introductory recognition, the storyteller declares women's wisdom on ecosystem disarrengement. Women represent the subject of knowledge since on the very day the sun vanished, women certainly knew the situation would last forever, "Ya sabíamos nosotras que el día en el que el sol dejó de salir, este había desaparecido para siempre" (Infante 2018, 166). In such a context, nature is primarily the otherness. It is perceived as an unresting agent generating fear and instability in the human community. The aforementioned arguments by Botting and Alaimo referred to nature with the terms *untamed* and *undomesticated*, which capture the otherness in the wilderness of nature.

To deepen in the socio-literary aspects of this climate exceptionality, the analysis turns to the archetype of the Hobbesian state of nature. This theoretical paradigm is recast in Catalina Infante's story to delve into ecogothic significance. A dialogue is traced between the arguments in "Todas somos una misma sombra" and the surviving suitability of the classical myth of the state of nature. This reasoning evokes the persistence of political philosophic myths and allegories from English letters and their capacity to exert influence on subsequent literary motifs and works. Thomas Hobbes's *state of nature*, in this case, and *utopia* by Thomas More are relevant examples. As J.C.A. Gaskin writes, "the historical reality of Hobbes's state of nature is partly our knowledge of savage societies" (Gaskin 1998, xxxii).

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is an English philosopher who postulates the political myth of the state of nature. It is a previous situation to the social pact and so to the origins of society. In this sense, he is one of the theorists of the social contract during the 17th and 18th centuries, together with John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. In 1642, in his book De Cive (*On The Citizen*), he defines the "condition of men outside civil society (the condition one may call the state of nature)" (Hobbes 1998b, 11-12). The paradigm was largely specified in *Leviathan*, published in 1651. J.C.A. Gaskin estimates that "this is the text which is 'the greatest, perhaps the sole, masterpiece of political philosophy written in the English language'" (Gaskin 1998, xlix). In the book, Hobbes asserts that "out of civil states, there is always war of everyone against every one" (Hobbes 1998a, 84); therefore, that is a situation of "no society [and] continual fear" (Hobbes 1998a, 84). During the state of nature, man's

behavior towards his kind is the cause for fear. For the English philosopher, the state of nature refers to the human need to form social structures. So, the "environmental" nature is not included in the concept of state of nature. In *The State of No Nature-Thomas Hobbes and the Natural World*, Henrik Skaug Saetra alludes to the "his clear humanism and his extensive use of terms connected to *nature* [...] when hardly mentioning nature *proper*, are aspects that imply that he's not the theorist of the environmentalists" (Skaug Saetra 2014, 177). In spite of the "apparent absence of the natural worlds" (Skaug Saetra 2014, 177) Skaug Saetra proposes an "environmentalist Hobbesian theory" (Skaug Saetra 2014, 177). On his part, Jedediah Britton-Purdy reflects on preconditions in Hobbes' arguments and explains that "today, what Hobbes claimed about social order is true of global ecological order. ... So, among the preconditions of going on living together is the shaping of a global ecological regime" (Britton-Purdy 2017). Nonetheless, Thomas Hobbes defines nature in the first sentence of *The Introduction* to the book *Leviathan* as "the art whereby God hath made and governs the world" (Hobbes 1998a, 7). Man is subsequently characterized as "the rational and most excellent work of nature" (Hobbes 1998a, 7). This rationalist conception of nature differs from the gothic idea of a sublime nature as well as irrational. However representing a pre-gothic scheme of nature, the Hobbesian myth of the state of nature permits a contrastive approach to ecogothic. Two elements serve as an analytical framework for ecogothic, and, particularly, for "Todas somos una misma sombra;" fear and the preamble to a social pact. So, ecogothic is explained from the constitutive elements of the Hobbesian state of nature.

The significance of the state of nature as a political myth widens into a literary metaphor. In the reciprocal dialogue with the Hobbesian classic, ecogothic provides a revisioned state of nature since nature as environmental domain is incorporated into the social archetype. In ecogothic literature, the state of nature describes a period in nature with predominance of fear because of ecosocial disorders related to human intervention. It comprehends an ethical should-be of reversibility. In this sense, Catalina Infante's story reargues the theoretical concept to describe a fearsome situation due to the ecosocial disorders in the era of Anthropocene. In this geological time, nature represents the space of devastation surged from human behavior and the state of nature is the primal setting of fear. Nature is thus a contention of humans with fear. Echoing such conceptions from Catalina Infante's story, ecogothic may also render nature as *dis-socialized*. It is a dissenting landscape from the society-built model. The social process is disruptive for women and nature because it describes a panorama of patriarchy both in natural and social environments. Nature conforms as an agency as well and, through fear-causing, it reveals disarrangements. In "Todas somos una misma sombra," the sun disappearance is the consequence in nature to Anthropocene, which considers nature a space subject to human dominating behavior. As an ecogothic explanation of the social framework, the vanishing of the sun is allegorically representative of the Anthropocene; the state of nature is such time's result. Similarly, the historical atmosphere during the 17th century in England determines the basis for the state of nature in Hobbes's work. As a summary argument, it can be stated that the state of nature represents pre-social violent chaos in Thomas Hobbes while in Catalina Infante is a symbol for devastation and domination.

The consequences of fear connect with the foundation of the state of nature. It is the imperative of self-preservation, which is the primary theoretical motive to associate Hobbes's and Infante's texts. As J.C.A. Gaskin puts in *The Introduction* to *Leviathan*, "it is first argued that human nature is commonly concerned with self-preservation" (Gaskin 1998, xx), or, in the words of Hobbes, "their own conservation" (Hobbes 1998a, 83). According to the argument, self-preservation before an all-against-all situation leads to the abandonment of the state of nature in favor of society. Hobbes establishes such an imperative from the individual while Catalina Infante narrates self-preservation from the group viewpoint. As for her text, human beings try to protect themselves after the ecological alteration of the sun vanishing; it is the cause to fulfill a new order to get over fear. As the storyteller evokes, there would be no survival if the whole community did not remain together, "no teníamos más alternativa que permanecer juntos ... sabíamos que no éramos capaces de sobrevivir solos" (Infante 2018, 163). This consciousness of self-surviving alone introduces the gothic idea of loneliness. They are the only human group in the story. Since the incipient instants of the state of nature, the group as a community of sole survivors finds in loneliness a cause of fear. They are alone in the scenery of ecological alteration.

Together with fear, the Hobbesian state of nature provides the expectancy of a social contract. "Todas somos una misma sombra" also suggests a new social pact including women and nature perspectives. Thinking on the delimitation of ecoGothic as a lens, the story offers the lens implying a female viewpoint on nature as well. In this sense regarding woman's roles in the state of nature, Carolyn Merchant demurs that "while the state of nature would logically imply full equality for women, in democratic consent theories arising from Hobbes and Locke, women remained under the dominion and authority of men" (Merchant 1990, 214). As a contrast, Catalina Infante suggests a social pact ending the state of nature with the inclusion of ecofeminism paradigms.

In consequence, fear and the following social pact outline the state of nature and the textual dialogue between Thomas Hobbes's definition and the resignification in ecogothic and, specifically, in "Todas somos una misma sombra".

2. THE LOCATIONS OF FEAR IN THE STATE OF NATURE

The analysis of "Todas somos una misma sombra" is structured in two narrative sequences. The state of nature after the vanishing of the sun due to Anthropocene and, secondly, the renewal of life in nature according to a social pact based upon ecofeminism. The ecosocial disorder in "Todas somos una misma sombra" starts off a new chronology represented by the state of nature. The climate anomaly of the sun impacts on the coexistence scheme with the exodus and uprootedness of the community. Landscape and time slide away through the spaces of fear. Catalina Infante's story remarks the role of women as a link to ecosystem and narrator of the story. She tries to narrate a process to establish a new model of society. As the storyteller remembers in *Todas somos una misma sombra*, we were a group of survivors waiting for the sun, "éramos un grupo de sobrevivientes esperando al sol" (Infante

2018, 161). At first, the sentence is applied to the whole group of characters in the story. It gradually becomes the definition for the surviving group of women. They experience fear in certain locations. Consequently, this epigraph locates fear as an ecogothic-defining feature in Catalina Infante's story.

2.1. Ecogothing-Defining Features in "Todas somos una misma sombra"

The state of nature archetype defines a context of fear. Hobbes places fear prior to the social contract and ecogothic details locations and themes of fear in nature and society as well. At the initial stages of "Todas somos una misma sombra," the state of nature is assumed to be a not benign space right after the sun has disappeared. Nature is "the separate and wild province" (McKibben 2003, 48), as defined by Bill McKibben. The human group expects this situation to be an ephemeral interlude and be reminded of as a nightmare. Despite the sun disappearance, climate anomaly is supposed to be transient into a hopeful early coming back to previous times. "Porque aún teníamos la esperanza de retomarla y pensar en este tiempo como mal sueño" (Infante 2018, 162). After the sun vanishes, the atmosphere is outlined by an urgent awaiting, "de espera urgente" (Infante 2018, 161). Characters want to interpret the way human action is affected by ecological disorder; this is an indication of the ignorance human beings feel before the harm by Anthropocene. Things seem to work out, "por un tiempo las cosas parecieron funcionar" (Infante 2018, 163). "Nos establecimos al final de la colina, en un descampado cerca del bosque" (Infante 2018, 159), the whole community roots itself by the end of the hill, near the woods. This is the first instance of the contiguity to the woods and the otherness of nature; it foretells the coexistence with the spaces of fear. Nonetheless, the state of nature consolidates. It occurs in the time of *non-days*. This ecodystopian concept is an expression of self-denying time. Such a period nightmarishly causes confusion, "la confusión de esos no-días que, hasta entonces, nos parecían una gran pesadilla" (Infante 2018, 167). This measure of time is entangled with the role of light in generating fear. The vanishing of the sun alters the natural light cycles defined by the sun. And, despite darkness and hazy time, cycles were always distinguished by the human group, "aun cuando todo fuera oscuro y se desdibujara el tiempo, siempre distinguíamos los ciclos" (Infante 2018, 160). The capacity to differentitate light and time cycles responds to the fact that those cycles had been socially created by men "los hombres lo habían creado" (Infante 2018, 160). It counterposts the time sequence in nature and explains the Anthropocene assumption of those cycles. The reference to light links to the title of "Todas somos una misma sombra" and acts as a cause for fear. As light contrasts, the successive light impressions are elements of nature telling in this era. Light shows the contradiction of nature and human, sun and fire. The beginning of Infante's story confirms that men lit the fire when the sun disappeared, "Los hombres encendieron el fuego cuando el sol desapareció" (Infante 2018, 159). After disappearance, sun emerges no more from nature while fire is a subsequent effect of human action. The ecosystem witnesses the disappearance of the main sustaining source of its existence while its replacement is a male intervention.

Nonetheless, this fact is a counterpoint which causes tiredness. Hence, their eyes are tired by the effects of fire light and heat. "En cambio, la luz y el calor del fogón nos cansaba los ojos" (Infante 2018, 166). Tiredness differently affects women and men. Men are weakened by the absence of sunlight while women's eyes adapt to darkness dexterously, "ellos estaban agotados, seguían debilitándose por la falta de luz [...] Nuestros ojos en la oscuridad parecían cobrar fuerza y hacerse más diestros al enfocar" (Infante 2018, 164). As the storyteller admits, on the establishment of the state of nature "ese era ahora el orden de las cosas" (Infante 2018, 166).

The agency of nature in the Anthropocene is shown acting reactively with the sun vanishing; this agency corresponds to otherness. In his article "Theorising the Ecogothic," Simon C. Estok remarks that "EcoGothic allows for understandings of how we persecute social and environmental otherness" (Estok 2019, 34). In the state of nature, women's behavior acts back against nature. After burning furniture and the old house, they set trees on fire. "Primero fueron los muebles de la antigua casa, luego la casa misma, después los árboles" (Infante 2018, 165). Heat was the only thing that could keep men alive, "sabíamos que el calor era lo único que mantenía vivo a los hombres" (Infante 2018, 165); the destruction of natural resources is associated to man's survival. Tree burning represents the approach to nature exemplified by Anthropocene. Men's survival collides with damages on the environment and women care is submitted to this circumstance. Women did not appreciate to cut trees down and tree burning is necessary to keep men warm. Heat comes from fire, the Anthropocene alternative to sun vanishing. Men call back with a method replacing the sunlight; it is a corollary of Anthropocene since they try to impose the heat and the man-made fires. At the same time, women begin to adapt to nature; that is to say, to cold and obscurity. So, the absence of light provokes men's tiredness and starts modelling of a new self in women.

The need for light to preserve themselves entails the human quest for sites of refuge. To find a shelter is the original will facing otherness in nature. Fear is due to the absence of shelter. In defining fear locations, Carolina Infante's text expresses the contrast between open spaces and sheltering buildings. After the sun vanishing, the human community initially remained in a house, a human-built space separated from nature, "moramos allí en un principio" (Infante 2018, 159). That house is intended to be a safe place, a refuge where no fear can happen and the consequences from Anthropocene are not suffered. In this sense, Donna Haraway estimates that "Anthropocene is about the destruction of places and times of refuge for people and other critters" (Haraway 2015, 160). Nevertheless, in "Todas somos una misma sombra," the house is not a sheltering site any longer and the group seeks another kind of protection. They began to walk through the fields looking for another refuge, "comenzamos a pasear por el campo buscando otro refugio" (Infante 2018, 159). In this period, women walk deep in the woods where they were not observed, "nos internábamos en el bosque donde nadie nos observaba" (Infante 2018, 164). The encounter with non-human agencies takes place in the woods, "solo para internarnos en el bosque, donde el ruido era de bichos y animales" (Infante 2018, 166). Elizabeth Parker refers to wilderness, conjointly as for the woods and forest, to "be understood as in symbolic contrast to human civilisation" (Parker 2020, 17). Analogously,

wilderness can be analyzed as a contrast to the existing society and a referent site for the state of nature.

In this context, Catalina Infante narrates fear as the conjunction of a climate emergency, the sun vanishing, and the gothic scenery of unknown woods. Besides, in the fearsome background of her story, ecogothic preludes the explanation of a process which is not only expressed over nature but in social circumstances. Distance between men and women metaphorizes the vanishing-point of the patriarchal system, "fue así que comenzamos a distanciarnos, hombres y mujeres" (Infante 2018, 166). After their increasing weakness, men do not survive, "ellos no sobrevivieron" (Infante 2018, 167). This is the replacement of a social system where violence occurs. "Así como los episodios de violencia que iban en aumento nos llenaban de rabia" (Infante 2018, 165).

As the narration goes on, Catalina Infante modifies the perception on the woods. It is the place where women begin intermingling with nature. Thus, the times in the woods differ from the periods living in the house. But, when the state of nature has been replaced by a new society, the woods become a friendly space where women go to feel freed and self-recognised. The episode of fusion with nature is the corollary of the woods' evolution into a forest, a wider space that hosts the renewal of the women's self. Symbolically, sun disappearance does not entail the conclusion of life on Earth. It is the indication for the finishing of a patriarchal society model whose behavior acts on environmental conditions and, mainly, on the sun. It refers to patriarchal society as a system linked to Anthropocene.

3. SHADOW AS THE NEW PERCEPTION OF LIGHT

As for the dialogue between ecogothic and the Hobbesian state of nature, Catalina Infante' "Todas somos una misma sombra" subverts the meanings of the elements of fear. It is the accepted ecosocial order when women become a joint shadow. The unwomanly social system has been eradicated. Women realize that previous life is not a domain to come back to. "Quizás no teníamos tantas ganas de volver [a esa vida]" (Infante 2018, 165). As a matter of fact, it could be considered the "collective feminist exit from Anthropos," according to Rosi Braidotti's statement (2017, 28). Ecogothic associates shadow to obscurity and is a counterbalance for sunlight. At the beginning of the story, women find themselves confused by darkness after the sun has vanished, "confundidas por la oscuridad" (Infante, 2018, 159). Primal light comes from the sun and, once disappeared, fire is intended as a replica. Women accustom to obscurity slowly in the night, "conforme nuestros ojos se acostumbraron un poco a la noche" (Infante 2018, 159). In this context, obscurity represents a third space between the confronted notions prior to and during the state of nature, natural sunlight and human fire. The bonds of women and nature gradually incarnate in the imagery of the shadow, which subverts its common representation. Women get accustomed to obscurity. They do not face against sunlight absence creating other forms of fire; they adapt to nature cycle of obscurity. Women's storytelling quietly undermines fears from obscurity. "Habíamos creado una narración coherente que nos tranquilizaba y

que hacía tolerable aquella oscuridad" (Infante 2018, 160). Obscurity is considered a positive force since women feel comfort in it. "Muchas de nosotras nos sentíamos cómodas en esa oscuridad" (Infante 2018, 165). The absence of light is replaced by a diffuse albeit minimal light. Nevertheless, obscurity is defined as light neutrality, "neutralidad de la luz" (Infante 2018, 165). In the midst of its attached unease, it is related to a certain degree of calm and serenity as well. "Había algo de calmo en la neutralidad de la luz" (Infante 2018, 165). Women do not associate otherness to obscurity in nature. In this sense, Catalina Infante reconfigures the significance of obscurity and, concordantly, the presence of the shadow. As the story title explains, "everyone of us, women, are the same shadow," "Todas somos la misma sombra" (Infante 2018, 167). The obscure area of the shadow is not the location for the sublime but the representation of women's self in community and the reversal of the perception of nature as an otherness. Shadow is also the result of the blocked projection of light over an object. From its ecogothic meaning of anxiety, Catalina Infante diminishes the misperception of light and represents shadow as a force for every woman in the group. In the story, their shadow condition dates back to fire extinction. It is the instant when man-made fire finishes. Women's bodies then turned into a blueish blackness, not knowing if it was darkness or because of real changes in their bodies. "Al extinguirse el fuego, nuestros cuerpos se volvieron de un negro azulado, no sabíamos si por la falta de luz o porque en verdad estaban cambiando" (Infante 2018, 169). It represents an ongoing women's will to interweave with nature until their bodies turned completely obscure, "hasta que nuestros cuerpos se oscurecieran del todo" (Infante 2018, 171).

"Todas somos una misma sombra" reargues the Hobbesian myth from the ecogothic-contrasted locations of light and darkness. Fear is not located in shadows and obscurity. In this domain, sometimes, and ignoring the causes, the moon appears. "No sabíamos cómo ni por qué, pero algunas veces aparecía la luna" (Infante 2018, 159). The moon sums an ecogothic element of a nightly diffuse light in the obscurity. It is also the sun antagonist, in nature and society. In the text, however, it mitigates the fear to unclear spaces and adds a feminine myth, the myth of fertility. In *Todas somos una misma sombra*, the myth of the moon is also resignified to describe women situation. The narrating voice tells that, on moon arising, a great stain intensely vibrated and lit from the dark; it was a play of light and shadows similar to places in the sky without stars. "Cuando la luna salía, esa gran mancha vibraba con intensidad y lograba iluminar desde lo oscuro, en un juego de luces y sombras parecido a los espacios del cielo donde no hay estrellas" (Infante 2018, 170). The character attributed to the moon joins to the obscurity represented by women. This is a stage when women self-recognised as the ever most obscure and largest stain and group. Their land is a little sphere with different somber tones in the universe; "nuestra tierra dentro del universo era una pequeña esfera de diversos tonos sombríos y que nosotras, todas juntas, conformábamos la mancha más oscura y extensa de todas" (Infante 2018, 170). It represents the ecofeminist community.

The representation of the shadow determines the confluence of ecogothic and ecofeminism paradigms in "Todas somos una misma sombra." On the day the fire extinguished, women as a whole shouted, "el día en que el fuego se apagó todas

gritamos" (Infante 2018, 168). This is the expression of a new ecosystem established in obscurity, where women adapt to through equality and mutual cooperation. Women's renewed self coherently has become a shadow. The establishment of a new social structure concludes the anthropocenic state-of-nature.

4. THE SOCIAL PACT. ECOGOTHIC AND ECOFEMINISM IN "TODAS SOMOS UNA MISMA SOMBRA"

The itinerary of women traces the foundations for the second element in the Hobbesian archetype of the state of nature, the disposition to a new social pact. In ecogothic, the social contract is developed as an ethical motive to promote a new vision on the ecosocial system. It includes nature and human beings. In "Todas somos una misma sombra," the ethical imperative is fulfilled by ecofeminism paradigms. As ecogothic deals with drifts in times of climate emergency, according to Andrew Smith and William Hughes, "the Gothic is a particularly appropriate genre in which to explore new possibilities for ecofeminism" (Smith, Hughes 2013, 12). Perspectives from this ecogothic and ecofeminism syllogism show a theoretical confluence since fear is a criterion to explain domination over nature and women. In particular, the social contract derived from Catalina Infante's story is based upon the pan-humanity by Rosi Braidotti and the trans-corporeality of Stacy Alaimo. Both domains of thought question the perception of the other. The subject of this pact is the feminine collective, which is narrated with the use of the first-person plural, as Claire Mercier highlights, to stress the ecofeminist viewpoint in the writing of *Todas somos una misma sombra*, "un colectivo femenino con el uso de la primera persona del plural" (Mercier 2022, 144). In an ecofeminism statement on the concept of nature, Stacy Alaimo also expresses that "'nature' is not a profoundly gendered realm but a site of many other struggles for power and meaning" (Alaimo 2000, 13). In this sense, Carolina Infante correlates with Stacy Alaimo's definition of the concept of trans-corporeality. "We inhabit what I'm calling 'trans-corporeality' –the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, in inseparable from 'nature' or 'environment'" (Alaimo 2008, 238). In this kind of isomorphism, there is a congenial correspondence between nature and women according to new social codes. The argument explains why the environment is included in the resignification of the state of nature, a space attached to the time of Anthropocene. Pan-humanity is the other aspect regarding the social pact. In the conclusive epigraph of *Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism*, Rosi Braidotti remarks the concept of pan-humanity actualizing "a community that is not bound negatively by shared vulnerability, the guilt of ancestral violence ... but rather by their compassionate acknowledgement of their interdependence with multiple others, most of which, in the age of Anthropocene, are quite simply not anthropomorphic" (Braidotti 2017, 39). The conclusion is titled *Recomposing Humanity*. Joining the arguments by Alaimo and Braidotti, as a response to Anthropocene, it is recognized the human corporeality inseparable from nature and interdependent with multiple others. In "Todas somos una misma sombra," this paradigm is reflected in the fusion of women with nature. Their whole

bodies mingled with earth and their insideness, eyes, ears were full of earth "nuestro interior se llenara de tierra" (Infante 2018, 171). They began to get more and more inside and increasingly digged with the entire body; the earth seemed to divide for them. "Comenzamos a adentrarnos y a cavar más y más con el cuerpo entero […] y la tierra pareció partirse para nosotras" (Infante 2018, 171). It is the participation of non-human agency in nature too. As the storyteller details, they opened their mouth and let the earth get into. "Abrimos la boca y dejamos que entrara también esa tierra" (Infante 2018, 171). In consequence, ecofeminism paradigm is a kind of proposal for the social pact in ecogothic. And this is the viewpoint reflected in Catalina Infante's story. It is an expression of concern for climate emergency in ecogothic texts.

The pact significance requires an agreement on the meaning of words. Ancient words were useless soon after the new system emerges, "las palabras de pronto dejaron de servirnos" (Infante 2018, 169). "Esos gritos se fueron transformando de a poco en aullidos; ladridos que surgían de tan profundo que no podíamos controlarlos" (Infante 2018, 168), the cries gradually transformed into howls, barks emerging from so deep they could not be controlled. "Nuestras voces se volvieron cada vez más graves y fuertes esa noche, e hicieron vibrar la tierra" (Infante 2018, 168). It is the uselessness of the words that represented the period of Anthropocene. The voices turned deeper and stronger and made the earth vibrate. It is the initial phase of the union of nature with other non-human beings. It represents the contrast with the silence of the otherness, the sun vanished quietly at the beginning of the story, "cómo se estableció la oscuridad y el silencio" (Infante 2018, 162). Far away, animal howls are heard by the presence of women, "a lo lejos, animales desconocidos hicieron escuchar sus gritos junto a nosotras" (Infante 2018, 168). Women do not already feel any fear for those unknown animals crying in the dark wilderness as it had been expected in previous ecogothic times of nature otherness. Once women have reached the assimilated identity with nature, the be-coming is fulfilled and nomadic walking ceased, "Un día dejamos de caminar" (Infante 2018, 171). And the final process of identification is affirmed taking the earth with their hands and feet. Women dug a hole so deep narrow as their bodies, "tomamos la tierra con las manos y los pies […] hasta cavar un hoyo profundo y tan estrecho como nuestros cuerpos" (Infante 2018, 171).

The narration contains the idea of movement, a voyage through wilderness when the characters move along the natural spaces in the story. In such narrative a context, women are nomadic subjects, according to Rosi Braidotti's notion. Sarah Nicholson refers to that condition which "infuses the conception of female subjectivity with motion" (Nicholson 2008, 47). In Catalina Infante's story, this category is represented by women be-coming. It combines the symbolic wandering and arrival to nature with the reaching of a new self, restoring the female subjectivity. During their journey they even move on with their hands and feet on the hillsides, "avanzando con manos y pies sobre las colinas" (Infante 2018, 170). "Recorríamos territorios extensos durante largos periodos de tiempo […] recorriendo una tierra cuya infinitud nos reconfortaba como ninguna otra cosa" (Infante 2018, 169). The infinite vastness of the territories provides them with the major comfort. Their motion-will epitomizes the representation of the progression from otherness to mothering. The

storyteller expresses the new social structure with an all-compressing aspiration after women's hearts beating in time with the world's beating, "hasta que el corazón latiera junto al latido del mundo" (Infante 2018, 172).

4. (M)OTHER AND THE IMPERATIVE OF PRESERVATION

(M)other is the symbiotic concept that synthesizes the state of nature in "Todas somos una misma sombra." In the book *Art of Darkness*, Anne Williams analyzes the poem "Frost at Midnight" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and she explains (m)other as a "term coined by psychoanalytic feminists to express the maternal other" (Williams 1995, 204). Anne Williams affirms that Female Gothic literature "creates a different kind of speaking subject" to the maternal other under patriarchal system (Williams 1995, 205). Therefore, (m)other or maternal other is a female representation whose unsubmitted voice is conferred by the gothic. Catalina Infante reconceptualizes the symbiotic notion of (M)other. In "Todas somos una misma sombra," it describes the itinerant progression from otherness to mothering; the story narrates the itinerary of women from a sunless space till the union with nature. The Chilean writer also relies on gothic themes to delimit otherness. But nature develops into the figure of mother and wilderness becomes a space for refuge. Shelter is the response to otherness. The need for shelter is linked to preservation. The idea of preservation traces back to the root of the state of nature. Self-preservation is the individual response to fear from otherness in the Hobbesian state of nature. In Catalina Infante's story, the progression from other to mothering is represented by the contrast between self-preservation and preservation. Ecogothic narrations portray ecosocial disorders that, sometimes implicitly, act as an ethical imperative for ecosocial warning for preservation. In Catalina Infante's story, the ecofeminism proposal of a new social pact exemplifies that ethical reason. As a consequence, the concept of (m)other socially entails the ethical imperative of preservation from the need for shelter. In "Todas somos una misma sombra," this imperative begins with women caregiving and memory telling. Preservation connects with fear in their very initial phases, even before women knew they inhabited the state of nature. They stay by the stove, taking care of the little children and telling themselves stories about their past lives, avoiding to forget who they had previously been, "junto al fogón, cuidando a los más pequeños, y contándonos historias de nuestras vidas pasadas, por miedo a olvidar quiénes habíamos sido" (Infante 2018, 160). This oral customary ritual takes place immediately after the sun has vanished and the expression of fear appears for the first time regarding the memory of women existence.

In the conclusive episode of the story fear persists since the group is in the quest for another sun. Women consider themselves subterranean waves in a journey to another sun, "ondas subterráneas que viajan hacia otro sol" (Infante 2018, 172). They still recognize the persistence of the sun as a primal source of light and heat though in a different social system. However, ecogothic motifs are not an anomaly but the alert against ecosocial reversal. As a matter of fact, the vanishing of the sun is not concluded. The sun has not appeared again and women assure they would

continue the union with nature until their howls were subterranean waves in journey to another sun, "nuestros aullidos fueran ondas subterráneas que viajan hacia otro sol" (Infante 2018, 172). This is the finishing sentence in the story and it confirms ecogothic suitability to narrate fear in ecosocial trouble and the capacity to suggest or propose an ethical response as well.

5. CONCLUSION

Elizabeth Parker attests that "there is *hope* in the ecoGothic [...] Fear makes us think differently about spaces, and so can make us think differently about Nature" (Dang 2022, 123). In accord with her assessment, this study focuses on the archetype of the state of nature. It discusses the suitability of Thomas Hobbes's theoretical design to offer a contrastive approach to ecogothic literature and Catalina Infante's "Todas somos una misma sombra." In this aspect, Catalina Infante's text resorts to ecogothic climate disorder to involve the harmonic role of women and nature as a foundation to build a new social agreement. As a consequence, the dialogical structure remarks the function of ecogothic literature to propose an ethical imperative of preservation and to explain what can be named as ecosociety.

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REBELLION AND WILDERNESS: FEMALE AGENCY AND IRISH NATURE IN ELIZABETH GRIFFITH'S *THE HISTORY OF LADY BARTON* (1771)

Lydia Freire Gargamala
Universidade de Vigo

Abstract

This paper endeavors to establish a correlation between the portrayal of female characters and Irish wilderness in Elizabeth Griffith's Gothic novel, *The History of Lady Barton* (1771). Deprived of agency and independence, female figures in the realm of Gothic fiction are often rendered as figures of *otherness* –alien, monstrous, and threatening– driven by a relentless pursuit of liberation from patriarchal constraints. Faced with the choice between madness, death or exile as defiant alternatives to submitting to societal repression, these characters become symbolic rebels against established norms, ultimately opting for a tormenting fate over submission. This portrayal positions them as figures of wildness and uncontrollability, echoing the untamed essence of nature itself. Therefore, by intertwining the fates of women like Louisa Barton and Olivia Walter with the chaotic and uncontrollable Irish landscape, Griffith's narrative, enhances the complexity of her female characters, suggesting an innate connection between their defiance and the tumultuous, uncontrollable forces inherent in the natural world. Through this lens, both women and nature emerge as sites of *otherness*, offering new avenues for resistance and empowerment.

Keywords: Elizabeth Griffith, Gender, Gothic, Nature, *Otherness*.

LA REBELIÓN Y LO SALVAJE: LA AGENCIA FEMENINA Y EL PAISAJE IRLANDÉS EN THE HISTORY OF LADY BARTON (1771) DE ELIZABETH GRIFFITH

Resumen

Este artículo se propone establecer una correlación entre la representación de los personajes femeninos y la naturaleza salvaje irlandesa en la novela gótica de Elizabeth Griffith, *The History of Lady Barton* (1771). Privadas de agencia e independencia, las figuras femeninas en la ficción gótica suelen ser retratadas como figuras de alteridad –alienadas, monstruosas y amenazantes– impulsadas por una búsqueda incesante de liberación de las restricciones patriarcales. Ante la elección entre la locura, la muerte o el exilio como alternativas preferibles a someterse a la represión social, estos personajes se convierten en iconos de rebeldía contra las normas establecidas, optando finalmente por un destino tormentoso en lugar de la sumisión. Esta representación las posiciona como figuras salvajes e incontrolables, haciendo eco de la esencia indomable de la propia naturaleza. Así, al entrelazar los destinos de mujeres como Louisa Barton y Olivia Walter con el paisaje indómito de Irlanda, la narrativa de Griffith enriquece la complejidad de sus personajes femeninos, sugiriendo una conexión innata entre sus transgresiones y las fuerzas tumultuosas e incontrolables inherentes al mundo natural. A través de esta perspectiva, tanto las mujeres como la naturaleza emergen como iconos de alteridad, ofreciendo nuevas vías para la resistencia y el empoderamiento.

Palabras clave: Elizabeth Griffith, género, gótico, naturaleza, alteridad.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Gothic literature, the concept of *otherness* functions as a profoundly disquieting force, deeply intertwined with questions of gender and the natural world. This *otherness* is neither distant nor abstract; instead, it emerges as an intrusive and pervasive presence that destabilizes the boundary between the human and the nonhuman, often embodying elements that are simultaneously familiar and alien. As Eric Savoy aptly observes, the Gothic genre is fundamentally rooted in the presence of *otherness* –not as a remote or theoretical concept, but as a pervasive and omnipresent force that constantly threatens to resurface (Savoy 1998, 6).[1] This relentless disruption not only unsettles established social hierarchies but also challenges fixed notions of identity, whether personal, gendered, or cultural, thereby undermining rigid societal norms and destabilizing the self.

Gothic texts often invoke this *otherness* as a disturbed and distressing natural world. Nature itself becomes a conduit for the expression of internal and external anxieties, manifesting as a force that is both menacing and inexplicable. Forests grow dense and impenetrable, mountains loom ominously, and the weather turns hostile, externalizing the characters' fears. Imbued with a sense of the supernatural and the sublime, the natural world becomes a symbol of the unknown and the feared, embodying the irrational and uncontrollable, while mirroring and magnifying themes of *otherness*, horror, and the uncanny. Similarly, the Gothic genre, with its emphasis on fragmented identities and alienation, proves to be a fertile ground for analyzing discourses concerning women.[2] As Nicole Dittmer notes, it often unveils "perspectives of female abjection by a society that restricts expression" (Dittmer 2023, 22). In this literary landscape, monstrosities and repressed aspects of female identity become inextricably intertwined, revealing the complex interplay between societal repression and hidden dimensions of female experience. This interplay provides a profound lens for both depicting and critically examining these complexities, revealing how societal constraints shape and distort the representation of female identity.

In this regard, Elizabeth Griffith's *The History of Lady Barton* (1771) offers a particularly illustrative case study, notably through its depiction of both female characters and the Irish landscape. The untamed and hostile elements of the natural world reflect the forces of *otherness* that marginalize and oppress female figures. This portrayal underscores the thematic convergence between the natural environment and female experience as sources of threat and estrangement. By examining this duality, my analysis seeks to illuminate how women are marginalized by societal structures and how nature itself becomes an object of fear and *otherness*. The interplay

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[1] For a deeper analysis of the Gothic's interrogation of *otherness*, see Andrew Smith and William Hughes, which connects Gothic themes to issues of imperialism and marginalization. Additionally, Tabish Khair offers a re-examination of the role of the colonial/racial Other in mainstream Gothic (colonial) fiction, providing new insights into concepts of *otherness*, difference, and identity.

[2] On the intersection of gender and fragmentation in Gothic literature, see Diane Long Hoeveler who offers a neo-feminist perspective on female identity within these texts.

between these elements not only highlights the novel's critique of societal norms but also exemplifies the Gothic genre's broader examination of identity and alienation. Through this lens, the text's depiction of both nature and gender serves as a powerful commentary on the ways in which the Gothic tradition exposes and interrogates the constructs of *otherness*.

2. CONFRONTING CONVENTION: FEMALE AGENCY IN ELIZABETH GRIFFITH'S GOTHIC NOVEL *THE HISTORY OF LADY BARTON*

In her seminal treatise *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir articulated the notion of a fundamental division within humanity, characterized by discernible distinctions encompassing attire, physical appearance, behavioural patterns, and vocational choices. Despite the apparent superficiality of these differences, Beauvoir emphasized their undeniable presence in societal constructs. Consequently, she embarked on an inquiry into the essence of womanhood, delving into what it truly means to be a woman and the disparities it entails compared to being male. Seeking to unravel its complex dimensions and implications, Beauvoir asserted that

> In actuality the relation of these two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria without reciprocity [...] A man is in the right in being a man, it is the woman who is in the wrong. It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine. [...] Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. [...] She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute –she is the Other. (Beauvoir 1949, xiv-xvi)

The concept of the Other, therefore, assumes paramount importance incomprehending the experiences and social roles of women. In Beauvoir's exposition, the Other emerges as the antithesis of the Self, serving as a shadow cast by the dominant subjectivity. No individual willingly embraces the status of objectification and insignificance; rather, it is the imposition of the Self that relegates the Other to this subordinate position. The Other, thus constructed, must accept their alienation, finding itself dependent on the Self, reversing the natural order of autonomy. By designating the woman as the Other, hence, she is implicitly positioned to conform to subordination and complicity.

Expanding on Beauvoir's examination of the concept of the Other in connection to womanhood, parallels can be discerned between her insights and the prevalent themes found in Gothic literature. In the realm of the Gothic genre, the depiction of female characters as the Other transcends being a mere thematic motif;

serving instead as a foundational element, weaving together the diverse narratives that conform the genre. The Gothic genre thrives on themes of *Otherness* and fragmented identities, offering intriguing insights into the representation of female abjection in a society that confines individual expression. This abjection manifests itself through the interplay of dichotomous forces, perpetuating conflicts inherent within the narrative structure. Within this framework, the emergence of the monstrous figure signifies a transformation, be it physical or psychological, serving as a symbolic representation of the suppressed facets of femininity (see Dittmer 2023, 11).

Hence, in the Gothic, the representation of female characters often embodies the epitome of *Otherness*, existing on the fringes of society, haunted by their marginalized identities and constrained by societal expectations. When considering, for instance, the archetypal figure of the Gothic heroine –a marginalized, often persecuted figure whose identity is subsumed by the patriarchal structures that surround her– this notion becomes apparent. Well-known Gothic characters such as Emily St. Aubert in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* or Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, for example, epitomize the Other, existing in a state of perpetual liminality, neither fully embraced by society nor free from its constraints. Torn between societal expectations and their own personal desires, their agency is stifled by the patriarchal forces that seek to control them. By applying Beauvoir's framework to Elizabeth Griffith's Gothic novel, *The History of Lady Barton*, it is possible to unravel the representation of female characters, namely Louisa Barton and Olivia Walter, as the Other and examine how they struggle to navigate the oppressive forces of society.

Originally released in three volumes, *The History of Lady Barton* comprises a compilation of epistolary exchanges among multiple characters. At the heart of the narrative is Lady Barton, the central figure around whom the story revolves. The novel begins by introducing Louisa Barton, immediately after her nuptials with Sir William Barton, an Irish baronet characterized by his arrogance and insensitivity. Despite being flattered by his persistent wooing, Louisa finds herself devoid of both love and respect for him. As she comes to recognize her incompatibility with Sir William, she is drawn towards his affable and amicable friend, Lord Lucan. Despite Lord Lucan's reciprocation, Louisa remains faithful to Sir William, but her growing sense of guilt gradually erodes her mental and physical well-being. Amid this turmoil, Louisa finds herself in danger when Colonel Walter, another acquaintance of her husband, tries to seduce her and, after facing rejection, falsely accuses her of having an affair with Lord Lucan. Driven by jealousy and misled by Colonel Walter's slander, Sir William unjustly condemns Louisa, precipitating a severe decline in her health. In a dramatic turn of events, Lord Lucan takes it upon himself to defend Louisa's honour by engaging in a duel and killing Colonel Walter. Shortly thereafter, Sir William discovers his wife's innocence, and her reputation is ultimately vindicated. However, the unfolding tragedy culminates in Louisa Barton's ultimate demise.

In parallel with the narrative of Louisa, and broadening the novel's scope of female experience, the narrative introduces the interpolated tale of Olivia Walter, Colonel Walter's French wife. Olivia's story functions both as a reflection of Louisa's plight and as a cautionary narrative. Olivia is first introduced in the novel as an

innocent girl who succumbs to Colonel Walter's flattery and declarations of love. Their clandestine meetings intensify their romance, leading the Colonel to eventually propose elopement. Overcome by her emotions, Olivia consents, without the presence of witnesses. However, as their union progresses, the Colonel's demeanour changes, culminating in his abandonment of Olivia and the revelation of his prior marriage to another woman, Nanette. Consequently, Olivia becomes the subject of societal scrutiny and malicious accusations, branded with charges of adultery and seduction. This drives her to seek refuge, by the end of the novel, within the walls of a convent, the sole sanctuary deemed secure from the relentless judgment of society.

In this context, a simple examination of both storylines vividly highlights the striking resemblance between the experiences of Louisa and Olivia in their encounters with male dominance within the novel. These characters embody a spirit of rebellion and resistance against the established societal norms, primarily driven by the traumas they endure at the hands of male figures in the narrative. Through their unwavering actions, both Louisa Barton and Olivia Walter demonstrate a profound inclination towards embracing death and confinement, respectively, as preferable alternatives to enduring the oppressive shackles of conformity imposed by society. Their choices serve as a powerful testament to their unyielding determination to break free from the constraints placed upon them, underscoring the indomitable spirit that resides within them, an assertion that will be further supported through a parallel analysis of the life journeys of these female characters.

Beginning with the protagonist of the novel, Louisa Barton's story unlocks the silence traditionally covering particularly feminized experiences of women denying their status as property by refusing to be contained. According to Jane Spencer the character of Lady Barton serves as a criticism of prevailing materialistic and superficial matrimonial practices through her "desperate cries of protest against the bonds of marriage" (Spencer 1986, 124). The protagonist of the novel finds herself bound in marriage to a man for whom she harbours no genuine affection, only to discover the true essence of love with a man outside of her union, namely Lord Lucan. Considering the societal expectations and gender conventions that were prevalent at the time, as we previously analysed, this was a highly problematic topic. For centuries, society maintained a double standard that allowed men to pursue multiple sexual partnerships while women were subject to stricter restrictions. Towards the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this double standard was particularly evident in the legal realm, as there was a notable decriminalization of adultery for men, granting them enhanced legal authority to penalize their adulterous wives while their indiscretions often remained unpunished (see Pollak 2016, 55-56). Such discrepancy becomes apparent when examining the marital dynamic between Lady Barton and Sir William in the novel. In the initial pages, the reader is introduced to Lady Barton, whose presence serves to elucidate the underlying tenets that underpin her marital union and her husband's doctrinal perspectives concerning the fairer sex, with a specific focus on his own wife.

Sir William is introduced as a man who holds misogynistic views, asserting that women should be treated like criminals and not be allowed to write. He disparages those who enjoy writing, claiming that they are unfit for other activities

(more conventionally feminine, probably), and questions the existence of friendship among women:

> women should be treated like state criminals, and utterly debarred the use of pen and ink –he says, that [...] that those who are fond of scribbling [sic] are never good for any thing else; that female friendship is a jest and that we only correspond, or converse, with our own sex, for the sake of indulging ourselves in talking of the other. (Griffith 2018, I 2-3)

His dismissive attitude towards sorority reinforces the notion that women's primary purpose is to talk about men, a clearly chauvinist and limiting view of women's capabilities and interests. Such an unfortunate comment about women is peculiarly followed by Louisa sighing the words "love, honor, and obey," emphasizing the word "obey" and declaring that "the latter only, rests on me," referencing the traditional expectations of a wife's role in the marriage, which was to be subservient to her husband, a role that our heroine is determined to perform as "part of the covenant" (Griffith 2018, I 4). On this premise, and already assuming the misogynistic character of Sir William, the reader is not entirely surprised when coming upon a scene in which an abandoned infant is found in a garden with a paper pinned to its breast, which said that the child has been baptized by its father's name, William, suggesting Sir William had been unfaithful to his wife, resulting in an illegitimate child. Such circumstance, disconcerted Sir William

> who, after many unnecessary asseverations of his innocence, [...], determined to prove his virtue, at the expense of his humanity, by ordering the child to be again left in the garden where it was found, till the parish officers should come to take charge of it; and by commanding a strict search to be made for the mother, that she might be punished, according to law. (Griffith 2018, I 138)

There are many problematic aspects regarding this passage. On the one hand, the fact that Sir William, a male character, is portrayed as being potentially unfaithful to his wife, while attempting to shift blame onto a woman, echoes the societal bias of the time, placing the burden of morality and virtue solely on women while excusing men's behaviour. Indeed, Sir William's attempt to shift blame serves as a stark reminder of how women were often scapegoated or held responsible for men's indiscretions. In this vein, the call for the mother to be punished according to the law escaping any accountability of his actions, further highlight the unequal treatment of men and women in the face of societal transgressions. On the other hand, the response of the society, as depicted in the text, where "the whole company smiled, as they knew that he had been above a year out of the kingdom" (Griffith 2018, I 139), can be seen as a reflection of the complicity and tolerance of male privilege within the social framework. It underlines the fact that society often turns a blind eye to men's indiscretions, even when they are evident, perpetuating the idea that men can act with impunity and escape consequences for their actions. The fact that Sir William's affair is viewed with amusement rather than condemnation

speaks to the normalization of men's misbehaviour and the willingness to protect their reputations at the expense of women's honour.

Hence, ensnared "under the yoke of marriage to a misogynist," borrowing Spencer's words (Spencer 1986, 125), Lady Barton turns her affection towards Lord Lucan, a man who has a high opinion of women, rather than her tyrannical woman-hating husband. However, in stark contrast to our initial perception of Sir William's character, Lady Barton finds herself enduring constant judgment from society, her own husband, and even her own self, as she is labelled (by herself) as a monster-like criminal figure, despite maintaining her fidelity throughout and never succumbing to infidelity, trying to suppress her rebellious inclinations, as herself claims:

> Wretched Louisa! strive no more to varnish o'er thy faults –Thou wert a criminal, in the first act, who wedded without love; and all the miseries which proceed from thence, too justly are thy due. (Griffith 2018, II 110)

Louisa, therefore, emerges as the Other, bearing the weight of societal expectations and self-imposed condemnation, existing in a state of continual liminality, being neglected by society and incapable of breaking free from its constraints. Perceiving herself as a criminal and consequently internalizing the gender-biased societal norms imposed upon her, which demanded adherence to and embodiment of an unblemished moral character that make it impossible for her to have any kind of romantic feelings for another man outside her marriage; even in the absence of any adulterous transgressions, Louisa finds herself ensnared in the ceaseless turmoil of her psyche. Such turmoil is increased as the narrative evolves, and Colonel Walter, who also harbours a romantic interest, or rather sexual, in our female protagonist, adds complexity to the situation. Walter's reaction upon being rejected by Louisa further underscores the underlying power dynamics and societal patriarchy at play, when in a vindictive manner, he accuses Louisa of infidelity with Lord Lucan. This accusation not only serves to vilify Louisa but also exposes the perilous consequences of women's agency in resisting advances and maintaining autonomy over her own desires. Even in the absence of concrete evidence of her infidelity, the mere suggestion of it becomes a heavy burden for Louisa to bear, as Sir William –favouring male's authority and opinions over those of women– does not grant his wife any credibility condemning her as "[the] vilest of women" (Griffith 2018, III 282) and threatening with locking her in an asylum or simply abandoning her.

Despite managing to restore her image in the eyes of society and her husband; as a means of fulfilling her penance for deviating from societal expectations surrounding idealized wifely conduct, the novel portrays her graceful demise at the narrative's end when

> her gentle spirit took its flight to heaven, while these fond arms in vain endeavoured to support the feeble frame from whence it parted –She sunk upon my [Fanny's] bosom, and expired! nor sigh nor groan gave warning of her death, she closed her eyes, and slept for ever! No words can paint the grief and distraction, of her unhappy husband. (Griffith 2018, III 308)

Therefore, Louisa Barton's existence is starkly delineated by the dominating presence of the male figures in her life, whether it be the chauvinistic tyranny of her husband, or the harrowing despair inflicted by Colonel Walter's actions; Louisa emerges as the epitome of the Other. Continually defined by and through male figures rather than in a relationship of connection and equality with them, her autonomy is rendered insignificant, overshadowed by the dominance and influence of the men in her life. Bound by predefined gender roles and stifled in her natural desires, Louisa's quest for self-discovery and fulfilment is tragically thwarted. Unable to find resolution amidst the confines of societal repression, Louisa Barton could not achieve a happy closure to their traumatic circumstances, finding death as the only possible solution to repression.

Similarly, in the novel, Olivia Walter serves as another cautionary character, much like Louisa Barton, both embodying the societal expectations of how women should not behave themselves in accordance with prevailing moral and ethical standards of the period. Her innocence and inexperience led her to become the other woman: ensnared in a clandestine and legally meaningless nuptial union with a man who is already bound in matrimony with another women named Nanette; Olivia finds herself bearing an illegitimate child, thereby subjecting her to the harsh judgmental gaze of her society, and ultimately, consigned to a life of seclusion, relegated to the confines of an attic and eventually of a convent.

Without any ill intent and solely assessing her goodness as the catalyst for all her misfortunes, Olivia emerges, as well, as the Other, a woman at the margins of conventional norms. Once her status as the other woman is discovered by the society that surrounds her, especially her servants, who began treating her

> with less respect than usual; they doubtless believed [Nanette's] story, and thought that [her] receiving her into [her] house, was at once a proof both of [her] guilt and fear. –The physician and apothecary who attended her, divulged the tale abroad, and [she] was looked upon by the whole city of Marseilles, as one of the most abandoned wretches. (Griffith 2018, I 247)

While acknowledging that Olivia bears no responsibility for her situation, for she too has fallen victim to deception, she arises as the one unduly burdened by the repercussions of the actions perpetrated by a man. Her condition as the Other, existing in a state of perpetual inferiority in comparison to men, leads her to be unjustly punished. She alone finds herself cast as a social pariah, whereas Colonel Walter, by contrast, remains unburdened by any obligation to atone for his deeds. Indeed, in the absence of punitive consequences, he even exhibits a clear determination to continue his adulterous behaviour, as our previous observations attest in the case of Louisa Barton.

Once Olivia believed that her circumstances had taken a turn for the better, finding refuge under the care of the Marchioness de Fribourg; her hopes were dashed again when she realized that her own damaged reputation, tainted by accusations of adultery, had preceded her. As a result, the marchioness now viewed her as a temptress trying to seduce her husband, Monsieur de Lovaine. Being labelled as "the

most ungrateful of her sex" (Griffith 2018, II 12), Olivia finds herself once again unprotected and with an infant.

> This last stroke was infinitely more severe than all that I had yet endured; I now saw the impossibility of ever clearing my conduct to my husband, and devoted as I was, by him, to infamy, the peaceful asylum of the sheltering grave was now become my only hope, or wish; even a mother's tenderness could not reconcile me to such unmerited and endless sufferings; that virtuous fondness which had sustained me through all my former trials, was now absorbed in mean self-love, and I could not refrain from praying for an end of my misery. (Griffith 2018, II 30)

Contemplating death as her sole escape, yet consumed by thoughts of her daughter's future, Olivia, in her naivety, embarks on a quest to locate Colonel Walter in search of protection. Her quest leads her to a grim fate, as she finds herself confined to an attic. In her dire circumstances, her only perceived path to happiness is to take refuge in a convent. It is not a coincidence that Griffith chooses to present the convent as the sole feasible solution for this unconventional heroine. As previously discussed, these abject women, portrayed in Gothic literature as insane, criminal, or rebellious figures, endeavour to challenge or escape the confines of a patriarchal society, suggesting that confinement or death are preferable alternatives to enduring repression; as in these narratives, achieving a traditional "happy ending" may not be a realistic possibility.

3. UNRAVELLING IRELAND'S GOTHIC TAPESTRY: THE INTRICACIES OF LANDSCAPE, IDENTITY, AND OTHERNESS

Expanding the spectrum of *otherness* in *The History of Lady Barton*, the novel offers one of the most nuanced explorations of Irish geography. Within the narrative framework of *The History of Lady Barton*, Ireland emerges as a compellingly marginal space within the broader construction of the British nation. Ireland and the Celtic fringe overtly represent readily identifiable spatial anomalies. Yet, the liminality depicted in the novel transcends mere geographical peripherality, operating on a more profound cultural and symbolic level. These regions occupy a dual position: they are intricately linked to the broader British identity yet imbued with an essence of *otherness*. This paradoxical nature enables them to serve multiple roles, providing both a refuge from the homogenizing influences of the central British power structure and its prevailing cultural norms, while also evoking a sense of mystery and unfamiliarity –an unsettling *otherness* that establishes a space that results both enticing and potentially menacing depending on the circumstances (see Morin 2018, 123-124).

The History of Lady Barton immediately opens with a conventional Gothic portrayal of wild Celtic scenery through the eyes of its protagonist, Lady Louisa Barton. Recently married to the Irish baronet Sir William Barton, Louisa recounts her adventures to her sister, Fanny Cleveland, as she travels from the familiar comfort

of her English family residence to her new life in Ireland. Upon reaching Holyhead, on the coast of Wales, Louisa encounters a landscape markedly different from anything she has ever seen. She delves into a detailed description of these unfamiliar surroundings, employing explicitly Burkean terms to capture their unsettling power.

> The wilderness, or even horror, of this place, for we have had a perpetual storm, is so strongly contrasted with the mild scenes of Cleveland Hall, or indeed, any other part of England that I have seen, that one would scarce think it possible for a few days journey to transport us into such extremes of the *sublime* and *beautiful* –I am persuaded that all the inhabitants of Wales must be romantic– there never was any place appeared so like *enchanted ground*, and the scenes shift upon you almost as quick as in a pantomime. (Griffith 2018, I 7-8, emphasis mine)

In introducing the novel with a vivid depiction of the Celtic landscape – particularly that of Wales– as an alienating terrain, Griffith appears to underscore and fortify the prevalent cultural and geographical *otherness* traditionally ascribed to these ostensibly "barbaric" lands that permeated this genre thus far. The depiction of the natural scenery in enchanted terms, invoking the specter of supernatural and natural threat, enables the text to establish, as Christina Morin suggests, "an immediate social and geographical distinction" (Morin 2018, 124) between England, and the Celtic fringe, thereby reinforcing its inherent separateness and mystique within the narrative.

As Louisa's journey unfolds, her arrival in Dublin presents a significant juncture in the novel. Having traversed the unfamiliar and enchanted terrain of Wales, she now encounters the core of Ireland. This geographical shift, however, does not signify a departure from the pervasive mystical strangeness that characterized her Welsh experiences. Instead, Dublin appears to echo the same enigmatic nature that infused her previous experience. Following a tumultuous voyage marked by a violent storm that nearly capsized the ship, Louisa finally sets foot upon the shores of Ireland, which she describes as

> a desert island, for it is entirely surrounded by an arm of the sea, and uninhabited by every thing but a few goats, and some fishermen, who are almost as wild as they –It was about four o'clock in the morning, when we arrived at this dismal place, and such a morning, for darkness, rain and wind, I never saw! (Griffith 2018, I 15-16)

While critical analyses of Irish Gothic fiction frequently cite this passage for its exemplification of the portrayal of the Irish landscape within the genre,[3] its

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³ Kilfeather identifies this passage as "the scene of adulterous possibilities and unruly designs" with the impending storm pushing Lord Lucan to confess his love for Louisa, thus sowing the seeds of the ensuing unhappiness to unravel. Kilfeather argues that the storm externalizes Louisa's anxieties –her fear of her husband's jealousy, her own and Lord Lucan's illicit passion, and her trepidation toward the foreign society she is about to enter. Drawing a comparison between Lady Barton and Victor Frankenstein, Kilfeather points out that her introduction to Ireland occurs when the ship is blown off course, symbolically landing her on an isolated part of the northern coast (2014, 6). Similarly, Christina

significance is often downplayed due to the author's Irish origins and established positive treatment of the Irish landscape in a positive light in previous work productions (i.e. see *Amana* IV-V). This tendency prioritizes later, more affirming descriptions within the novel, potentially dismissing this initial portrayal of estrangement as a mere bad "first impression" (Killeen 2014, 6). However, such an approach risks overlooking the potential subversion inherent in an Irish author presenting her homeland as an alienating terrain. The implications of this depiction, in my reading of this passage, are clear: the disruptive portrayal of Ireland from the onset is not accidental. As an Irish author writing in London, Griffith needed to navigate a complex political atmosphere and adhere to conventional traditions that appealed to an English audience. Therefore, whether her motivations were driven by a desire for financial success, producing a work that would be more palatable and marketable to her target readership, or a strategic effort to engage the English readership from the beginning of the narrative, Griffith's alignment with English-minded Gothic conventions is quite telling.

In her initial foray into the Gothic tradition, therefore, Griffith sought to immerse the English reader by utilizing the Irish landscape to evoke a sense of *otherness* and danger. By presenting Ireland in a manner that emphasized the isolation and dislocation, the author catered to the tastes of a foreign readership that found allure in the portrayal of the Irish landscape as mysterious and foreboding. Through the deployment of potent natural imagery –darkness, rain, and wind– the author cultivates a sense of awe-inspiring sublimity, tinged with alienation, satisfying the Romantic fascination with untamed nature and the confrontation with overwhelming forces.

Following this vein, Louisa persists in her bleak depiction of Ireland. One might expect a shift in tone, or perhaps a concession to a more picturesque aspect of the landscape. However, her subsequent statement, referring to the exploration of the island as "gone to reconnoitre la carte du païs, de la terre inconnuë, ou nons etions [*sic*]" (Griffith 2018, I 18) further reinforces the motif of disparity. Scholars such as Kilfeather and Morin have scrutinized this passage for its implications, revealing a portrayal of Ireland and its inhabitants as inherently foreign, aligning them more closely with the Catholic Continent –notably France– than with Protestant England. On one level, the narrator's choice of the French language, a language associated with England's historical rival, according to their analysis, resonates powerfully with the political anxieties surrounding these nations. Throughout centuries of Anglo-Irish relations, a persistent fear haunted the English political consciousness: the spectre of a Franco-Irish alliance, filing English anxieties, dictating foreign policy decisions, and ultimately contributing to a climate of mistrust and suspicion

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Morin characterizes Louisa's initial encounter with the Irish landscape as imbued with a "mystical strangeness," suggesting that Ireland is portrayed as "an intriguingly liminal area of the British nation" (2018, 123-124). Additionally, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, in its fifth volume dedicated to Irish women's writings and traditions, includes this passage as an example of *The History of Lady Barton*'s "very early use of the Gothic possibilities in the Irish landscape" (Deane *et al.* 1991, 797).

permeating English interactions with Ireland. Thus, viewed through the lens of these anxieties, such linguistic choice becomes a potent reflection of and a contribution to the prevailing climate of mistrust between the two countries. Furthermore, by constructing Ireland as "terre inconnue," Griffith reinforces this sense of Ireland's foreign nature and potential threat. Associating Irish and French identities, Griffith is reinforcing the notion of "estrangement between England and Ireland" (Kilfeather 1994, 40), with the English ruling elite perceiving Ireland through a lens of *otherness*. Ireland emerges, thus, a distinct entity, one that did not nearly fit into the English conception of nationhood. Instead, it was seen as an alien land, culturally and religiously divergent from Protestant metropolitan England (see Morin 2018, 123-127; Kilfeather 1994, 38-40).

Extending the concept of *otherness* further, Louisa continues by claiming

> Suppose us now to have walked about a mile and a half, without discovering any object but the sea, which surrounded us, when, to our great delight, we spied land, tho' still divided from us by a gulph we thought impassable. We stood however on the shore, inventing a thousand impracticable schemes to cross this tremendous Hellespont. (Griffith 2018, I 19-20)

Griffith further reinforces the motif of isolation and remoteness associated with Ireland by alluding to the absence of any significant geographical features besides the sea. The emphasis on the gulph as "impassable" emphasizes this sense of seclusion, along with the emphasis on the "thousand impracticable schemes" devised to cross this obstacle, leading the characters "trapped" within the Irish landscape, serving as a way of emphasizing the perceived difficulty and danger of traversing even a small distance within the Irish landscape. Nonetheless, a glimpse of relief and positivity is subtly introduced by Griffith after an Irish gentleman fearlessly swims his horse across to rescue Louisa and her companion. This act initiates a gradual transformation in the heroine's perspective, leading her to reassess her ingrained rejection of Ireland and everything associated with it as she becomes acquainted with its people. Thus, Louisa eventually acknowledges

> From the first notion that you could conceive of our generous hosts, you must believe that we were politely and elegantly entertained; but neither your idea, nor my description can do justice to their hospitality; they have given me the most favourable impressions of this country, on my first entering it. (Griffith 2018, I 23-26)

This perception is, however, swiftly challenged by Sir William, whom Louisa notes is "partial to his native land." He cautions her wife not to expect "a whole nation, of such –fools!," a warning which Louisa quickly dismisses by claiming "heigh, ho! this is my only comment" (Griffith 2018, I 26-27).

Once again, highlighting in just a few pages, the tensions between England and Ireland at the time, Sir William, as an Englishman, embodies the broader English perspective on Ireland, often characterized by a mixture of condescension and dismissal. His advice reflects a recognition of the simplistic and negative generalizations about the Irish that were widespread among the English populace.

Louisa's dismissive response, "heigh, ho" boldly challenges these deeply ingrained stereotypes. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Louisa exhibits a perspective devoid of the pervasive prejudices against the Irish. Her casual dismissal of Sir William's cautionary remark signifies a radical departure from the norm. Despite initially agreeing with and perpetuating such stereotypes, Louisa ultimately illustrates her capacity to perceive the intrinsic goodness in people irrespective of their nationality or the broader political context, serving as a profound critique of the reductionist and monolithic views held by many of her English compatriots.

By framing Louisa's development within the context of Anglo-Irish relations, this interaction, therefore, becomes a microcosm of the larger socio-political dynamics between England and Ireland, with which Griffith was particularly well-acquainted. Through Louisa's journey from prejudice to empathy, the author subtly critiques the colonial mindset that sought to define and dominate Irish identity through simplistic and derogatory stereotypes, that established Irish citizens as inherently inferior. Louisa's transformation, therefore, challenges such reductive views, opening up the possibility of ultimately transcending such ingrained biases that had dominated Anglo-Irish relationship for centuries. Addressing the limitations of the colonial gaze, Sir William's patronizing viewpoint encapsulates the condescension and dismissal characteristic of imperial ideology, which sought to maintain control through a presupposed superiority. However, Louisa's shift towards empathy symbolizes the potential for the dismantling of these oppressive structures.

This perception echoes consistently throughout the novel, underscoring the notion that while Ireland may be portrayed as a mysterious and captivating realm, villainy is not inherent to its landscape. This evolving depiction of Ireland, therefore, invites a reconsideration of how cultural identity is constructed and perceived within the framework of colonial power. Griffith's work stands as a sophisticated exploration of how narratives of *otherness* and exoticism can both reflect and challenge colonial ideologies. In presenting Ireland not merely as a site of colonial conflict but as a space ripe with potential for understanding and empathy, *The History of Lady Barton* pushes readers to engage with a more multifaceted view of Irish identity. Thus, Griffith not only entertains but also provokes a deeper contemplation of the complex interplay between cultural identity, colonialism, and the possibilities for genuine reconciliation. Whether this outcome was a deliberate authorial intention or an unintended consequence of Griffith's own origins and intrinsic admiration for her homeland remains uncertain. What is unequivocal, however, is that Griffith's narrative transcends simplistic categorizations, inviting a rich spectrum of interpretive possibilities within literary criticism. By incorporating a consideration of the environmental and natural spectrum; this narrative challenges existing paradigms and opens avenues for future scholarly exploration, offering a fertile ground for deeper investigations that have yet to be thoroughly examined.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Elizabeth Griffith's *The History of Lady Barton* masterfully navigates the complex interplay between landscape, female agency, and cultural perceptions within the context of Irish Gothic literature. As we have shown, the remarkable journeys of Louisa Barton and Olivia Walter serve as poignant testimony to their unwavering determination to break free from the suffocating constraints of societal norms pervasive in the Gothic narrative. While they may initially appear to embody the archetypal damsels in distress, their fierce determination to defy convention elevates them beyond mere victims, positioning them as active agents in their own narratives. In the broader scope of Gothic literature, heroines frequently find themselves ensnared in circumstances of captivity or persecution, often succumbing passively to their fate. However, what distinguishes Louisa and Olivia's experiences is their proactive resistance against such subjugation. Opting for death or exile over surrender, they subvert the traditional trope of female submission, embodying a courageous defiance that challenges the patriarchal norms of their era. Their resolute choices resonate not only as individual tales of defiance, but as emblematic symbols of the collective struggle endured by women in a society intent on confining them to prescribed roles. By embracing death and seclusion, Louisa and Olivia emerge as beacons of the ongoing fight for women's autonomy, steadfastly refusing to conform to the patriarchal expectations imposed upon them. Their narratives serve as potent reminders that even within the confines of eighteenth-century society, female characters need not be relegated to passive roles or limited solely to furthering male-driven plots. Instead, they manifest as complex, multidimensional figures whose subtle acts of rebellion challenge established gender norms and ardently advocate for women's autonomy.

Moreover, Griffith's depiction of Ireland, as a land suffused with enigmatic beauty and captivating mystique, adds further depth to the thematic exploration and narrative development. The Irish landscape, depicted as a transformative force, mirrors the internal conflicts of the protagonists while subverting established notions of Irish identity and the Gothic genre itself. From the rugged wilderness of Wales to the desolate shores of Ireland, Griffith deftly portrays the liminality of these landscapes, imbuing them with symbolic significance that resonates throughout the narrative. Through Louisa and Olivia's journeys, readers are invited to reevaluate preconceived stereotypes, discovering within the folds of Ireland's landscape a realm teeming with warmth, hospitality, and benevolence. In this way, Griffith challenges prevailing narratives of Irish *otherness*, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of the landscape shaped by its rich history, culture, and the enduring resilience of its people.

In essence, *The History of Lady Barton* transcends the confines of its time, standing as a testimony to Griffith's skill as a storyteller and her keen understanding of the complexities of female agency and Irish cultural identity. Through its compelling narrative and richly drawn characters, the novel provides readers with a window into a realm where women challenge societal norms, finding strength and empowerment amidst the nurturing embrace of the natural world.

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TEARS IN RAIN BY ROSA MONTERO: AN ECOGOTHIC HARDBOILED TRIBUTE TO PHILIP K. DICK'S DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?

Emilio Ramón García
Universidad Católica de Valencia

Abstract

Tears in Rain is set in Madrid in 2109, a large city in a heavily polluted dystopic world which has seen several wars, alien contacts, genetic engineering, teletransportation, pollution and dramatic climate changes due to ecophobia and a limitless appetite for resource exploitation. It is a world in which the management, privatization and monopolization of vital resources by large multinationals have caused scarcity; exacerbating the environmental injustice towards those who contribute least to it. Mixing the SF with the Postmodern EcoGothic and the hard-boiled model, this fictional society is immersed in a civilizational crisis that affects our own conception as subjects. This situation of environmental injustice translates into social tensions and the marginalization of those humans, replicants and aliens who are forced to live in the most degraded areas. These underprivileged marginalized beings serve to renegotiate human identity, but also to ignite fanatical fundamentalisms that define their identity in aggressive opposition to the 'other'. The goal of this article is to explore fear, the dissolution of the self, the construction of peoples as monstruous others, the preoccupation of bodies which are modified and nature as a space of crisis as markers of Postmodern EcoGothic in Rosa Montero's novel.

Keywords: Dystopia, Postmodern EcoGothic, Hard-boiled, Rosa Montero, *Tears in Rain*.

LÁGRIMAS EN LA LLUVIA DE ROSA MONTERO: UN HOMENAJE ECOGÓTICO DE ESTILO HARDBOILED A *¿SUEÑAN LOS ANDROIDES CON OVEJAS ELÉCTRICAS?* DE PHILIP K. DICK

Resumen

Lágrimas en la Lluvia está ambientada en Madrid en 2109, una gran ciudad en un mundo distópico muy contaminado que ha visto guerras, contactos extraterrestres, ingeniería genética, teletransportación, contaminación y cambios climáticos dramáticos debido a la ecofobia y a un apetito ilimitado por la explotación de recursos. Un mundo en el que la monopolización de recursos vitales por parte de grandes multinacionales ha provocado escasez; exacerbando la injusticia hacia quienes menos contribuyen a ella. Mezclando la ciencia ficción con el ecogótico posmoderno y el modelo *hard-boiled*, esta sociedad se encuentra inmersa en una crisis civilizatoria que afecta nuestra propia concepción como sujetos y que se traduce en tensiones sociales y la marginación de aquellos humanos, replicantes y alienígenas que se ven obligados a vivir en las zonas más degradadas. Estos seres desfavorecidos sirven para renegociar la identidad humana, pero también para encender fundamentalismos fanáticos que definen su identidad en oposición agresiva al «otro». El objetivo de este artículo es explorar el miedo a la disolución del yo, la construcción de las personas como otros monstruosos, los cuerpos que se modifican y la naturaleza como espacio de crisis como marcadores del ecogótico posmoderno en la novela de Rosa Montero.

Palabras clave: distopía, ecogótico posmoderno, *hard-boiled*, Rosa Montero, *Lágrimas en la Lluvia*.

I have seen things you people wouldn't believe, attack ships on fire off the of the shoulder of Orion. I watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.

Blade Runner 01.46.24/ *Tears in Rain*, 240

1. INTRODUCTION

Rosa Montero (Madrid, 1951) has had an illustrious career as a journalist and writer. Her work has been acclaimed by critics and the public and she has received prestigious awards such as the Premio Nacional de las Letras Españolas in 2017. Montero has been published in various reputable newspapers and magazines such as *Fotogramas*, *Pueblo*, *Posible* and *Hermano Lobo* and she has collaborated with the Spain's leading newspaper *El País* since 1976, for which she has written over 2,000 literary interviews, as well as countless articles and columns. She has also published articles and opinion columns in various prominent international newspapers. In her journalistic role, Montero consistently denounces human rights violations, racism, war, unbridled capitalism, the loss of public investment, the acuteness of social problems and ecological destruction. She also points out the moral poverty of the political and privileged classes. Regarding citizen and political passivity in the face of climate change, the author expressed her indignation in *El País* at the fact that a football match between Real Madrid and F.C. Barcelona was arousing more interest than the South African climate summit, which took place almost simultaneously but ended with insufficient agreement on minimums (Prádanos 2013, 46).

After making a name for herself as a journalist, Montero arrived on the literary scene at the age of 28 with the publication of her first novel, *Crónica del desamor* (1979), a female-centered testimonial about the Transition. Her fiction, which is filled with many marginal, suffering characters who are always in search of self-knowledge and self-control (Serra-Renobales 2012, 73; Gascón-Vera 2012, 21), has been consistent, prolific and heterogeneous; progressively incorporating a range of (sub)genres into her novelistic production, including the bildungsroman, crime fiction, romance, the historical novel, fantasy, autobiography, autofiction, personal essay and science fiction, among others. Her fiction has been translated into more than twenty languages, including five novels into English, and several of her works have been adapted into films, comic books and art installations.

Tears in Rain is set in Madrid in 2109, a large city in a heavily polluted dystopic world which echoes that of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* In Montero's novel, the world's nations have merged to form the United States of the Earth (USE), a political alliance constituted in the year 2098 in defensive response to the discovery of three extraterrestrial civilizations. Here, replicant (or 'technohuman') detective Bruna Husky is tasked with solving a bizarre and disturbing pattern of crime, whereby some replicants are driven to kill because of the adulterated memories that they have had forcibly implanted. She is hired by Myriam Chi, the leader of a political organization known as the Radical Replicant Movement, after someone sends her a video in which Chi is brutally murdered by a

technohuman. The political leader is convinced that the same person is responsible for other replicant killings, and she wants Bruna to find the culprit. Tensions between humans and replicants are rising. Bruna's investigations lead her to infiltrate the Human Supremacist Party disguised as a woman and she discovers a connection to archivist Yiannis Liberopoulos' concerns about changes being made to official records: someone has been manipulating documents and falsifying information to provoke a revolt against the technohumans. Thanks to their investigative work, we learn that all the incidents are connected as part of a global conspiracy to enforce human superiority over the replicants.

Smith and Hughes define the ecogothic as a genre of fiction that plays with all the stock characteristics of the Gothic whilst focusing on a world that is ravaged by climate change (2013, 9). In consequence, this paper argues that *Tears in Rain* explores the essence of humanity and its fears through a science fiction detective novel that is set in an ecogothic, dystopian world. While Patrick Murphy suggests that ecocriticism and science fiction have the potential to illuminate each other (2009, 373), I contend that the same can be said for ecologically focused crime fiction.

2. MADRID 2109: THE SETTING

The reader learns from the first pages that, during the past century, there have been several wars, alien contacts, improvements in both genetic engineering and teletransportation, and dramatic climate changes and pollution. This context is conveyed, in part, through Bruna's thoughts and comments but, mostly, thanks to the notes of Yiannis Liberopoulos, a historian at the Central Archive, the United States of Earth, Modifiable Version. Furthermore, despite scientific advances, life is basically a struggle for survival. Many people are uncapable of finding a job and are forced to live on the street and clean air is a commodity which must be bought. If not, human citizens are forcibly relocated to a zone where the contaminated air can make them sick. It is a scenario that owes much to Dick's *Androids*, whose action takes place in Los Angeles in 2019, in a world radioactively polluted because of the so-called World War Terminus which devastated the population of Earth and left it nearly uninhabitable. After the war, the United Nations encouraged mass emigrations to off-world colonies to preserve humanity's genetic integrity. Moving away from Earth comes with the incentive of free personal androids: robot servants that are identical to humans.

Yiannis' concerns about someone tampering with official records are shown from the beginning. As a matter of fact, the first article he is editing, "#376244," is labeled "Technohumans/ Keywords: history, social conflicts, Rep War, Moon Pact, discrimination, biotechnology, civil movements, supremacism" (2012, 9). Thanks to this and many other entries, the reader is made aware of key historical developments. We also learn that "The Central Archive, one of the most powerful of the USE institutions, was owned by PPK, a huge private corporation, although the Central Planetary State had full voting rights on its board of management" (2012, 337).

The object of social discrimination are replicants, who are also known as 'reps,' 'technohumans,' and 'technos.' They are humanoid artificial life-forms that were originally created to be a slave race –that is, to carry out those tasks that humans do not want to do, like working under the hardest conditions on a hostile planet or military combat. Montero's replicants have been given rights, but that does not prevent them from being feared by many humans. Nevertheless, they are not the only source of people's anxiety. Three days after the first contact with extraterrestrials, when "an alien spaceship landed on the Chinese sector of the mining colony of Potosí" (2012, 40-1), humans signed the "Human Peace" agreement and, eventually, created the United States of Earth in 2098 (2012, 41). Out of the three known alien species, the Gnés, the Omaás and the Balabís, the most common ones on Earth are the Omaaás because they fled by the thousands from religious wars on their home planet. However, and despite all cultural and good exchanges among species, "The official name for extraterrestrials is Other Beings" (2012, 44).

According to Sainath Suryanarayanani, the choice of Madrid as a location for the novel is not simply because it is Montero's home city. Spain has proven to be one of the most enthusiastic countries about commercializing biotechnologies (2015, 237) and the country's "biotechnology firms are clustered predominantly in the Madrid area and Catalonia" (2015, 238). Madrid is also a major hub of high-level tertiary functions. The most important ones, which relate to the world's economic organization, are executed from the central headquarters of corporations and transnational banks. For that reason, it could be categorized as a "global city," a term coined by Saskia Sassen (2009). For the Dutch American sociologist, "Major cities have become distinct socio-ecological systems with a planetary reach" (2009, n.p.) and, therefore, the source of many environmental changes. It should thus come as no surprise that some sociological studies on globalization note how, among Spaniards, the perception of global warming as a major threat to Spain doubled between 2002 and 2008 (Noya Miranda *et al.* 2010, 284). Madrid is, consequently, an ideal setting for a story based on biotechnology and pollution.

3. GLOBAL WARMING, SLOW VIOLENCE AND THE ENVIROMENTALISM OF THE POOR

In *Tears*, eighteen percent of the planet is overpopulated due to global warming. As the coastal regions went underwater, their inhabitants migrated to higher lands and these massive migrations caused wars in which millions died. This scenario exemplifies Rob Nixon's concept of 'slow violence,' which often has an immediate impact on the world's poorest inhabitants (2013, 2). According to Nixon, slow violence is:

> a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. [All due to] climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes. (2013, 2)

This is exemplified in the novel by the comments of the Nobel Laurate in Medicine, Gorka Marlaska, who says that "Just as a frog placed in water that is gradually being heated is unaware of the problem until it boils to death, so humanity was unaware of the catastrophe until the massive number of deaths became evident" (2012, 193). This is a catastrophe that leaves no country untouched because no single nation can expect to become a winner. As Nixon suggests, "under the current globalization regime, since there are, in every country, significant groups of both winners and losers" (2013, 159).

Following this line of thought, Montero situates Spain as part of the privileged northern hemisphere, a region that is less polluted than the rest of the world. However, she also places emphasis on marginalized groups within the southern European space because, as Alicia Puleo states, ecological damage negatively impacts all life forms, yet the consequences are not evenly distributed (2011, 53-64; 74-81). In *Tears*, people without medical insurance are only be treated by NGO Samaritans, "the only civic association that offers health services to those who have no insurance" (2012, 6). Notwithstanding, due to the overwhelming number of people needing their services, they prioritize humans over nonhumans:

> a practice that wasn't legally acceptable, but it was what happened. And the worst bit, Bruna thought to herself, was that it made sense on one level. When a medical service was overloaded, maybe it was sensible to give priority to those who had a much longer life expectancy-those who weren't condemned to a premature death, like the reps. (2012, 8)

The USE's policies reflect those mentioned by Braidotti, such as "dismantling the welfare state and increasing privatization" (2007, 21), that have dire consequences for most of the population.

Midway through the novel, the reader learns how this critical situation has been reached, whilst connecting it to the responsibility that the past (or our present) has had in triggering it: "Although global warming had already began to melt the polar ice caps in the 20th century and the sea level had been rising progressively for several centuries, it is clear that its devastating impact on society seemed to explode suddenly around 2040" (2012, 193; emphasis in original). As cities and most arable lands were inundated, hundreds of millions of desperate hungry people climbed to ever higher places. But those places were already inhabited and suffering from hunger. As a result, "a blind violence overtook the world, and one massacre followed another for several years" (2012, 194). It is estimated that, "after a decade of conflicts, two billion people, mostly of non-Caucasian origin, had died through famine, disease and direct violence" (2012, 194). For the Ultra-Darwinists, this was "a process of natural selection of benefit to Earth" (2012, 195).

Even in a disastrous scenario like this, large multinationals benefit financially as they "decided to exploit the Submerged Worlds to the maximum. Various sites were established, containing the most iconic of the flooded zones, and their management was auctioned among several leisure and tourism mega-enterprises. To date, about a dozen theme parks have been opened" (2012, 197). Montero's fiction thus echoes the ideas of Vandana Shiva and Simon Estok about a long-term

ecophobia, which instead of promoting real change amidst crises and catastrophes, has, rather, reinforced the neo-capitalist logic that generated them (Estok 2018). In doing so, the multinationals' limitless appetite for resource exploitation, with the help of modern science, provides the ethical and cognitive license to make such exploitation possible, acceptable and desirable (Shiva 1992, xvii). The result is a polluted and waste-filled ecosphere (Sassen 2009, n.p.) that affects daily life. To make things worse, the management, privatization, and monopolization of vital resources by large multinationals have caused scarcity; exacerbating environmental injustice towards those who contribute the least. We can see some examples of this in Tears with the characters' need to buy purified water cards (2012, 54), take steam showers given the very expensive price of water (2012, 313), the ingestion of synthetic foods (2012, 402), the possibility of purchasing an expensive license to eat meat (2012, 55) and the extinction of polar bears "through drowning as the Arctic ice cap melted" (2012, 158). This mass extinction also takes place in Dick's Androids, where the effects of the war induce progressive species death, beginning with birds, then "foxes one morning, badgers the next, until people had stopped reading the perpetual animal obits" (1996, 36).

Amidst this unjust and polluted world, wealthy people go through surgery countless times to avoid looking old; a practice that, for David Huebert, explicitly transforms bodily being into a "'trans' practice" (2015, 252). The privileged spend their time at places like "HUNGRY. The best multi-entertainment center in Madrid. A multipurpose venue to satisfy every conceivable craving. [...] Open 24 hours 365 days of the year" (2012, 212). After all, as Carlo Petrini puts it, "Consumerism is an ideology that pillages and wastes resources, but ultimately fails to satisfy needs" (2010, 43). In addition, Puleo contends that today's narcissism and self-indulgent speciesism lead us to societies in which the only anthropos that really counts is the one who can pay for the products offered, which turns the world into an immense warehouse of raw materials and clone centers of commerce and consumption (2011, 409).

4. AN ECOGOTHIC HARDBOILED STORY: CRIME, FEAR AND THE DISSOLUTION OF THE SELF

4.1. The Hardboiled Model

The hardboiled fiction model that was developed by Dashiell Hammet, Raymond Chandler, Mickey Spillane and Chester Himes, among others, depicts an immoral world in which corruption and excessive violence are rife. The protagonists of such fiction are tough detectives who are accustomed to guns and aggression, and whose actions sometimes resemble those of the criminals that they pursue. Typically, they are lone wolves who do not trust the system and who choose to live by their own rules and moral code (Ramón García 2022). Following this model, Bruna Husky has few savings to draw on and desperately needs to find a client, but times are dire: "The USE had been in permanent financial crisis since Unification, but in recent

times there seemed to be a crisis within the crisis and business everywhere was at a standstill" (2012, 26). This notion is in line with Amaya Orozco's statement that "it is a civilizational crisis, it is a whole way of understanding how we are in the world that is blown up. As a matter of fact, it is a crisis that affects our own conception as subjects" (2010, 132).

Bruna was created in a world "ravaged by climate change" (Ganz 2013, 87) as a combat replicant, which means that she was created "bigger and more athletic than most" (2012, 3). She has better coordination and speed and the ability to "see quite well in the dark" (2012, 63). After serving her required two years in the military, she started to work as a private investigator. Her origins remind us of Dick's androids, which were first invented as "Synthetic Freedom Fighters [for use in World War Terminus, but later] had been modified [to] become the mobile donkey engine of the colonization program" (1996, 16). Given that these replicants were initially created as a product of warfare and designed as replacement soldiers, they seem to reflect a typical scenario of human-created technology. As Christopher Sims explains,

> I say "typical" here because Dick is reflecting the historical truth that many actual technological developments come out of military projects. But after the near destruction of the Earth in World War Terminus in the novel there is a more urgent need to pull together as a species and make new habitats on nearby planets, in order to ensure the survival of humankind: the most advanced technology has to be adapted as a means to this new end. (2009, 69)

Regardless of Montero's protagonist being a replicant and Dick's bounty hunter Rick Deckard being a human who 'retires' replicants, they both show the traits of the hardboiled detective genre. As a matter of fact, Nigel Wheale labels Deckard as a twenty-first-century version of Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe (1999, 300) and, in this sense, Bruna Husky would be a twenty-second century version.

Bruna is a tough, solitary, and independent character who feels miserable and drinks heavily to counteract her loneliness. In her own words, "If there was anything that depressed her more than getting drunk, it was doing so during the day. Alcohol seemed less harmful, less despicable, at night. But starting to drink at midday was pathetic" (2012, 1). Her loneliness is partly due to her lack of social skills, which make relationships difficult, as the narrator informs us: "Bruna was not particularly keen to have dealings with other reps. Although, if truth be told, she didn't mix much with humans either" (2012, 2). Her behavior fits with what Julia Kristeva calls "pseudo-relationships with pseudo-others" (1991, 13) since she is incapable of having acquaintances that satisfy and complete her. Instead, she always maintains a certain distance from the people around her, a typical trait of a hardboiled private investigator (PI).

Notwithstanding, she has one friend, Yiannis Liberopoulos, a government archivist who lost his son, Edú, almost forty-nine years ago and still grieves his loss. Yiannis helped Bruna through a difficult time in the past and they have been close friends ever since. For Bruna, he "was like her father. The non-existent father whom a non-existent murderer had killed when she was nine years old. Nine equally non-existent years" (2012, 31).

She is also on good terms with Oli, a woman of "vast body [and] equally enormous hospitality [who runs a small diner and] never turns up her nose at anyone: techno, alien-usually referred to as bicho- or mutant. It was for this reason that her clientele was varied" (2012, 26). Such a location is commonplace in hardboiled fiction. This is the kind of business in which, unlike many others, billboard-people are allowed: poor and miserable beings who worked for a few gaias and cannot mute or turn off their commercials, which are always on a perpetual loop. For that reason, billboard-people "would spend their day wandering the streets like lost souls, with the publicity slogans blaring in their ears nonstop" (2012, 27). It is worth noting that the name of the currency in *Tears*, gaias, derives from the Greek term for the mother goddess, Gaia, the personification of the Earth. It is also a term used by James Lovelock in *A Final Warning. The Vanishing Face of Gaia*. A scientist concerned with global warming mentioned in Montero's novel Instrucciones para salvar el mundo (2008).

In accord with the hardboiled fiction model (Ramón García 2022), Bruna occasionally reaches out to other people to help her; one of them being Paul Lizard, a police inspector who follows her very closely. Bruna is attracted to him but does not know if she can trust him; especially since he treats her like a suspect throughout most of the novel but also saves her twice from enigmatic assailants. Their relationship is a complex one because, as a PI, her work always depends on a good relationship with law-enforcement agencies. After all, "maintaining her private detective's license was inevitably linked to how well she got on with the police" (2012, 117), a scenario that echoes that of Deckard and the LAPD.

Among this diverse troupe of characters, we also find the former memoirist charged with writing the memoirs of the replicants, Pablo Nopal, who was forced out of the business when he was suspected of killing his rich uncle. Nopal now writes books and is searching for one specific replicant who has the memories he wrote last; one with more –and more vivid– scenes than usual (which are estimated to be 500). Bruna's feelings towards the memoirist, as well as towards the inspector, are never free of suspicion. Her short list of human acquaintances and friends also include Gándara, the forensic MD who works the night shifts and gives her firsthand information about the deceased and their causes of death.

Apart from humans and replicants, there are several other forms of life in *Tears*. The Omaás, for example, have transparent torsos and can read the thoughts of those they have sex with. The members of this species are called bichos, or 'creeps', and both humans and reps try to avoid them. However, Bruna makes friends with one of them, in a development that is typical of crime fiction: she awakens one morning with a drug-and alcohol-induced hangover, horrified to discover an Omaá named Maio in her bed. Bruna initially ignores him, but Maio, seemingly homeless, sits at the door of her building during the day and night. After some time, she invites him to stay with her and together they develop a communicative and mutually beneficial relationship. Eventually, Maio ends up saving her life.

4.2. The Ecogothic

      Andrew Smith and William Hughes state that in Gothic works "nature becomes constituted … as a space of crisis which conceptually creates a point of contact with the ecological" (2013, 3) and this is the scenario in which Bruna works and lives. This is a space that reminds us of the way Margaret Atwood "plays with all the stock characteristics of the Gothic genre, [including scientific and global threats], using the markers of the Gothic to advocate environmental awareness and change" (Ganz 2013, 87-88). In this sense, the environment in *Tears* is a human-modified ecosystem that has destroyed "biodiversity at a rapid pace" (Martínez-Alier 2012, 65). Here, the last polar bear died after swimming for some four or five hundred kilometers and not finding ice. This polar bear was cloned by scientists from secured genetic material and now lives in an aquarium inside a shopping mall. After it dies, a replacement bear clone must be produced from its cells. Its name was Melba (2012, 158). As in Dick's novel, in which most of the scenes involving animals show that, for the humans, such creatures exist as commodities rather than as beings in their own right (Vint 2007, 114), *Tears* presents a world "with diminished diversity and wonders, fewer species, less of the conveniences we currently enjoy" (Estok 2018, 45). This is a world that, according to Vandana Shiva, kills people by the murder of nature "which is today the biggest threat to justice and peace" (1992, 36).

      Following this line of thought, Sherryl Vint contends that humanity has been attacking nature for centuries but, especially, since

> Descartes conceptualized the human self as separate from nature, including the nature of its own body. He also argued strongly for an absolute split between humans and animals, asserting that animals are merely mechanical beings undeserving of our empathy rather than living and feeling creatures like ourselves. (2007, 112)

      According to this order of things, Shiva contends that the scientific revolution transformed nature from terra mater into a machine and a source of raw material whilst removing all ethical and cognitive constraints against its violation and exploitation (1992, xvii). By doing so, humans have been overexploiting Earth's resources and burning fossil fuels as if these actions have no consequence, but this could not be further from the truth. Joan Martinez-Alier states that CO_2 concentration in the atmosphere was about 300 ppm when Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius first conceptualized the enhanced greenhouse effect in 1895 and that, by 2012, it was nearly 400 ppm and increasing 2 ppm each year, mostly as the result from burning fossil fuels (2012, 53-54). Despite this worrying scenario, Nixon explains,

> It is the oil companies that are currently most opposed to taking measures to alleviate the ecological crisis –which they contribute to accelerating– that end up profiting from this crisis [and that's why a company like] BP spent less investing in solar, hydrogen, and wind energy over a six-year period than it did on a two-year advertising campaign to rebrand itself as "Beyond Petroleum." (2013, 268)

      In Puleo's words, the same people who denied that there was climate change now affirm that it is necessary to adapt to it and propose to do business with it

(2011, 10). This is exactly what happens in Montero's novel as those who negate climate change also want to sell people the solution.

In her analysis of Dick's *Androids*, Vint contends that "the novel's anxiety about the unstable boundary between humans and androids can thus best be understood as an expression of anxiety about the distorted life of humans under capitalism, a life alienated from our species being" (2007, 124), a situation that is also the case in *Tears*. This is a world in which, according to Luis Prádanos, global capitalism has appropriated planetary space by degrading it with its excrement. A system that destroys abundant resources to privatize and commercialize them (2013, 56). This is what happens, for instance, with the multimillion-dollar company that sells purified water cards and provides vapor showers (2012, 306) due to the scarcity of water. In this world, the amount of clean air is so scarce that only the middle and higher classes can afford to live in relatively clean zones. The poor are forced to live in hyper-polluted areas with the result that their life spans are reduced by half. If they try to sneak into the clean zones, the tax police detain them straightaway. In this world, there are "lung parks [...] with rows of artificial trees [which] absorbed much more carbon dioxide than genuine trees [and] belonged to Texaco-Repsol" (2012, 59); one of those companies that destroyed the environment and now advertise themselves as the solution. This company makes use of billboard-people like the woman who wears "a horrible uniform in the corporate colors, crowned by a silly little hat [and with] screens on her chest and back [playing] the company's dammed commercials on a perpetual loop" (2012, 27). In Bruna's opinion:

> You either had to be a poor wretch or very unlucky to end up in that line of work; Billboard-people were only allowed to take off their outfits for nine hours a day; [...] they would spend their day wandering the streets like lost souls, [...] In return for such torture they were paid a scant few hundred gaias, although in this case, being Texaco-Repsol, the woman would undoubtedly get free air as well. And that was important, because each day there were more and more people unable to pay the cost of breathable air who would then have to move to one of the planet's contaminated zones. If truth be told, many would kill to have such a lousy job. (2012, 27-28)

This situation of environmental injustice translates into social tensions and the marginalization of those who are forced to live in the most degraded areas as it so happens with those who run "the risk of living clandestinely in Clean Air Zone ... for fear of the undeniable harm pollution caused to children" (2012, 179). They are commonly known as 'moth's because they "illegally abandoned their contaminated cities with permanent gray skies and appeared, just like moths, attracted by the sunlight and the oxygen, only for the vast majority of them to go up in flames, because the tax police were incredibly efficient" (2012, 179). They live in a society that Bruna ironically calls a "magnificent democratic system that poisons children who have no money" (2012, 180). This injustice becomes more unbearable when contrasted with the vision of a rich girl flying with a toy reactor "despite the prohibitive price with which the waste if fuel and the resultant excess pollution were penalized. For what it cost the child to fly an hour, a human adult could cover the cost of two years of clean air" (2012, 117). Another example of environmental injustice is caused by

a reversal of the so-called Arctic oscillation, which "periodically caused brief and unusual waves of extreme cold, with one or two days of heavy snowfalls, howling gales, and plummeting temperatures that in Madrid could easily reach minus four degrees Fahrenheit ... the icy cold always left a trail of victims: the very old, the very sick, the very poor" (2012, 288). Montero's novel thus presents a scenario in which neoliberal logic is taken to its maximum conclusion, as it is not satisfied with exposing the less fortunate –which seem to be the majority– to the most adverse effects of the ecological crisis, but also shows the general public's lack of support and empathy. For the privileged classes, the existence of these human beings, as well as of any other non-profitable being, is a burden, and so their existence becomes diluted amid the toxic clouds of pollution, a postmodern echo of the dark fogs of early Gothic.

4.3. Science

Underprivileged humans, replicants and aliens are marginalized beings. But they are also more able to overcome prejudice and care for one another than those in positions of power. In Val Plumwood's words, "these new 'others' serve to renegotiate human identity, but also to ignite fanatical fundamentalisms that define their identity in aggressive opposition to the 'other'" (2002, 228). In the case of extraterrestrials, all humans could do was to unite in a single country and stop wars among themselves, and in the case of underprivileged humans these were simply ignored. But replicants represent a typical postmodern Gothic trend; "the construction of peoples or individuals as monstrous or 'other' [...] the preoccupation with bodies that are modified" (Spooner 2006, 8). Hence, they are feared.

Shoshannah Ganz reminds us that "the role of science in interfering with or manufacturing life [stirs the] debates about genetic engineering [which have] been a part of Gothic literature from its inception" (2013, 94-95). In *Tears*, science has greatly progressed in the areas related to war and resource extraction by creating replicants that fight and work on unhospitable planets. Capitalism and science seem to be the only things of import in this world, thus, as is the case of other postmodern Gothic works, "human values are no longer defended against religious superstition or belief in the supernatural, as with earlier Gothic literature, but against an absence of any values at all" (Bolton 2014, 4). The only exception to this except final notion is that of the global market-based economy and, as a matter of fact, the reader soon learns that human greed led not only to the devastation of the planet, but also to the creation of monstruous others:

> Given that teleportation eliminated distances and traveling a mile was thus no different from travelling a million miles, Earth's governing bodies became locked in a race to colonize remote planets and exploit their resources. This was referred to as Cosmos Fever and became one of the principal triggers for the Robot Wars, which devastated Earth from 2079 to 2090. (2012, 37-38; emphasis in the original)

Significantly, the consequences of repeated teleportation echo the Franken-stein effect because, after several such journeys, humans experience dangerous

physiological changes such as their "eyes moved to cheeks, defective lungs, hands without fingers, and even skulls lacking brains. This destructive effect of teleportation is referred to as TP disorder, and those individuals afflicted by visible deformities are colloquially known as mutants" (2012, 39; emphasis in the original). Even though it was proven that repeated teleportation inevitably ends up producing organic damage and that the possibility of suffering from a serious TP disorder increases dramatically, some people nevertheless continue to do it in order to earn the money they need. This is, for example, the case of Mirari, a violinist who lost an arm when trying to get the money to buy a Steiner violin and now has a mechanical one (2023, 305).

4.4. Fear

The dissolution of the self, one of the distinctive traits of postmodern Gothic according to Fred Botting (2005, 109), is presented in more than one way in *Tears*. For underprivileged humans, this can mean anything from losing their mental stability to losing an organ, becoming a mutant, or dying. The supremacists, on the other hand, fear the replicants most of all, and the uncertainty of what humans will become and what will be left of human beings after the change. This key premise of this novel indicates what Bolton describes as "the source of dread in the posthuman Gothic" (2014, 3). As Yiannis points out, "Fear induces a hunger for authoritarianism in people. Fear is a really bad advisor. And now look around you, Bruna: everyone's afraid" (2012, 180). In this sense, as David Punter contends, "exploring Gothic is also exploring fear and seeing the various ways in which terror breaks through the surfaces of literature" (1980, 21).

For replicants, the dissolution of the self comes in more than one way because it involves not only their life span but also their memories. The fact that they die after just ten years of Total Techno Tumor (or 'TTT'), is a source of constant angst. TTT is a painful way to die; with tumors growing inside the replicant's body until it collapses. Bruna knows this suffering well because she accompanied her boyfriend, Merlín, during his last excruciating days on Earth. As a constant reminder of her death approaching, the first two lines of the novel say "Bruna awoke with a start and remembered that she was going to die. But not right now" (2012, 1). At this point in her life, Bruna has "four years, three months, and twenty-nine days" (2012, 1) remaining until TTT occurs. Like humans, replicants are mortal, but unlike them, who generally do not know the exact point at which they will die, techohumans await a specific date with great distress. Montero's replicants, like those of Dick's, exist "at the definitional threshold of species plasticity, occupying a nebulous interstice between organism and machine" (Huebert 2015, 252). Despite reps making up fifteen percent of the population, less than one percent of the budget for medical research is spent on the search for a cure to TTT (2012, 50). However, as Bruna observes, the greater discrimination is not that of humans against reps, but that of the powerful against the wretched, whether they are humans or not. As a matter of fact, close to the end of the novel, she learns that some replicants have lived up to

three decades. But scientists do not bother to investigate the TTT because it is not profitable to do so (2023, 455).

Another source of fear about the dissolution of the self comes from the manipulation of memories, and, once more, this is not only a concern for reps. On the one hand, at the level of the global psyche, the multinational company that controls the Archive of USE allows the manipulation of History, whether its owners know it or not, in a way that generates rampant technophobia among humans; a manipulation denounced by Yiannis which costs him his job. In addition, some privileged people pay to have their painful memories extirpated, a practice that can become addictive. On the other hand, replicants are beings who are implanted with artificial memories of their childhood and adolescence to help them integrate better in human society, into which they are born with a physical age of twenty-five. These memories are designed according to "the Law of Artificial Memory of 2101" (2012, 15) and they are unique to each rep. Nevertheless, all technohumans have a memory of being around 14 years old, the 'Revelation Scene' or, as it is popularly known, the "dance of the phantom" (2012, 15). This is the point at which the individual's parents tell him or her that s/he is a technohuman. Society is aware of the ethical and social dilemmas arising from these memories and, therefore, they are studied at universities such as the Complutense in Madrid (2012, 15), but that does not stop them from creating new ones.

Even though Bruna is aware of her memories being entirely false, she cannot see them as anything but her own and, as a result, she continues to struggle with this illusionary past. As she states, "I'm not my memory. Which, moreover, I know is fake. I am my actions and my days" (2012, 75). Notwithstanding the fictional nature of her memories, they are a constant source of fear to her: "It was a dark, childhood terror. A deadly pain. It was the same thing she'd suffered at night as a child, when her fear of things had crawled through the shadows like a slimy monster at the foot of her bed" (2012, 373). In this sense, like with the creature of Victor Frankenstein, Bruna's life is made of fragments that derive from other sources. The horror that Victor experiences at his first sight of the patchwork creation that is his creature echoes that of Hericio, the human supremacist leader, when he says: "the reps are our mistake. In fact, I even pity them, I feel sorry for them, because they are monsters that we humans created. They are children of our arrogance and greed, but that doesn't stop them from being monsters" (2012, 82). This affirmation, once again, reminds us of Spooner's words about the "construction of peoples or individuals as monstrous or 'other' [...] the preoccupation with bodies that are modified" (2006, 8). Replicants thus suffer from speciesism, which Vint, following Singer, defines as "a prejudice or attitude of bias toward the interest of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species [an] attitude [which] must be understood in analogy to sexism and racism" (2007, 113).

5. CONCLUSION

N. Katherine Hayles (1999, 160) suggests that in Philip K. Dick's novel androids are associated with unstable boundaries between the self and the world. They represent the ethical gray zones that have arisen from technological advances and, thus, the fiction in which they exist can be interpreted as cautionary tales about scientific progress. In fact, by the end of Androids, Deckard becomes a different person: his experience with the bounty hunter Phil Resch and the replicant opera singer Luba Luft provokes his greater empathy for humanoid robots and, thus, killing them does not seem so justifiable anymore (Galvan 1997, 426). In Montero's novel, friendship between humans and replicants already exist but anxieties about their relationship derive mostly from people's actions and their consequences. As a result, the androids in *Tears*, like those of Dick, "exist under threat ... of the inability to self-replicate, of species enslavement, of sexual abuse and exploitation, of being highly human-like and yet fundamentally inhuman" (Huebert 2015, 252).

Maria Beville, when defining "Gothic-postmodernism," mentions the frequency with which spectral characters and hellish waste lands feature in such fiction, which causes a gradual but unstoppable deterioration of reality and self (2009, 10). This description is apt for Montero's hyper-polluted, dystopian world that is populated by underprivileged citizens who resemble lost souls. *Tears* features buildings that remind us of the crumbling edifices in the Gothic tradition, such as Nopal's secret hideouts or Yiannis' apartment. However, while these Gothic buildings are crucial to the effect of the novel, outdoor spaces play an equally integral role as they demonstrate a convergence of the human and the natural world which, in this case, is a severely damaged environment. Because of such a location, it is difficult "to maintain the self when the environment which produced that self no longer exists [giving way to] a journey about an eroded sense of the self" (Smith and Hughes 2013, 11).

Similarly to early Gothic works in which the past haunts those in the present, historical assaults on the environment in Montero's futuristic novel continue to disturb those living in the time of *Tears*, an ecogothic space that has become "one mass grave and garbage dump that the survivors must navigate" (Ganz 2013, 99). Montero's text exposes humanity's problematic role as participants in the destruction of life on the planet; a circumstance that forces the reader to question who the monsters in the novel are and what constitutes the monstrous. In this dystopian world, humans and replicants face daily fear: of the dissolution of the self, of dying because of TTT, of pollution, because of water scarcity, or even a fear of becoming a mutant. As a result, Myriam Chi tells Bruna, "we reps and humans are sick beings; we always feel our reality isn't enough. So we consume drugs and give ourselves artificial memories; we want to escape from the confinement of our lives" (2012, 51). *Tears in Rain*, thus, explores to highly dramatic effect the disintegration not just of a specific individual or a specific place, but of life itself.

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"NONE OF THEM KNOWS ABOUT FLOODS OR ANYTHING ABOUT THE RIVERS": MONSTROUS KINSHIPS AND AGENCY IN MICHAEL MCDOWELL'S *THE FLOOD AND THE LEVEE*

Gianluca Calio
University of Frankfurt

Abstract

This paper explores the disruption of the human/non-human binary in Michael McDowell's Blackwater series, focusing on how the character of Elinor Dammert challenges traditional distinctions between humans and environment. Set in the Southern Gothic landscape of Lower Alabama, the analysis scrutinizes Elinor's relationship with the region's fluvial environment, emphasizing her role as a complex, shape-shifting gothic figure. Emerging mysteriously from the river after a flood, Elinor's actions reflect a deep connection with both the human and non-human worlds, as she intervenes against anthropogenic alterations, particularly deforestation and proposed hydrogeological projects. By highlighting Elinor's efforts to disrupt destructive human practices, the paper argues that her character can be seen as attempting to create kinship between humans and the landscape of Perdido, embodying an ecoGothic figure that transcends moral binaries. Elinor's interventions will therefore reveal an alternative form of ecological agency that emphasizes kin-making rather than domination or revenge.

Keywords: New Materialism, Kinship, Agency, Southern Gothic, Hybridity.

"NINGUNO DE ELLOS SABE SOBRE INUNDACIONES O SOBRE RÍOS": PARENTESCOS MONSTRUOSOS Y AGENCIA EN *THE FLOOD AND THE LEVEE* DE MICHAEL MCDOWELL

Resumen

Este artículo explora la interrupción de la oposición binaria humano/no humano en las series *Blackwater* de Michael McDowell, centrándose en cómo el personaje de Elinor Dammert se enfrenta a la distinción tradicional entre seres humanos y medio ambiente. Situado en el paisaje gótico sureño del Bajo Alabama, este análisis examina de cerca la relación de Elinor con el medio ambiente fluvial de la región, haciendo hincapié en su papel como figura gótica compleja con forma cambiante. Emergiendo del río de forma misteriosa tras una inundación, las acciones de Elinor reflejan una conexión profunda tanto con el mundo humano como con el no humano, mientras interviene contra alteraciones antropogénicas, en particular la deforestación y propuestas de proyectos hidrogeológicos. Subrayando los esfuerzos de Elinor de alterar prácticas humanas destructivas, este artículo argumenta que su personaje puede ser contemplado como un intento de crear parentesco entre humanos y el paisaje de Perdido, personificado en figura ecogótica que trasciende binarismos morales. Las intervenciones de Elinor revelarán por tanto una manera alternativa de agencia ecológica que enfatiza la creación de parentesco más que la dominación o la venganza.

Palabras clave: nuevo materialismo, parentesco, agencia, gótico sureño, hibridación.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the introduction of the inaugural issue of the journal *Gothic Nature*, Elizabeth Parker and Michelle Poland assert that "[n]ature has always engendered fear, wonder, and fascination" (2019, 1). Going further, they observe how nature is "consistently constructed in our stories as Other, excessive, unpredictable, disruptive, chaotic, enticing, supernaturally powerful, and, perhaps most disturbingly, *alive*" (1; original emphasis). Through the Gothic lens, nature is perceived as unsettling, transgressive, and never merely a passive component in the ongoing relationship between the individual and the environment. EcoGothic narratives, therefore, appear to disrupt the "habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)" (Bennett 2009, vii), thereby exposing a phenomenon identified by Simon C. Estok as 'ecophobia' –namely, "the contempt and fear we feel for the agency of the natural environment" (2009, 207). New materialist approaches, in some sense, embody a 'gothic' dimension in their advocacy for the dissolution of boundaries between the human and the non-human, as Timothy Morton reminds us by stating that "ecological awareness is also dark-uncanny" (2016, 5).

At the same time, Smith and Hughes seem to be aware that "the Gothic's representation of 'evil' can be used for radical or reactionary ends" (2013, 2). In other words, they acknowledge that the ecoGothic might serve as a framework through which non-human actants, ideally, might be charged with ideological perspectives and specific political orientations. Violent and destructive acts such as heat waves, torrential rainfalls, and flooding can be, therefore, interpreted as nature's means of 'fighting back' and responding to human intervention, particularly within the context of the climate change discourse developed over the last decades. In some ecoGothic narratives, moreover, the binary setting between the human and non-human is further questioned by the presence of specific actants who dissolve the boundaries between species and kin, who are "chthonic" (Haraway 2016, 2) and yet agentic, and ultimately turn into advocates for the environmental protection of an entangled ecosystem. All this happens in Michael McDowell's Southern Gothic saga *Blackwater*, a six-volume series published in 1983 where a small town in the southern regions of Alabama, Perdido, serves as the central stage for a story of hauntings and reflections on the way human activities inevitably alter the landscape. The first two volumes of the saga, *The Flood* and *The Levee,* particularly focus on the planning and subsequent construction of a dam. In the plans of a local engineer, Early Haskew, this project is intended to shield the town of Perdido from occasional river floods in the surrounding area; however, the construction of the levee faces opposition from the enigmatic Elinor Dammert, a schoolteacher mysteriously appearing after a flood of the Perdido and Blackwater rivers (the two streams surrounding the town) who vehemently opposes the anthropogenic resolutions of the town. Her relationship with the swampy Alabama landscape is explained early in the narrative, as Elinor is revealed to be a gothic shapeshifting creature that emerged from the riverbed after the flood with the purpose of marrying into the Caskey clan, the wealthiest family in town and owner of the local sawmill. Settling into the town of Perdido, she begins a process of dissolving intraspecies boundaries that will culminate in the creation

of a new kin that is both human and non-human, thus restructuring the hierarchy that conventionally places humans above other species. While doing so, her hybrid position will allow her to act as an ecological defender of the area's ecosystem, giving significance and representation to the landscape destroyed by anthropic interventions and resorting to violence when necessary.

This article will analyse exemplary sections of Michael McDowell's *The Flood* (1983) and *The Levee* (1983), especially focusing on the hybrid figure of Elinor Dammert and her political crusade against the anthropogenic altering of the landscape of Lower Alabama perpetrated by the citizens of Perdido. I will argue that focusing on Elinor's in-betweenness and monstruosity, using ecoGothic as a framework of reference, can be useful in structuring an argument that reduces the hierarchical power of humans over other vital and non-vital elements of the environment while, at the same time, giving significance and agency to 'dull' matter –in this case, the rivers surrounding the town. To effectively examine the interactions between ecoGothic and agency in the *Blackwater* saga, the article will be divided into two complementary chapters. The first section, departing from an analysis of the Southern Gothic setting of Michael McDowell's texts, will focus on the monstrous figure of Elinor Dammert, a gothic shapeshifting being who reframes the relationships between humans and non-humans and advocates for alternative ways of interactions with the river ecosystem. The second section will instead focus on Elinor's reactionary efforts against the project of deforestation and hydrogeological intervention in Perdido, while also exploring the ways in which ecoGothic literature can articulate environmental agency.

2. SOUTHERN GOTHIC ENTANGLEMENTS AND MONSTROUS KINSHIPS

In a 1985 interview with Douglas E. Winter, Michael McDowell, reminiscing his childhood, immediately draws a connection between the landscape of Alabama, its people, and the Gothic genre: "I grew up in a relatively poor, rural area of the country. I saw a lot of poverty, the likes of which you don't see anymore. And southerners *are* Gothic –there's other word for it. They're warped in an interesting way" (178; original emphasis). As Teresa Goddu explains in her *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*, the Southern states have consistently been subjected to othering throughout their history –particularly in correlation with their Northern neighbours– coming to be represented through Gothic imagery of degradation, transgression, and excess and ultimately "becoming the repository for everything from which the nation wishes to dissociate itself" (1997, 4). As a consequence, Southern narratives have often represented the South as "a dark and dangerous place in a perpetual state of collapse" (Horsley 2022, 14), where boundaries might be easily crossed and representations of authority interrogated.

Transgression stands out as one of the most predominant characteristics of the Gothic. David Punter observes that the genre has served as a framework for authors over the centuries, introducing a multi-layered perspective that challenges the traditional binary notions of good and evil and fosters the exploration of

situations that linger "at the boundary of what is and what is not acceptable, what is to be allowed to come to the warm hearth of society and what is to be consigned to the outer wilderness" (2000, 145). Binary oppositions in Gothic stories are initially reinforced only to be blurred at the opportune moment. Life and death frequently collide into the realm of the uncanny; sanity and madness blend into an intermediate state of uncertainty and vagueness. In these narratives, the threshold between opposing pairs is always a precarious space, whether physical or figurative. Instead of suggesting stability within traditional hierarchical structures, the Gothic evokes a sense of disconcerting uncertainty, anxiety, and a fear of contamination, emphasised by Sugars and Turcotte in their own definition of the characteristics of the genre:

> The Gothic, as a mode, is preoccupied with the fringes, the unspoken, the peripheral, and the cast aside. It is populated with monsters and outcasts, villains and victims, specters and the living dead. The Gothic is often located in a realm of unknown dangers and negotiates both internal and external disquiet. It is a literature of excess and imagination. (2009, xv)

Elizabeth Parker and Michelle Poland, examining Gothic under an ecocritical lens, observe that "[t]he 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*" (2019, 2, original emphasis). The disruption of the last binary pair is a fundamental staple of New Materialism, which, as a matter of fact, is frequently spruced with gothic undertones; Morton's *Dark Ecology*, for example, makes frequent use of the word 'uncanny' to describe the realisation that "[t]hings influence one another such that they become entangled and smear together" (2016, 150) at a point where it is not anymore possible to separate the human from the non-human.

Southern Gothic texts like McDowell's *The Flood* and *The Levee* question anthropocentric views about human superiority over the non-human components of the landscape. Maybe unsurprisingly, the dominating settings of these works are the swamps in Alabama: surrounding the town of Perdido, these places are usually described, in Southern Gothic narratives, as "dangerous, messy, and resistant to the attempts of humans to impose order upon them" (Crow 2017, 145). These marshy areas, in McDowell's saga, are also periodically expanding due to the combined impact of deforestation and water precipitation in the region. The initial image presented to the reader of Perdido is a flood tinged with Gothic implications, as Perdido is rendered as a ghost town wholly submerged in mud and water:

> At dawn on Easter Sunday morning, 1919, the cloudless sky over Perdido, Alabama, was a pale translucent pink not reflected in the black waters that for the past week had entirely flooded the town. The sun, immense and reddish-orange, had risen just above the pine forest on the far side of what had been Baptist Bottom [...]. Now it was only a murky swirl of planks and tree limbs and bloated dead animals. Of downtown Perdido no more was to be seen than the town hall, with its four-faced tower clock, and the second floor of the Osceola Hotel. Only memory might

tell where the courses of the Perdido and Blackwater rivers had lain scarcely a week before. All twelve hundred inhabitants of Perdido had fled to higher ground. The town rotted beneath a wide sheet of stinking, still black water, which only now was beginning to recede. (*TF* 9)[1]

A reader potentially investigating the causes of this flood might easily find an answer in the activities of the three wealthiest families of Perdido, namely the Caskeys, the Turks, and the DeBordenaves, who own all the sawmills and lumberyards of the area. At a certain point, the text explicitly asserts that "lumber comprised the entirety of Perdido's industry" (21), promptly presenting the looming threat of deforestation as the primary catalyst for the abrupt flooding of the rivers surrounding the town. This hypothesis of a direct correlation between urbanisation, deforestation rates, and the escalation of natural phenomena such as minor flooding events has been examined by many scientific studies (Noori et al. 2016; Boggs and Sun 2011; Bradshaw *et al.* 2007). At the same time, if the Gothic signals "the disturbing return of pasts upon presents" (Botting 1996, 1), Keetley and Sivils have noted that the ecoGothic might regard time not only as "familial, social, cultural, and political but [also] *evolutionary*" (2017, 5, original emphasis). Therefore, the rising flood might be perceived as a haunting force that regresses landmasses to a prehistorical age, not only before civilisation but also before the very existence of biological life on dry land. Moreover, water in McDowell's texts is uncanny, as the power of the flood in the *Blackwater* saga resides not only in its destructive force but in the ability to haunt the citizens of Perdido even after the water has been completely drained from the town (*TF* 47-48). Not only has the human presence in Perdido been affected by the rising waters, but also the natural environment: "Flowers, shrubs, and trees had perished by the thousands, and the whole town had to be replanted" (53). The flood, therefore, emerges as a totalising event, a "hyper-object" (Morton 2013) that wreaked havoc on humans, animals, and vegetation, disturbing and crossing boundaries between the human and the non-human in its uncanny and disruptive force. The rising waters of the Blackwater and Perdido rivers, moreover, will also complicate the relationship between biotic and abiotic forces in the story through the introduction of Elinor Dammert, a monstrous figure who decides to leave her home in the riverbed to inhabit human society.

At the beginning of *The Flood*, Elinor is discovered by Oscar Caskey (the man she will eventually marry) and his attendant Bray in a room on the second floor of the Osceola Hotel. She is believed by everyone to have "waited and waited" (*TF* 14) for someone to rescue her, but the first inconsistencies in her story are immediately pointed out by Bray, who questions the plausibility of Elinor surviving the flood without access to water, food, or a proper shelter against the flood's fury (18-20). Her connection with the water of the area is also emphasized by her physical appearance: it

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[1] The initials *TF* refer to the first volume of Michael McDowell's Blackwater saga, *The Flood* (1983), while the letters *TL* will be used later in the article to denote the second volume, *The Levee* (1983).

is mentioned that her hair is a "kind of muddy red, thick, and wound in a loose coil" (14), and the matriarch of the Caskey clan, Mary-Love, comments on it by stating that it "looks like she had it dyed in the Perdido" (33). From the very first moment of her appearance in town, Elinor Dammert revisits the trope of the "foreign stranger in the South" (Yousaf 2016, 122), representing, as perceived by characters like Mary-Love Caskey, a threat to the stability of Southern cultural norms in Alabama. Her association with the colour of the riverbed of the Perdido highlights the ambiguity of her character, who, through her strong connection with water, reinterprets the stereotype of the Southern belle with a gothic twist, associating femininity "with fear, excess and the non-normative" (Donovan-Condron 2016, 340). However, it is soon clear that Elinor is a threat not only to Southern cultural norms but to the notion of humanity itself; in an early scene immediately following the recovery of Elinor from the Osceola Hotel, her monstrous features are briefly glimpsed through the perspective of the minister of the church of Perdido, Annie Bell Driver:

> Though the water was clear and only deep enough to cover the body, it had worked a kind of visual transformation: Miss Elinor's skin seen through that rapidly running water seemed leathery, greenish, tough ... Moreover, even as the preacher stared, a distorting transformation seemed to come over the features of the other woman's submerged face. While before it had been handsome and narrow and fine-featured, now it seemed wide and flat and coarse. The mouth stretched to such an extent that the lips seemed to disappear altogether. The eyes beneath their closed lids grew into large, circular domes. The lids themselves became almost transparent, and the dark slit was set directly across the bulging eyeball like a pen-drawn Equator on a child's globe.
> She wasn't dead.
> The thin, stretched lids over those protuberant domes drew slowly apart and two immense eyes –the size of hen's eggs, Miz Driver thought wildly– stared up through the water and met the gaze of the Hard-Shell preacher. (*TF* 35)

Despite the minister passing out from the shock and eventually concluding that she must have hallucinated, the narrative establishes, through this uncanny turn of events, the fact that Elinor can easily cross the human/non-human binary and turn into a monstrous Gothic creature, *de facto* questioning and queering the alleged hierarchical supremacy of the human over the other elements of the environment. Elinor, the non-human actant stemming from the riverbed, will not settle for staying in the shadows: she will slowly construct a social role in the community and will eventually marry Oscar Caskey, the young heir to the Caskey lumber business, who promptly falls in love with her and, despite the objections of his mother, Mary Love, eventually becomes her husband.

As just mentioned, Elinor immediately questions the alleged supremacy of humans over other constituents of the environment. Due to her non-human upbringing, she possesses a certain degree of local knowledge which defies anthropocentric views. In another scene of *The Flood*, Oscar Caskey sees her walking by the river banks, planting acorns, looking particularly confident in the fact they will very soon grow into big and sturdy oaks:

"I've got acorns," she said.

"You planting them?" Oscar asked incredulously. "Nobody plants acorns. Where'd you get 'em?"

"River washed 'em down," Elinor replied with a smile. "Mr. Oscar, you want to help me?"

"Acorns aren't gone do anything here, Miss Elinor. Look at this yard. What do you see here? Do you see sand, sand, and no grass? That's what I see. I think you are wasting your time planting acorns." (48)

It is interesting to note Oscar's pragmatic stance when discussing trees, as he dismisses any suggestion that Elinor might have more knowledge than he does about the riverbanks. However, the citizens of Perdido are eventually astounded by the "daily growth" (63) of the oaks, reaching "twenty feet high and a foot around" (114) in less than a year. Of course, such rapid growth defies natural processes, yet it aligns with Elinor's uncanny nature, which is specular to Oscar's pragmatism. While Oscar, being the possessor of one of the three major sawmills of the area, believes in his own knowledge of the Perdido ecosystem –displaying an anthropocentric view that sees humans as having direct control over the swamp's ecosystem– Elinor shows him that some entanglements between the environment and its forms of life are, in fact, unpredictable.

In *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway suggests introducing the term 'Chthulucene' as an alternative to the more well-known and prominent Anthropocene and Capitalocene. Haraway explains that she prefers this term because "unlike the dominant dramas of Anthropocene and Capitalocene discourse, human beings are not the only important actors in the Chthulucene" and that "the order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story" (2016, 55). Chthulucene is a "needed third story ... for staying with the trouble" (55), which, for Haraway, means acknowledging the entanglements and interconnections that the "chthonic ones" experience on planet Earth without the constraints of hierarchical structures or predefined orders. For this reason, Haraway advocates that we "make kin, not babies" (103) to explore the mechanisms of entanglement that bind all biotic and abiotic entities within the environment.

The Chthulucene is a kind of Gothic concept, as the chthonic ones inhabiting it are described as "replete with tentacles, feelers, digits, cords, whiptails, spider legs, and very unruly hair" (2); it is therefore suitable to describe the character of Elinor, whose monstruosity is often highlighted by the text. However, it is also possible to note that the motivations driving Elinor to leave the riverbank next to Perdido are in fact dictated by her desire to advocate for both people and the environment, seeking to establish connections between the people of Perdido and the nature surrounding them. Furthermore, alongside this cosmic motivation, there is a much more intimate and personal one; Elinor herself is searching for kin and wants to establish a connection with the people of Perdido, "making kin as oddkin" (2) and troubling the human genealogy of the Caskey family with an interspecies union. "All my family are dead" (*TF* 105), Elinor explains as Mary-Love, Oscar's mother, at

first refuses to be involved in their upcoming wedding: while it is possible to assume that Elinor refers to once-living relatives, it is equally plausible to consider that she is referring to the abiotic components that make up the ecosystem of the river swamp. Indeed, when Elinor gives birth to her second daughter, Frances, in a chapter titled "The Baptism," she ventures alone with the newborn in her arms into the mists of Perdido, prepared to 'baptise' her daughter in the waters of the river. A servant, Zeddie, noticing her from the window, promptly follows her at the river's banks:

> Zaddie caught the child –or at least thought she caught it. Reaching down into the water, she had scooped up something. It felt very little like a baby! It was so slippery and unsoft, yet rubbery –a fishlike thing– that she very nearly let it go again. Zaddie shuddered with repulsion for whatever it was that she held in her hands, but she raised it up above the surface. She saw that she had caught hold of something black and vile, with a neckless head attached directly to a thick body. A stubby tail that was almost as thick as the body twitched convulsively, and the thing was covered with river slime. In the air it struggled to get away, to return to its element. But Zaddie held it tight, closing her fingers into its disgusting flesh. From its fishy mouth emerged a stream of foamy water, and the thrashing tail smacked against Zaddie's forearms; dull, bulging eyes shone up into her face.
> Elinor's hand closed over Zaddie's shoulder.
> The girl stiffened, and looked around.
> "You see," said Elinor, "my baby's fine."
> In Zaddie's arms lay Frances Caskey, naked and limp, with Perdido river water dripping slowly from her elbows and feet. (*TL* 26)

The infant is thus baptized in the river, which Elinor treats as "vibrant matter," a member of her kin who could therefore never "hurt [her] little girl" (25). Therefore, the dual nature of Elinor's daughter, Frances, is established by the narrative, as the new member of the Caskey family is, in fact, the result of an intraspecies entanglement that complicates the idea of 'human species' and enriches it with Gothic undertones. Frances will, as an adult, exhibit an almost morbid attachment to the Perdido River, leading her to choose to leave the Caskeys and live in the river from which her mother emerged years earlier. Frances thus embraces the monstrosity within her by rejecting the anthropocentric implications that her position within the Caskey clan would require. By choosing to live in the river, she demonstrates her readiness for «making oddkin» and becoming a creature of the Chthulucene.

3. ECOPHOBIA AND AGENCY IN THE CHTHULUCENE

In the introduction of *EcoGothic*, Smith and Hughes observe that the Gothic has consistently been preoccupied with "radical or reactionary ends" (2013, 2), particularly in terms of political orientations. This aligns with its polarising nature and transgressive tendency to challenge boundaries, as noted by Catherine Lanone, who rightly states that ecoGothic narratives often employ radical strategies "in order to shock capitalist logic into changing while there may still be time" (2013, 28).

EcoGothic, therefore, seems to give equal agency to biotic and abiotic, human and non-human components of the environment alike. While Bennett, in *Vibrant Matter*, has observed that "[t]he political goal of a vital materialism is not the perfect equality of actants, but a polity with more channels of communication between members" (2010, 104), Blazan states that "[h]aunting can also be understood as an expression of the agency and vibrancy of Nature" (4), making a convincing argument that explores the role of the ecoGothic in shaping the agentic qualities of the environment:

> Given their planetary staging, the forces of the Anthropocene are seldom directly perceptible on a human scale, an intangibility expressed in such neologisms and new theories as hyperobjects, heliotrope, planetarity, Gaia, or Great Acceleration versus Slow Violence, to name only a few. These new concepts seek to do justice to a globalized world that advances with –or possibly without– the human in transformative ways that resist representation. As a mode that has traditionally sought to express what cannot be rationalized, the gothic mode and the related horror genre are uniquely positioned to address such unfathomable forces. (3)

The *Blackwater* Saga employs the imagery of the flood in order to cast a haunting presence over the anthropogenic project of landscape modification carried out by the three wealthiest families of Perdido through deforestation and the construction of a levee. As the central element characterising the stereotypical Southern setting of the swamp (or *bayou*), water becomes, in the two examined texts, a component of a threatening landscape imbued with connotations of danger and ambiguity, able to retaliate violently with totalising events like floods but also pretty circumscribed occurrences like occasional drownings. Water itself, in *Blackwater*, is a Gothic element: the citizens of Perdido fear the river and look at the flood as an impending threat that could manifest itself at any moment. Dreading the agency of the marshy landscape of the area, they come to manifest that feeling of "ecophobia" that, according to Simon C. Estok, is

> a uniquely human psychological condition that prompts antipathy toward nature. [...] This antagonism, in which humans sometimes view nature as an opponent, can be expressed toward natural physical geographies (mountains, windswept plains), animals (snakes, spiders, bears), extreme meteorological events (Shakespearean tempests, hurricanes in New Orleans, typhoons), bodily processes and products (microbes, bodily odors, menstruation, defecation), and biotic land-, air-, and seascapes (every creeping thing that creepeth, every swarming thing that swarms, partings of –and beasts from– the sea). The ecophobic condition exists on a spectrum and can embody fear, contempt, indifference, or lack of mindfulness (or some combination of these) toward the natural environment. (2018, 1)

Citizens of Perdido also observe rainfall with apprehension. Although no other floods threaten the town's stability until the end of the last volume of the saga, it is said that heavy rain is a persistent meteorological phenomenon characterising the early months of the year in the area and occasionally causing damage to properties and vegetation. Water, therefore, keeps a violent and ambiguous connotation throughout the six volumes of the saga, often connected to a dimension of ecohorror that seems

to hint at the possibility that nature is effectively fighting back against humans and their anthropogenic intervention in the transformation of the landscape. Much of this fear for the agency of water is, moreover, vehiculated through the character of Elinor. Similar to how the flood ravaged the town, beginning with Baptist Bottom –the poorest neighbourhood mainly inhabited by black residents– Elinor's aquatic form reveals her agency through the murder of those accustomed to living on the margins of the town and, figuratively speaking, of society. In this specific instance, the first victim of the Perdido waters after the 1919 flood is Buster, one of the children from Baptist Bottom who one night follows Elinor and, once discovered, is first drawn into the water and then devoured by the woman:

> The thing ... grabbed him. Buster's arms were pinned to his sides with such force that the bones splintered inside them. His breath was squeezed out until none was left, and he braced for the coarse black tongue that would lick out his eyeballs. Unable to refrain, he opened his eyes, but so far beneath the surface he could see nothing at all. Then he felt a thick heavy coarseness press over his nose and mouth. As it licked up toward his eyes, Buster Sapp slipped into a blackness that was deeper and darker and more merciful than the cold Perdido. (*TF* 66)

As a resident of Baptist Bottom, the most exposed area of the town, Buster serves as a symbolic representation of the fact that natural disasters resulting from human interventions always tend to affect the most helpless segments of the population first. Water, and by implication Elinor, functions therefore in the *Blackwater* Saga as an ecoGothic uncanny force that manifests "the fear we feel for the agency of the natural environment" (Estok 2009, 207).

While the citizens of Perdido regard water with fear and, for the same reason they express their appreciation for the levee project, finding in the technological advancement a sense of protection against the unpredictability of nature. When Early Haskew arrives in town, aiming at modifying the landscape of Perdido with the construction of the levee, everyone seems favourable to the initiative, and Mary-Love Caskey, in her ongoing conflict with Elinor Dammert, decides to host the engineer for his entire stay in town, publicly affirming the Caskeys' favourable stance towards the project. This decision is particularly opposed by Elinor, who demonstrates her disagreement with the massive project in numerous conversations with her husband Oscar and her housemaid Zaddie:

> "You know what that man wants to do? He wants to dam up the rivers. He wants to build levees all around this town to keep the rivers from flooding."
> "Miss El'nor, we don't want no more floods," said Zaddie cautiously. "Do we?"
> "There aren't going to be any more floods," said Elinor emphatically. [...] "None of them knows about floods or anything about the rivers, Zaddie. You'd think they'd have learned something, wouldn't you, living so long around here, where every time they look out the window they see the Perdido flowing by, where every time they go to work or go to the store they have to cross a bridge and see the water flowing under it, where they catch their fish for supper on Saturday night, where their oldest children get baptized, and where their youngest children drown. You'd think they'd know something by now, wouldn't you, Zaddie?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Zaddie quietly, but Miss Elinor did not even turn around to look at the black girl.

"They don't though," said Elinor bitterly. "They don't know anything. They're going to hire *that man* to build levees, they're going to pretend that the rivers aren't there anymore." (*TL* 20-21, original emphasis)

It is, therefore, revealed that Elinor harbours a fear of her own, namely the possibility that the citizens of Perdido might start overlooking the presence of the rivers as well as their vital role in the local ecosystem. Moreover, she emphasises a seemingly evident fact from her perspective: human beings remain oblivious to the causes of the flood that ravaged Perdido because they fail to recognise any causality between their landscape-altering activities, such as deforestation, and nature's retaliatory response. If Elinor demonstrates an understanding of the entanglements and multiple connections between living beings and the environment, she simultaneously critiques the inability of humans to relinquish anthropocentric hierarchies when conceptualising their surroundings. She reproaches this form of blindness to her now husband, Oscar, in a conversation regarding his approval of the Haskew's project on the construction of the levee:

"But, Elinor, I have got to say…"
"Say what?"
"That I am gone be supporting Mr. Haskew in his work. I think there's gone be another flood sooner or later, and I think the levees are gone have to be built. I know you don't like it, but I have got to do all I can to protect this town and the mills."
"All right, Oscar," said Elinor with surprising calmness. "You have started to see some things correctly, but you don't see everything right yet. The time will come when you will learn the error of your ways…" (*TL* 26-27)

Her words promise a vengeful take on the town of Perdido, represented in this case by Oscar and its inability to observe the interconnection between the construction of the levee and the alteration of the natural landscape of Lower Alabama. Revenge, after all, is a Gothic thing: when asked about the recurring motif of revenge in his works, Michael McDowell explained that "in books, you can make revenge work, because you can focus life to the extent that somebody can formulate and carry out revenge" (1985, 183). This observation finds resonance in the actions of Elinor Dammert throughout *The Flood* and *The Levee*, where her motivations appear rooted in a sentiment of ecological kinship that remains constant throughout the entire story. When Genevieve, the wife of one of the Caskeys, proposes the idea that "was to alter the entire future and aspect of Perdido" (*TF* 109) –namely, the construction of the levee to protect the town from future floods– Elinor expresses her disapproval, considering the downsides of separating the life of the town from that of the river. However, it is only when Genevieve beats her own daughter, Grace, one of the Caskey children who has connected with Elinor the most, that Elinor decides the woman needs to disappear. In an uncanny scene set on the road to leave Perdido, the car on which the woman is driving is reached by a single cloud evoked by Elinor that starts "suddenly to pour out rain, as if it were a sponge and God had wrung it" (124). The effect of the torrential rainwater hits the car with appalling violence:

The Packard itself had now driven into the cloud's stormy venue. Never had the passengers of the car seen so great a downpour in so small an area. The water beat against the roof so loudly that they were deafened. Rain gushed through the windows in sheets and instantly soaked Bray and Zaddie and Genevieve to the skin. It poured so heavily against the windscreen that their vision of the road ahead was completely obscured. In an instant all their senses had been occluded by rain: they saw, heard, tasted, felt, and smelled nothing else. (124)

The heavy rain, making it impossible to see the street, leads to an incident involving a truck transporting long pines from the sawmills of Perdido. As one of the pines shatters the windshield, it tragically causes the death of Genevieve, piercing "through her right eye and out the back of her skull" (125). In this way, water is depicted as aligning with the ecohorror trope of "nature's revenge" (Dang *et al.* 2022, 116) by haunting and ultimately causing the death of the woman responsible for suggesting the construction of a levee in Perdido. However, it is also relevant to note that Elinor acts in defence of her kin, which is represented equally by the river's ecosystem and the Caskey family. Her hybridity is therefore here further highlighted, as well as her transgressive and in-between role which defies anthropocentric human/nature binaries.

Despite Elinor's efforts to prevent the construction of the levee, the project proposed by Early Haskew will be approved, and the construction will begin right near the Caskey house. Curiously, however, Elinor's attitude towards the levee will gradually change, especially after hearing the numerous pleas from those who fear the river's flooding. According to the woman, the levee is completely useless; however, she realizes that it provides a certain sense of security for the citizens of Perdido, allowing them to co-exist next to the river in harmony and freed from the constant fear of catastrophic flooding. In a sudden twist of events, Elinor therefore accepts the construction of the levee: this process of hydrogeological assessment might play a significant role in changing the citizens' perception of the river from a mortal enemy to a fellow actant in the environmental entanglement of Perdido. The banks of the Perdido River become therefore a liminal space where human and non-human forces interact and both sides demand a sacrifice to set off a gothic, queer alliance. But if the human side demands the construction of the levee, the abiotic and yet agentic side requests a sacrifice too, namely the atrocious slaughtering of a child with a mental disability, John Robert, perpetrated by Elinor in an act of *realpolitik* against the rival DeBordenave clan:

> When John Robert stopped, instinctively knowing that he ought to go no farther, Miss Elinor's grip on his arms became suddenly tight and painful. He could no longer move either his arms or his body, so tight was Miss Elinor's hold. He twisted his head around and looked up at her in meek protest.
> But it wasn't Miss Elinor's face that returned his gaze. He couldn't see much of it because the moon was hidden directly behind that head, but John Robert could see that it was very flat and very wide and that two large bulbous eyes, glimmering and greenish, protruded from it. It stank of rank water and rotted vegetation and Perdido mud. The hands on John Robert's arms were no longer Miss Elinor's hands. They were much larger, and hadn't fingers or skin at all...

The last thing that John Robert DeBordenave perceived was the slight whistle of wind in his ears and a light breath of wind across his face as all that was left of him, his trunk and head, were picked up and hurled through the air. He turned and twisted, and saw his own blood streaming from the holes in his body, gleaming in thousands of black droplets in the moonlight. (*TL* 125-126, 127)

Symbolically speaking, Elinor, the 'Chthonic one,' is negotiating the fragile future of the entire ecosystem of the zone through the construction of a dam. Making kin in the Chthulucene, as Haraway suggests, means accepting that 'we are humus, not Homo, not anthropos; we are compost, not posthuman' (2016, 55). As in the case of John Robert's murder, whose body will be hidden beneath one of the cornerstones of the levee, literally decomposing and becoming one with the earth, Elinor restructures the hierarchical landscape so that the human and non-human can merge within the new configuration of Perdido's landscape. Moreover, the political consequences of this gruesome murder will thus soon be explained in the narrative, as both the Turks and especially the DeBordenaves –plagued by the debts derived by 1919 in one case and the loss of the heir of the clan in the other– decide to sell their sawmills and acres of land to the Caskey clan. At the end of *The Levee*, consequently, Elinor expresses her satisfaction in noticing that Oscar "is going to own *all* the mills along the river" and "have a whole *shoebox* full of land deeds" (*TL* 137, original emphasis). While this might sound at first like a reinstatement of the hierarchical superiority of human beings over the environmental components of the landscape, things might not be more different, as a new system of maintenance of the forests will be from that moment onwards applied to the entire ecosystem of Lower Alabama –a system of "selective cutting and intensive replanting" with the ultimate goal of "plant[ing] more trees than [Oscar] cut down" (139).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored how Elinor's in-betweenness and monstruosity in Michael McDowell's *The Flood* and *The Levee*, when analysed through the lens of ecoGothic, can help structure an argument that challenges the hierarchical dominance of humans over other vital and non-vital elements of the environment. Simultaneously, it has demonstrated how this ecoGothic approach grants significance and agency to 'dull' matter –in this case, water and the rivers surrounding the town. Using New Materialism and EcoGothic as a framework, it has been hypothesized that speculative fiction can help in restructuring traditional human/non-human and biotic/abiotic binary structures, fostering new models of intraspecies kinship while simultaneously acknowledging the 'vibrant' materiality of the environment. This hypothesis has indeed proven to be correct, effectively paving the way for further studies that can deepen the study of environmental and material agency in speculative fiction and particularly within the ecoGothic.

As a significant portion of this paper has focused on the disruption of traditional binary structures in the conceptualisation of the environment, the idea

that the *Blackwater* Saga might be a narrative of ecological revenge which relies on the conventional trope of the struggle between man and nature may seem somewhat oversimplified at this point. In particular, through the hybrid characterisation of the character of Elinor, it has been consistently shown that both *The Flood* and *The Levee* suggest a redefinition of hierarchies that aligns human beings to the other environmental constituents, establishing new forms of kinship defying the human/non-human structure. "Chthonic ones" like Elinor Dammert, according to Donna Haraway, "are monsters in the best sense; they demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters", while "also demonstrat[ing] and perform[ing] consequences" (2019, 2). The Chthulucene becomes in McDowell's saga, therefore, a scenario where biotic and abiotic matters alike act as agentic forces in the shaping of the environment and its characteristics, in a transgressive ecoGothic framework that complicates traditional understandings of interaction between life and matter.

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AN ECOGOTHIC READING OF SEA MONSTERS:
DEEP BLUE SEA (1999) AND *THE MEG* (2018)

Irene Sanz Alonso
Universidad de Alcalá

Abstract

Even though our planet is mostly covered by water, seas and oceans are still considered inhospitable environments where the force of nature can be appreciated in all its splendor. It is perhaps this unconquerable character that makes humans perceive marine ecosystems with a mixture of awe and horror, feelings which may be increased if we think of the unknown creatures that populate the depths of the ocean. This article will look at two films which portray both the wonders and horrors of nautical landscapes, *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) and *The Meg* (2018), and it will do so by using an ecogothic approach. The analysis will focus on why these movies could be catalogued as ecogothic by observing on their settings, their characters and their plot development. It will also analyze how humans relate to the marine ecosystem and to the creatures that inhabit it, particularly with different forms of sharks, including their ancestor, the megalodon, emphasizing how these relationships tend to be portrayed as a fight for control. Furthermore, the representation of these nonhuman animals' agency will also be considered with the aim of raising awareness about the dangers of humans' attempts to control and manipulate nature.

Keywords: Ecogothic, Sharks, *Deep Blue Sea*, *The Meg*.

UNA LECTURA ECOGÓTICA SOBRE MONSTRUOS MARINOS:
DEEP BLUE SEA (1999) AND *THE MEG* (2018)

Resumen

Aunque nuestro planeta está cubierto principalmente por agua, los mares y los océanos se consideran aún entornos inhóspitos en los que la fuerza de la naturaleza puede apreciarse en todo su esplendor. Es quizá este carácter inconquistable el que hace que los humanos perciban los ecosistemas marinos con una mezcla de admiración y horror, unos sentimientos que pueden verse acrecentados si pensamos en las criaturas desconocidas que habitan en las profundidades del océano. Este artículo explora dos películas que retratan tanto las maravillas como los horrores de los paisajes náuticos, *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) y *Megalodón* (2018), y lo hace desde un enfoque ecogótico. El análisis se centrará en por qué estas películas pueden catalogarse como ecogóticas observando ambientaciones, personajes y el desarrollo del argumento. También se analizará cómo los humanos se relacionan con los entornos marinos y con sus habitantes, especialmente con los tiburones, y su antepasado el megalodón, poniendo énfasis en cómo estas relaciones tienden a ser una lucha por el control. Además, la agencia de estos animales no-humanos también se tendrá en cuenta de cara a promover cierta concienciación sobre los peligros que suponen los intentos del ser humano por controlar y manipular la naturaleza.

Palabras clave: ecogótico, tiburones, *Deep Blue Sea*, *Megalodón*.

1. INTRODUCTION

With an approximate seventy percent of the surface of the Earth being covered by water, we can probably argue that the oceans and seas still conceal many secrets not yet discovered by humans. Besides, whenever we think about the ocean we do so with a mixture of awe and fear, or as Sidney I. Dobrin comments, "we cast the ocean as the wildest nature, the untamable, the unpredictable" while also "as a place of salvation" (2021, 1). These mixed feelings exist because, despite our historical coexistence and our attempts to conquer the sea –or at least to use it for our benefit, there is still much we do not know about it, and everything unknown provokes concern. If we embark on analyzing the mixture of admiration and horror that the sea provokes in us it is necessary to explore the concept of ecophobia. Developed by Simon Estok in several works, including *The Ecophobia Hypothesis,* ecophobia is defined as "a uniquely human psychological condition that prompts antipathy toward nature ... It is a phobia that has largely derived from modernity's irrational fear of nature and hence has created an antagonism between humans and their environments" (2018, 1). When enumerating the different aspects of nature humans may feel ecophobic about, Estok includes different types of elements, from geographical to animal ones, including bodily processes and products and seascapes, and he does so quoting phrases from the Bible so as to indicate that ecophobia has always existed (2018, 1). Regarding modern societies, as Michelle Poland asserts, ecophobia lies at the core of capitalism because for this system to exist, it is necessary to perceive the non-human world in terms of control and oppression, a situation that has led to the concept of the Anthropocene, "a new geological epoch caused by the impact of human activities on the planet" (2024, 114). Although criticized by some scholars when first postulated, Estok's definition of ecophobia entails the acknowledgement of this fear and disdain towards the natural world and adopts a more environmentalist approach towards the natural world. In other words, by becoming aware of our ecophobia we can overcome it and embrace nature with respect rather than with contempt.

As we have seen, Estok's definition of ecophobia is concerned with the fear of nature and as he explores in several of his works, it is a uniquely human feeling. Considering this concept, we can highlight another term that has been recently coined and which also contributes to examine the fear and contempt that the natural world may produce in us, and that is the ecogothic: "In its broadest sense, the ecogothic is a literary mode at the intersection of environmental writing and the gothic, and it typically presupposes some kind of ecocritical lens" (Estok 2018, 1). As Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils argue, by "[a]dopting a specifically *gothic* ecocritical lens" an ecogothic approach allows for an analysis of "the fear, anxiety and dread" that humans feel towards nature, that is, "it orients us ... to the more disturbing and unsettling aspects of our interactions with nonhuman ecologies" (2018, 1). Therefore, as Keetly and Silvis comment, considering the definitions of ecophobia and the ecogothic we can see how both intersect "not only because ecophobic representations of nature will be infused, like the gothic, with fear and dread but also because ecophobia is born out of the failure of humans to control their lives and their world" (2018, 3).

Therefore, and as Hillard points out, it is surprising that ecocriticism has generally ignored those representations of nature "inflected with fear, horror, loathing, or disgust", an idea that he relates to Estok's concept of ecophobia in his article "Gothic Nature Revisited: Reflections on the Gothic of Ecocriticism" (Hillard 2009, 688). Actually, it remarkable that Gothic ecocriticism is such a recent approach since, as Hillard argues, "ecocriticism itself has always been a Gothic story" (2019, 22) because of its "awareness of crisis and danger" (2019, 23).[1]

Michelle Poland also comments on the potential of the ecogothic by focusing on how it can help us "examine our troubling relationships with the nonhuman world, particularly our fears *of* and *for* our earthly home" (Dang 2022, 117 emphasis in original). Besides, there is another reason why ecocriticism and the Gothic interplay in an interesting way and that is related to what lies at the core of the latter, which is a mixture of "fear *and* desire" (Dang 2022, 116 emphasis in original). Regarding this, Elizabeth Parker argues that when dealing with the ecogothic, "binaries ... may twist at any moment" since "something is alluring and inviting, but it's also terrifying at the same time" (Dang 2022, 116). Therefore, the ecogothic both conveys the fear towards nature and the fear for a natural world that human actions have endangered, while also finding fascination in the frightening creatures that the deep sea may harbor, and thus exploring fictional works through an ecogothic lens may be the way to learn about what aspects of the nonhuman world scare us and how we can learn to overcome that feeling in order to embrace a more hopeful vision of our ecological future.

As commented before, Estok explores what seems to be a total fascination with that side of nature that frightens us, the unexpected natural catastrophe against which humans have little to do but trying to survive. To this respect, Tom Hillard refers to Estok's work and how he analyzes the way we humans are captivated by images from natural disasters around the world –he mentions hurricane Katrina or global warming– and the way "our media daily writes nature as a hostile opponent who is responding angrily to our incursions and actions, an opponent to be feared and, with any luck, controlled" (2009, 687). Hillard emphasises real news to point out the raising number of examples in the popular culture that portray nature as a cruel entity (Hillard 2009, 687). He mentions *Twister* (1996) and *Volcano* (1997), among others, and includes more recent examples such as *Open Water* (2003). I would also add many of the low budget productions of the company The Asylum which include *San Andreas Quake* (2015), or *Apocalypse of Ice* (2020), or the popular *Sharknado* series (2013-2018). In fact, among the many products of the company, there seems to be a special interest on sea monsters with examples such as *2-Headed Shark Attack* (2012) and its sequels, *Bermuda Tentacles* (2014), or *Megalodon* (2018)

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[1] Despite its relatively short trajectory, it is important to highlight the vast number of recent publications focused on the ecogothic; see, for instance, Hillard (2009) and Keetley & and Sivils (2018), or the journal *Gothic Nature: New Directions in Ecohorror and the EcoGothic* (2019). This evolution of the ecogothic, including the volume this article belongs to, proves that the interest in the field is nothing but growing.

and its two sequels. The abundance of movies of this type proves the interest we have in what Hillard calls "the hostile and deadly aspects of the otherwise nurturing image of 'Mother Nature'" (2009, 688).

These movies show that we look at the darkest side of nature with both fear and fascination, and this is a mixture of feelings that has populated much of the cultural products labeled as Gothic. As Hillard comments, using a Gothic lens enables us to understand the way in which movies of this type represent "fears and anxieties about the natural world" (2009, 689) and perhaps, in some cases, analyze the environmental message they conceal. Considering everything exposed above, the aim of this article is to explore the Gothic elements present in the movies *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) and *The Meg* (2018). The analysis will focus on why these movies could be catalogued as ecogothic by focusing on their settings, their characters and their plot development. It will also analyze how humans relate to the marine ecosystem and to the creatures that inhabit it, particularly with different forms of sharks, including their ancestor, the megalodon, emphasizing how these relationships tend to be portrayed as a fight for control. Furthermore, the representation of these non-human animals' agency will also be considered with the aim of raising awareness about the dangers of humans' attempts to control and manipulate nature and the nonhuman creatures we share this planet with. Both films show how humans' attempts to master nature and to manipulate it without considering the consequences of their actions result in catastrophic situations that then they have to resolve. Ironically, at the end once balance is reinstated the human protagonists emerge as saviors of the very same problems they have provoked, although some of the characters die in the process as a way of atonement.

2. INTO THE DEEP BLUE VASTNESS

If we think about our fears regarding the future of our civilization and of the nonhuman world, one of the first elements that comes to our minds is water. Being the substance that covers most of the surface of the Earth –and a resource without which life could not exist– we may be surprised by how relatively little critical attention marine ecosystems have received. In this sense Hester Blum, when talking about oceanic studies, defends "that the sea should become central to critical conversations about global movements, relations, and histories" (2013, 151). She proposes that the sea should not only been conceived in terms of a thematic focus or "organizing metaphor with which to widen a landlocked critical prospect" but that it should be understood as a "new epistemology ... for thinking about surfaces, depths, and the extra-terrestrial dimensions of planetary resources and relations" (Blum 2013, 151). As the sea has always been part of human history, it is then not surprising to assert that "The ocean has lapped at the margins of the critical courses that literary, historical, and cultural studies have shaped in recent decades" (Blum 2013, 151). However, Blum posits that the oceans should be analyzed as a realm of "cultural exchange ... on its own terms" going beyond "the seas' function as a passage for travel" (2013, 153).

The ocean as such seems to have been excluded from critical analysis in general, and this situation has been no different if we talk about Gothic studies. In this sense, Natalie Deam comments that "Gothic studies have rarely considered the marine world and almost entirely overlooked the Gothic potential of marine biology" (2020, 260). Although we may wonder how the ocean can be related to the Gothic, she highlights that Gothic elements such as "the threats of sublime and desolate horizons, haunted ruins, confinement, suffocation, and the supernatural all have long traditions within the literatures of the sea" (Deam 2020, 257). In a similar way, Emily Alder highlights that the "intersections between the Gothic and the sea are so visible that the main question is why they are so rarely examined" (2017, 1). In order to support her view she points out several elements typical of aquatic narratives that can be clearly related to traditional Gothic imagery:

> Ships can be isolating, claustrophobic structures; ocean depths conceal monsters, secrets, bodies; the sea and its weather provide storms, sunsets, and remote locales for sublime and terrifying experiences; deep water is a useful metaphor for the interiority of the self; the ocean's precarious surface interfaces between life and death, chaos and order, self and other. (Alder 2017, 1)

We can see several characteristics that prove that even though the Gothic has not been usually related to cultural productions focused on the sea, maritime settings present features that we can extrapolate to Gothic works.

In her defense of the marine Gothic Deam continues explaining that since the ocean is considered "a massive receptacle of the earth's primitive history", literature and other cultural products started to portray what kind of monsters may be hidden "in the depths, allowing a Gothic evolutionary imagination to flourish" (Deam 2020, 260). Actually, when we think of marine ecosystems it is precisely the depths which usually become the most frightening area as they are mostly unknown (and unconquered) territory. Although human expeditions into the ocean tend to avoid the complex infrastructure surrounding deep immersions –we may remember the catastrophe of the OceanGate's submersible Titan when trying to reach the Titanic wreckage– any experience related to the ocean makes us aware of our insignificance when compared to the immensity of the sea. Moreover, this insignificance is emphasized when we consider how humans need to adapt to life at sea, "an unstable medium that has depth as well as breadth" (Packham and Punter 2017, 17).

Nevertheless, if the immensity of the ocean is not enough to make us humans feel small and horrified, he numerous scientific and fictional accounts of frightening sea creatures lurking in the depths throw us overboard: "The ocean environment offers tremendous potential for monstrosity" (Costantini 2017, 99). Because of the wild forces of nature operating at sea and the dangerous creatures –whether fictional or real– that inhabit the deep blue sea, marine ecosystems awaken "the vulnerability of the human condition in an environment controlled by primeval forces" (Costantini 2017, 101). The deep ocean may harbor unknown monsters that escape human understanding and thus "challenge notions of anthropocentricity" (Alder 2017, 12). One of these sea creatures that have populated literature an

audiovisual media proving human readers and spectators their insignificance is the shark. Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), based on Peter Benchley's eponymous novel, terrorized generations with its realistic portrayal of a great white shark that decides to attack swimmers in Amity Island's waters. In the following decades numerous productions offered similar accounts of different types of sharks attacking humans without any apparent reason to do so. One of the things that make sharks so frightening is precisely their ability to make us feel inferior, to make us "a possible prey species for animals occupying higher trophic levels" (Giblett ctd. in Fuchs 2020, 108). In the following pages the analysis of two productions of this type, *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) and *The Meg* (2018) will be performed through the lens of the ecogothic.

3. *DEEP BLUE SEA* AND *THE MEG*

Released in 1999 under the direction of Renny Harlin, *Deep Blue Sea* portrays a group of people –including scientists, a shark expert, and a cook– at an underwater base. Their research, for which they need funding from a pharmaceutical company, focuses on how a protein found in sharks' brains can help mitigate the effects of Alzheimer's disease. Although everything seems to be under control and the experiments seem to go as planned, it soon transpires that some of the scientists have ignored ethical limits and have been forcing their research on some shark specimens with devastating consequences. The consequences of human actions on the marine ecosystem are also the central theme in Jon Turteltaub's *The Meg* (2018), based on the 1997 novel *Meg: A Novel of Deep Terror*, by Steve Alten.[2] In this film, because a human expedition has trespassed a thermocline, two specimens of megalodon –although for most of the movie the protagonists think there is only one– start attacking humans at open sea so the plot revolves around hunting down these creatures. Separated by almost twenty years, both films explore how sharks – or sharks' ancestors– are affected by human actions and how humans have to kill these creatures so that balance is restored to how it was before the events in the films. Despite their differences, both audiovisual products contain similar elements that can be analyzed from an ecogothic point of view, such as the constant feeling that something awful is going to happen, the settings where the action takes place and the monstruous creatures themselves.

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[2] Although the movie title only featured *The Meg,* the novel title *Meg: A Novel of Deep Terror* includes the adjective deep both as a modifier of terror but also with a reference to the terrifying depths of the ocean. Just as in *Deep Blue Sea,* the titles invoke the fear of the depth, of unknown and dangerous territory.

3.1. Gothic Settings

When asked about her idea of the Gothic, Michelle Poland, one of the editors of the journal *Gothic Nature*, comments that to her the term evokes "castles, convents, tunnels, hallways, various wildernesses, mountains, the sublime" (Dang 2022, 116). In fact, much Gothic literature and audiovisual productions usually feature dark and semi-abandoned places with a certain sense of claustrophobia, as well as sublime landscapes unconquered by men and full of secrets where things are not what they seem at first sight. Thinking about claustrophobia at sea we can easily imagine isolated platforms in the middle of the sea, but also the suffocating space of underwater facilities that utterly depend on electricity –which in horror films stops to work at some point. Thus, Mariaconcetta Costantini explores the discomfort that usually implies a life at sea, highlighting that, "Despite continuous advancements in nautical technology, the sea literature of the last three centuries abounds in representations of the potential powerlessness and anguish of an embarked life" (2017, 102). Life at sea can be perceived as a contradiction as the sea usually entails freedom whilst being oppressive at the same time as it is impossible to survive at open sea without some kind of vessel. Similarly, ships enable people to travel across the ocean, but as a ship "is both a means of transport and a prison" (Costantini 2017, 102) as one cannot abandon it easily because of being in the middle of the ocean. Alder also emphasizes the contradictory nature of ships as she describes them as "are liminal spaces, between life and death, inside and outside" (2017, 4). Actually, in *Deep Blue Sea* when the character played by Samuel L. Jackson first arrives by helicopter in the marine facility –which used to be a base used by the US navy– his first thought is that its appearance is that of a prison: "Looks like Alcatraz floats" (Harlin 1999, at 00:06:49-51).

Most of the movie *Deep Blue Sea* takes place in this modernized underwater base that looks like a prison. It includes laboratories and scientific devices that have probably cost a large amount of money as they are highly specialized. Despite the high tech machines, we get an anxious feeling of claustrophobia and powerlessness, as despite all the money spent on the facilities, the base ends up becoming a mortal trap –something spectators may anticipate from similar films of the action/terror genre such as *Aliens* (1986). This setting also makes spectators think of the vulnerability of human beings, as when scientists are working in a laboratory and one of the genetically modified sharks destroys the glass of a huge window that separates the facility from the depths of the sea. The sense of isolation is emphasized by the fact that there is a storm approaching so that helicopters cannot evacuate the base, which means the protagonists are completely trapped once the attack of the sharks provoke the base to be flooded. The inundation of the facility implies that sharks can move around it and not just at open sea, so the protagonists –and the spectators by identifying with them– become the prey of a superior creature.

This sense of helplessness can also be perceived in *The Meg* as we can see some high tech submarines become mortal traps when attacked by the megalodons. In the opening scene of the film, a rescue team lead by the protagonist, Jonas, arrives in a nuclear submarine that has been attacked by some unknown creature. As spectators

we see nothing, and we have only the character's word –which is taken as imagination by the other characters– that a huge sea monster has attacked the submarine. The scene may result suffocating as time is running out and the submarine is inevitably being destroyed, forcing Jonas to make a difficult decision: to sacrifice part of his team so that not everyone dies as a completely successful rescue is unfeasible. Later on in the movie, when the first scientific submarine goes through the thermocline and encounters a whole new ecosystem, this feeling of powerlessness appears once again. The audience observes the dark sea floor and then something hits the small submarine, and it is not until some minutes later than we can actually get a glimpse of the megalodon, but the vehicle is already damaged and its occupants need to be rescued in a matter of minutes.

Therefore, although the marine facilities in both movies are presented as modern and with state of the art technology, at some points they become deadly traps. This is more evident in *Deep Blue Sea*, as the base gets flooded and once electricity stops working everything is dark with a hostile weather outside. Although these settings have nothing to do with castles, abbeys and other buildings portrayed in traditional Gothic works, the atmosphere of fear and foreboding in the spectator is quite similar. We can see how the characters feel trapped in metallic and plastic facilities that become sort of prisons as they are in the middle of the sea, surrounded by a mass of water that harbors unknown dangers. These man-made bases, submarines and ships become thus asphyxiating spaces that turn against the humans that built them, as it happens with abbeys and castels in Gothic lietature. The fear that these places provoke is further enhanced by the presence of shark-like creatures that make humans vulnerable and disposable, a feeling that is already present as even if these facilities are destroyed, their wrecks will remain at the floor of the sea while human bodies will be eaten and disappear in time. We can also interpret the destruction of these human underwater infrastructures as an attempt of the sea to recover its control by erasing any human trace, proving that humanity is temporary while oceans remain a constant presence.

3.2. Sea Monsters

Apart from the constant tension in the movies, partially motivated by the settings the action takes place in, the presence of the sea monsters is probably the most prominent Gothic element. In the case of *Deep Blue Sea* sharks are portrayed as evil creatures from the beginning, when we see a shark attacking a yacht. Afterwards, when the investor arrives at the base he comments: "Beneath its glassy surface... a world of gliding monsters. It's pretty scary stuff, huh?" (Harlin 1999, 00:10:48-50). This way of referring to the sharks, together with the opening scene, already sets the tone of the movie regarding the sea creatures as they are considered monsters rather than non-human animals. This monstrosity comes from the inability to classify them as sharks anymore. We progressively see how these sharks do not behave as regular specimens and then we discover, after the confession of one of the scientists, that they have been altering their forebrains' to five times their size so that they produce

more of the protein the scientists will need to cure Alzheimer's disease. Although the experiment is successful, the sharks start attacking the base and in the end all the results of the research disappear, as if by some kind of poetic justice nature restores the original balance. The most interesting aspect of the sharks portrayed in the movie is that, as a consequence of the growth of the sharks' brains, they become more intelligent and their behavioral patterns start to change, as when they attack regular sharks, start to hunt in groups or when they show they can swim backwards.

Apart from the two main scientists[3] that ignored ethical considerations when altering the sharks' forebrains –echoing the mad scientist of Gothic fiction, who thinks that can alter the natural order of things and manipulate nature without consequences– the rest of the characters in the movie condemn the experiments as they think that even if the purpose was a good one, the scientists should not have defied the natural law. For example, the shark specialist criticizes the scientists' actions by telling them: "You've taken God's oldest killing machine and given it will and desire. You've knocked us to the bottom of the goddamn food chain" (Harlin 1999, at 00:48:00-02). This statement is interesting because his words do not take into consideration the wellbeing of the sharks or how they may cope with their new brain functions, but he focuses on how the experiment may have lethal consequences for humans as they stop being the main predator to become the sharks' prey. Besides, as an expert in sharks he should be aware that sharks are not killing machines but lifeforms that have evolved to become predators in their habitat –a habitat that humans invade for its resources. This is quite an anthropocentric response, and sharks are just seen as objects without thinking about how the alterations may affect them or how this new type of shark can have catastrophic consequences for their habitat as their behaviral patterns have been altered. Another character, the main investor, offers a more critical view on the scientists' behavior when he seems to imply humans are evil by nature: "Nature can be lethal. But it doesn't hold a candle to man," as showing some ethical awareness towards the experiments performed in the base.

As an indirect effect of the monstrosity of these modified sharks, these creatures are also attributed some kind of agency, probably because of the development in their intelligence levels. This is fore example illustrated when they are able to recognize weapons, as one of the characters points out, and when they somehow disconnect the cameras so that the workers in the base cannot see what they are doing. Therefore, because of the enlargement of the sharks' forebrains the modified specimens are not only capable of producing more protein, but their ability to reason allows them to make decisions. This way these sharks become the apex predator in the film as they are not only (presumably) as intelligent as humans, but they can also survive underwater, while humans cannot on their own. For example, in one of the most striking scenes in the movie we see how the sharks manage to grab the stretcher

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[3] It would be interesting to explore the figure of the mad scientist in *Deep Blue Sea*, as we can find many examples of mad scientist in Gothic works, where once the scientist plays God –as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*– decides to abandon its creation and/or not take any responsibility for their actions.

where the hurt scientist lies and take it underwater to throw it against the glass wall of one of the laboratories, provoking its shattering and thus the facility to become flooded. Although we may think sharks are taking their revenge on the staff at the base –as one of the characters says referring to the main scientist: "She screwed with the sharks and now the sharks are screwing with us" (Harlin 1999, at 00:48:40-44)– there is a moment when one of the characters observes that everything sharks are doing is with the aim of becoming free and swim into the ocean: "That's the answer to the riddle, because that is what an 8000lb mako thinks about, about freedom, about the deep blue sea" (Harlin 1999, at 01:26:12-16). Nevertheless, these sharks' behavior, as when they provoke humans by using the harmed scientist as a tool to flood the base, proves their intelligence and their ability to reason. This enhanced intelligence seems to include a degree of wickedness thus making spectators wonder if these sharks show human traits such as gratuitous violence and a desire to cause harm as a revenge. On the other hand we may allege that the only reason why these sharks attack humans is because these humans represent the only impediment to their complete freedom. If the scientists and other members of the base staff die, then the sharks will be free to move around, no more constrained to the base and no more subjected to experiments.

By implying that these sharks are intelligent and able to reason they are being attributed some kind of agency, as usually reason is only associated with humans. This is an interesting movement as it places the modified sharks in a kind of limbo as they are no longer non-human animals as such since their decisions are not made by instinct but rather by what seems some sort of "rational –and thus exclusively human– deliberation" (Alaimo 2010, 143). In fact, Stacy Alaimo points out that precisely the lack of agency that has traditionally been ascribed to the more-than-human world has justified the exploitation of natural resources because non-human animals and the environment have been seen as passive entities at the mercy of human interests (2010, 143). In the film *Deep Blue Sea* we see how the sharks use the intelligence they have been granted to plan their escape from the marine facility, attacking any human they encounter. Besides, by creating intelligent sharks, the spectators' anguish increases as "it combines the uncertainty inherent in all maritime adventures with the fears raised by predators emerging from unfathomable depths" (Costantini 2017, 103). These sharks are not only lurking in the dark depths of the ocean –even though they are limited by the base perimeter– but they are aware of their situation and we can see in the film how their main purpose is to escape the base and become free. As spectators we may wonder if these sharks would end up taking revenge on humans by using their intelligence to hunt them down, or if they would just live free in the middle of the ocean, as ordinary sharks do.

In *The Meg* we encounter different marine species, but the one which plays a protagonist role is the megalodon. As commented above, the first time the megalodon appears is just as an unknown entity attacking a submarine, we do not realize which type of specimen it is until some scenes later. When the creature actually appears in its habitat attacking one of the mini submarines, Suyin, the female protagonist and expert on marine biology exclaims her surprise at finding that megalodons still exist, even if it is only in this new submarine world. This first real encounter with

the megalodon proves that Jonas was not wrong when at the beginning of the film he defended that there was a giant creature attacking the submarine his team was rescuing:

> [Suyin:] My God! It's a shark. It's like 20, 25 meters.
> [Jonas:] It's a megalodon.
> [Suyin:] Impossible.
> [Jonas:] I'm so glad I'm not crazy. (Turteltaub 2018, 00:32:53-33:08)[4]

Although megalodons are believed to be extinct by trespassing the thermocline the human protagonists have temporarily altered the temperature of the ecosystem so two megalodons have found a way to travel from their submarine realm to our ocean, with the danger that entails. From an ecogothic perspective we could say that by trespassing the thermocline humans have opened the door to another world, a world of unknown monsters that destabilize our reality. The megalodon can be truly described as a sea monster as its size is huge and that makes it a horrifying sight: "Between 70 and 90 feet. 21 to 27 meters. The megalodon was the largest shark that ever existed. It feared nothing. It had no predators" (Turteltaub 2018, 00:40:20-29). Although it is impossible to ascertain if the megalodon "feared nothing," as fear is part of the survival instinct, the fact that it had no predators implies that humans should be afraid because –as it happens in *Deep Blue Sea*– the megalodon occupies the top position in the food chain.

The monstrosity of the megalodon is reinforced throughout the movie as when Suyin's daughter says: "There's a monster and it's watching us" (Turteltaub 2018, 00:45:20-23), after she sees something lurking in the depths of the sea. There is another scene that portrays the megalodon as a cruel monster and that is when it kills a female whale and its offspring. At the beginning of the movie, we can see a whale and its calf approaching one of the base's glass walls and the marine biologist even jokes about her special relationship with whales: "I might have lured them with some whale songs" (Turteltaub 2018, 00:07:10-13). She even refers to the whales by human names and spectators can perceive their bond, as sometimes it seems they can communicate with her. However, the whales meet a tragic ending, being eaten by the megalodon, thus making spectators feel special hatred towards it. In a way, this is a very simple contrast because the megalodon killing the whales is probably just a question of survival as the whales mean food, but the fact that we are first exposed to them in such a moving way reinforces the meg's cruelty and voracious appetite and

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4 At the beginning of the film the submariner Jonas is described as having suffered pressure-induced psychosis by some characters because of his affirmation that there had been a sea monster attacking the nuclear submarine his team was asked to rescue. This portrayal as a mad man may remind spectators of that of police offer in the film *Jaws* (1975), when no one believes him when he says there is a shark attacking Amity Island. Another similar example, also in the context of horror-science fiction movies would be the protagonist in *Aliens* (1986) when she warns the Weyland-Yutani Corporation about the existence of the aliens in a planet where they have established a colony.

thus its portrayal as a monster, instead of simply acknowledging its predatory nature. This is interesting as the only reason why the megalodon is there, and thus ends up eating the whales, is precisely humans' interference by trespassing the thermocline. Besides, by establishing this contrast between whales and the megalodon we perceive how some non-human animals are better considered than others. In the case of this film we see how the whales are portrayed as closer to humans –perhaps because both species are mammals– and there even seems to exist some form of communication between them. However, the megalodon –which is not a mammal but a fish– is presented as detached from the human world, as part of another place –or time– from where only monsters come. This situates the megalodon as a monster coming from another world, following the Gothic tradition, but at the same time proves that there is still inequality regarding how other-than-human species are perceived by humans.

Even though most of the film consists of humans hunting the megalodon to prevent it from approaching populated shores, there is an interesting event when they are looking for the sea creature and the protagonists find the rests of what used to be a ship together with human limbs and dead sharks without their fins. They assume the megalodon attacked the shark poachers as if it actually knew what it was doing, as a kind of revenge against humans killing sharks: "Looks like the meg evened the score" (Turteltaub 2018, 00:48:09-12). Including this scene is interesting because it does not only make most spectators feel momentary sympathy towards the megalodon, but also because it implies the meg is able to reason to some point, attributing some sort of agency to it.

If we analyze the behavior of the human characters regarding the newfound marine ecosystem and the megalodon we can find two different sides. Although most of them show respect towards nature and a certain non-anthropocentric understanding of the natural world, there is another group of characters driven by capitalism and thinking of nature as a resource to be exploited. For example, after trespassing the thermocline we can see a new marine habitat, a new and unknown world at a glance while hidden from us which awakens in the characters the mixture of fear and desire of Gothic fiction: "This ecosystem is completely cut off from the rest of the ocean by the freezing cold thermocline. We should find all sorts of species completely unknown to science" (Turteltaub 2018, 00:12:28-37). While we can see in these words what seems to be a sincere scientific interest, another character, the wealthy man who has paid for the facilities, interprets the discovery in a different way: "Sounds like a good investment" (Turteltaub 2018, 00:12:38-40). Thus, instead of thinking of the fascination towards an unknown world in Gothic terms, he seems to think only of the profits he may make after the discovery of a new underwater world, of its exploitation in economic terms. This capitalistic approach is later on reinforced when, after discovering the megalodon, he wants to take advantage and start taking action, whereas the scientists think that it is better to proceed cautiously. The protagonist, Jonas, who based on his experience seems to know that the sea cannot be controlled, seems especially angered at the idea and says: "You ever think that Mother Nature might know what she's doing? The thermocline might just be there for a reason?" (Turteltaub 2018, 00:42:15-23). These words are interesting from an ecocritical perspective as they presuppose that nature has some kind of

agency that allows for ecosystems to function correctly. Besides, it seems to imply that the thermocline exists to avoid the contamination between two different worlds that coexist in the same place, and so the film consists mainly of re-establishing the original balance, which is in the end achieved by killing the megalodon.

Even though we can see how the sharks from *Deep Blue Sea* and the megalodon from *The Meg* are portrayed as sea monsters, both movies also imply a warning message regarding the dangers of manipulating nature in any of its forms. In *The Meg*, for example, the character that has paid for the base and who insists on hunting the megalodon for possible profits celebrates they survive an attack from the creature saying: "That was a serious man vs. nature moment. I'm just glad things went our way" (Turteltaub 2018, 01:04:27-32). This is interesting as we can see how he is clearly detaching himself for nature, as if we humans were not part of the environment. However, another character answers him back referring to one of the members of the team that had previously died: "It didn't go our way. Not for Toshi. And not for science. We did what people always do. Discover and then destroy" (Turteltaub 2018, 1:04:34-44). I think this statement –which echoes one from *Deep Blue Sea* reflecting on human's inability to not alter the balance of nature– illustrates the general tone of the movie, the idea that human actions may have unforeseeable consequences for the ecosystem and for humans themselves. Both in this movie and in *Deep Blue Sea* some characters highlight the dangers of playing with nature, emphasizing how humans seem to be corrupted by nature. Interestingly enough, in both movies the characters that show disrespect for the environment and for non-human animals end up being killed by the sea monsters, but the sea monsters also die at the end because their survival would have devastating consequences, and the balance needs to be reinstated. As in many Gothic works, at the end the natural order is re-established once the monster is killed or the mystery is solved, but in this case the endings are significant as the monsters –genetically modifed sharks and megalodons– appear because of human actions. Just as with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the creators do not take responsibility for their creations.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, *Deep Blue Sea* and *The Meg* offer an interesting depiction of the marine ecosystem approached from a mixture of science fiction and horror. They are not the only examples of narratives that explore the anxiety derived from being lost at sea and/or attacked by sea creatures, but what they highlight is that these sea monsters are human creations, whether through genetic modification or as a consequence of manipulating the ecosystem. Together with the sea monsters the movies show other features typically associated with the Gothic genre, as suffocating and darks spaces –in this case submarine vehicles and bases instead of castles or ancient monasteries– and a constant tension and sense of foreboding. However, these works go beyond this Gothic characterization and incorporate what we may interpret as an ecocritical warning regarding the dangers of manipulating and trying to control the natural world. This ecological message serves to prove that human

exceptionalism is an invention of anthropocentric thought as in these movies we see how humans struggle to survive against creatures that are either huge and strong –as the megalodon– or dangerous and intelligent –as the sharks in *Deep Blue Sea.* This is for example illustrated in one of the final scenes in *Deep Blue Sea* when the female scientist that has modified the sharks wants to kill the last specimen and says: "She may be the smartest animal in the world... but she's still just an animal." This way of thinking is highly speciesist as the marine biologist should be able to notice the similarities between human and non-human animals, but she still sees the sharks as detached from her, as opposed to the whales in *The Meg*, or to other sea creatures such as dolphins, and this attitude can be related to Estok's ecophobia, which sanctions the objectification of non-human animals through our hyper-separation from the natural world. Following Estok's arguments regarding ecophobia, we can see that it may be produced by nature's agency, since it is discomforting to exploit something that we may refer in agentic terms, and this is perhaps the reason why some non-human animals are better considered than others, because their agency suits us and does not make us feel uncomfortable. However, when we talk about hyper-intelligent sharks and megalodons, we see our status challenged and we can justify their extinction as they are threatening predators with humans as their prey.

Both films seem to imply that nature cannot be tamed or mastered, and that human actions "continually fray into unforeseen consequences" (Keetley and Sivils 2018, 3) that affect both humans and the non-human world. Besides, the sea monsters may be interpreted as a warning against certain attitudes that are portrayed in the movies at different moments, and which characterize most of the western world: "capitalistic greed, mass consumerism, imperialism, and anthropogenic environmental degradation" (Costantini 2017, 102). The sea monsters' existence is precisely provoked by human's attempts to do a greater good –either finding a cure for Alzheimer's disease or discovering the world beyond the thermocline– but then humans end up threatened by their own "creations." If we read this message in ecocritical terms, these more-than-sharks embody environmental degradation and prove that that our lives are interconnected with the lives of those that surround us. The oceans illustrate our general feelings towards the environment, a mixture of fear and awe towards the unknown, because the deep blue sea still remains unexplored territory.

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MISCELLANY

FROM IBSEN TO RAY: TRANSCULTURAL ADAPTATION AND FILM AUTHORSHIP IN *GANASHATRU* (*AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE* 1989)

Shyam Sundar Pal & Ananya Ghoshal
Indian Institute of Technology Indore, India

Abstract

Satyajit Ray's *Ganashatru* (*An Enemy of the People* 1989) marks the first part of *the final trilogy*, with the subsequent two parts being *Shakha Prashaka* (*Branches of the Tree* 1990), and *Agantuk* (*The Stranger* 1991). Ray's last three films are notable for their strong use of language against the prevailing state of corruption and decadence in society. *Ganashatru* shows how Dr. Ashoke Gupta, a medical practitioner in Chandipur, an imaginary town in West Bengal, fights against the town's corrupt officials to decontaminate the temple's holy water, spreading jaundice and other water-borne diseases. Enriching the oeuvre of Ray's filmic adaptations, *Ganashatru* is an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People* (1882). Since the source text is adapted from another culture, the paper identifies *Ganashatru* as a "transcultural adaptation," borrowing the term from Linda Hutcheon. A theoretical analysis of film authorship is presented in this paper. Ray's three critically important aspects of film authorship are explored next –his inclination to adapt classic texts, his casting of a familiar set of actors, and the establishing of his protagonist's resistance to corruption.

Keywords: Satyajit Ray, Henrik Ibsen, *Ganashatru*, Transcultural Adaptation, Film Authorship, Resistance, Corruption.

DE IBSEN A RAY: ADAPTACIÓN TRANSCULTURAL Y AUTORÍA FÍLMICA EN *GANASHATRU* (*AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE* 1989)

Resumen

La película *Ganashatru* (*Un enemigo del pueblo* 1989) de Satyajit Ray es la primera parte de *la trilogía final*, siendo las dos partes posteriores *Shakha Prashaka* (*Ramas del árbol* 1990) y *Agantuk* (*El desconocido* 1991). Los últimos tres filmes de Ray son destacables por su fuerte uso del lenguaje contra el estado prevalente de corrupción y decadencia en la sociedad. *Ganashatru* muestra cómo el Dr. Ashoke Gupta, un médico en Chandipur, una ciudad imaginaria en Bengala Occidental, lucha contra los corruptos funcionarios de la ciudad para descontaminar el agua sagrada del templo, que está propagando la ictericia y otras enfermedades transmitidas por el agua. Enriqueciendo el corpus de adaptaciones cinematográficas de Ray, *Ganashatru* es una adaptación de la obra de Henrik Ibsen, *Un enemigo del pueblo* (1882). Dado que el texto fuente es adaptado de otra cultura, el artículo identifica a *Ganashatru* como una «adaptación transcultural», tomando prestado el término de Linda Hutcheon. A continuación, se presenta un análisis teórico de su autoría fílmica, donde se exploran los tres aspectos más importantes de la autoría cinematográfica de Ray: su inclinación a adaptar textos clásicos, la selección de un conjunto familiar de actores y el establecimiento de la resistencia de su protagonista a la corrupción.

Palabras clave: Satyajit Ray, Henrik Ibsen, *Ganashatru*, adaptación transcultural, autoría fílmica, resistencia, corrupción.

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the release of *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World* 1984), Ray took a five-year-long gap from filmmaking, except for the short documentary on his father, *Sukumar Ray* (1987). He returned to filmmaking with *Ganashatru* (*An Enemy of the People* 1989), the first installment of *the final trilogy*, which was followed by *Shakha Prashaka* (*Branches of the Tree* 1990) and *Agantuk* (*The Stranger* 1991). These films constitute *the final trilogy*, as they are the last three films of an illustrious film career of one of the greatest filmmakers of India. However, the theme of the films ostensibly resonates with Ray's observations of the contemporary degraded state of society as he contemplates, "looking around me, I feel that the old values of personal integrity, loyalty, liberalism, rationalism, and fair play are all completely gone. People accept corruption as a way of life, as a method of getting along, as a necessary evil" (Robinson 2004, 340). In *Ganashatru*, a doctor fights against the corrupt authorities of a municipal town to decontaminate the temple's holy water. In *Shakha Prashaka,* an old, retired industrialist father is heartbroken learning about the corrupt and dishonest ways two of his sons adopt to make their fortune. In the final film, *Agantuk*, the protagonist, an anthropologist, renounces the humdrum of city life to explore the root of culture and civilization. As Andrew Robinson points out, Ray has thematized corruption in bureaucracies and politics as well as moral decay in his films on more than one occasion, as he did in his earlier films like *Pratidwandi* (*The Adversary* 1970), *Jana Aranya* (*The Middle Man* 1975), *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (*Kingdom of Diamonds* 1980), and *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World* 1984); but the final trilogy stands out for its 'defiant individualism,' 'sombreness of theme,' and 'directness of language' (2004, 339).

The diversity of themes that Ray explores in his filmic narratives owes much to the selection of their source texts. Therefore, adaptation proves to be an essential phenomenon in his filmmaking career. *Ganashatru*, the first film of *the final trilogy*, is also an adaptation of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882). Ray's adaptation of Ibsen's play is crucial, shedding light on various relevant aspects of Ray's filmmaking techniques. Firstly, it is an adaptation of a theatrical text, a novel experience for him. Secondly, and notably for the first time in his filmmaking journey, Ray extends his search for a source text amongst the Western classics. In this regard, it must be noted that Ray enjoyed enormous exposure to American and European literature and cinema even before his filmmaking career took off. Robinson writes, "Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People*, written in 1882, had appealed to Ray ever since he read it. He was attracted to its central character, the idealistic Dr. Stockmann, that obstinate whistle-blower who destroys a comfortable life for the sake of a principle" (2004, 342).

This paper identifies Ray's adaptation of Ibsen's text as 'transcultural adaptation,' borrowing the theoretical term from Linda Hutcheon's book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006). Referring to the adaptation theories of Hutcheon and Robert Stam, the article examines Ray's process of transculturation in transplanting Ibsen's 19th-century text in the 1980s social and cultural ambiance of West Bengal, India. The article further discusses the theoretical context of film authorship, referring to the

critical discourse of film authorship by John Caughie, David A. Gerstner, and Thomas Leitch. It is argued in this article that Ray effectively employs three significant features of his authorship to create the film *Ganashatru*, in which he adapts a classical text, casts a familiar cast, and establishes the protagonist's resistance to corruption. The essay further discusses Ray's authorship of adapting classical texts and working with a familiar set of actors, which begins right from the initial years of his filmmaking. However, the authorship of Ray's protagonists' resistance against corruption develops since his 1970s films, particularly with *the Calcutta trilogy*. Since the 1970s, Ray's films have started exposing the corrupt state of society in the modern city.

2. TRANSCULTURAL ADAPTATION AND *GANASHATRU*

Linda Hutcheon coins the term 'transcultural adaptation' in her landmark book on adaptation studies, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006). To borrow her words, in such adaptations, "a change of language is involved; almost always, there is a change of place or time period" (Hutcheon 2013, 145). Simply put, transcultural adaptation occurs when a source text travels to a new culture at a different time. Hutcheon also notices diverse facets when transcultural adaptations take place, including –an accompanying shift in the political valence from the source text to adaptation, transculturation or adapter's effort to right resetting, or recontextualizing, and changes in racial and gender politics from the source text to adaptation (146-147). Robert Stam (2017) later recognizes such adaptation, which involves a journey from one culture to another, as 'cross-cultural dialogism.' Although the practice of adaptations using sources from other cultures has been a phenomenon for a long time, Hutcheon and Stam have successfully framed them in the lexicon of adaptation studies.

There has been a thriving tradition of transcultural film adaptations in Indian cinema over the years. Although the number of transcultural adaptations in 20th-century Indian cinema (Bollywood and other regional cinema) is less, with the onset of the 21st-century, Indian cinema has seen promising growth in transcultural adaptation. There is no doubt that William Shakespeare's plays attract the interest of Indian filmmakers most within the sphere of world literature. A simple explanation may be that his plays are universally appealing on a thematic level, but Mukherjee rightly suspects something more fundamental, "it is quite difficult to understand the reasons behind Indian film directors' fascination with the Bard of Avon's plays" (2023, 2). Much before their cinematic rendition in India, Shakespeare's works came to be known in India through their literary and performative re-creations. According to Suddhaseel Sen, the reception of Shakespeare's works at a global level (including non-Anglophone regions) can be said to have truly begun in the 19th-century... In the same period in colonial India, Shakespeare came to be translated, performed, and commented on regularly, especially in the two cosmopolitan centers of those times, Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Bombay (now Mumbai) (2021, 1). Furthermore, he contests the views of the postcolonial critics, who believe that the reception of Shakespeare was a part of the British civilizing mission or English language education (4). Instead, Sen states, local-language theatres provided the primary site

for cross-cultural exchanges since, in cities like Calcutta and Bombay, where the British cultural influence was most pronounced, theatrical managers were keen to adapt Shakespeare's plays, along with Hindu, Arabic, and Persian stories, for local audiences (4). Moreover, he also points out how the early literary reworkings of Shakespeare's works, like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's essay "Sakuntala Miranda, ebong Desdemona" ("Sakuntala, Miranda, and Desdemona," 1875) and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's *Bhrantivilas* (*Comedy of Errors* 1869), along with anticolonial and anti-misogynist lines, were pioneering in their scope by global standards (8).

In India, the Hindi film industry, often synonymous with Bollywood, based in Mumbai, dominates Shakespeare adaptations over regional cinemas. According to Dionne and Kapadia, the term Bollywood is often used as shorthand to describe stylistic gestures –the mix of dance, music, and melodramatic romance plots– that characterize popular Hindi cinema" (2014, 9). Quoting Mira Reym Binford, they further elaborate on Bollywood film as having "a distinctive aesthetic of its own... Realism, in the sense of visual or psychological authenticity, has not been valued. The mandatory song-and-dance sequences, like operatic arias, tend to serve as both narrative and emotional points of culmination and punctuation. Baroque and sometimes highly dramatic camera movement is complemented by flamboyant use of color and sound effects and flashy editing... Sound and visuals of song-and-dance sequences are often edited in blithe defiance of conventional laws of space and time" (10-11). However, the term Bollywood could be "a problematic category as it does not do justice to the tradition of Indian theatrical representation and cinema that make up its global content as a film form," but like the term Hollywood, the word Bollywood has "a useful pliancy as it defines the globalization of Indian filmmaking and its political and aesthetic vibrancy" (8). According to Rachel Dwyer, "Hindi cinema has itself been transformed since 1991, particularly with the formation of what is now known as 'Bollywood,' the high-profile, globalized mainstream cinema that lies at the heart of the growing entertainment industry" (2014, 8). To mention a few Bollywoodization of Shakespeare's texts, one is intrigued to recall critically acclaimed and commercially successful Vishal Bhardwaj's Shakespearean trilogy –*Maqbool* (2003), an adaptation of *Macbeth*; *Omkara* (2006), an adaptation of *Othello*; and *Haider* (2014), an adaptation of *Hamlet*. A play like *Romeo and Juliet*, because of its theme of romantic tragicomedy, which is best suited for Bollywood movies, has been adapted many times viz. Raj Kapoor's *Bobby* (1973), Mansoor Khan's *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1982), K Balachander's *Ek Duje Ke Liye* (1981), Habib Faisal's *Ishaqzaade* (2012), Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela* (2013), and Manish Tiwari's *Issaq*, (2013). Debu Sen's *Do Dooni Chaar* (1968) and Gulzar's *Angoor* (1982) are inspired by *The Comedy of Errors*. Apart from them, other Hindi film directors like Sharat Katariya's *10ml Love* (2012), an adaptation of *The Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Bornila Chatterjee's *The Hungry* (2017), an adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* proliferate the number.

Apart from Bollywood, regional cinema in India demonstrates the enduring influence of Shakespeare. The Bengali cinema archives a significant number of Shakespearean rebirths among the regional cinemas. Based primarily on the eastern Indian state of West Bengal, Bengali cinema mainly caters to Bengali-speaking viewers

in that linguistic territory. Besides Bollywood, Bengali cinema, since its inception, according to Sharmistha Gooptu, has followed to establish a distinctive Bengaliness or Bengali culture which was driven by a certain kind of self-assertion and identity formation of the *bhadralok*[1] (educated Bengali gentlemen), who formed the main section of the moviegoers till 1960s and '70s (2018, 18). It was not until the 1980s that Bengali cinema began imbibing the influence of Bollywood 'masala' movies and created a new configuration of *another order of Bengaliness* (Gooptu 2018, 19; italics in the original). This transformation determined the contemporary character of Bengali cinema as since the '80s, it gradually transcended the circle of the *bhadralok* movie audience (19). However, Bengali cinema, too, significantly adds to the list of Shakespeare adaptations. Ajay Kar's *Saptapadi* (1961), based on *Othello*; Manu Sen's *Bhranti Bilas* (1963), an adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors*; Ranjan Ghosh's *Hrid Majharey* (2014), inspired by *Macbeth and Othello*; Aparna Sen's *Arshinagar* (2015), an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*; Anjan Dutt's *Hemanta* (2016), an adaptation of *Hamlet* are among a few. Rosa Maria García-Periago's (2021a and 2021b) studies have critically brought into notice Shakespeare's adaptation in other regional cinema –M Natesa's Tamil language film *Anbu* (1953), an adaptation of *Othello*; another Tamil language recreation of Shakespeare's tragedy is Dada Mirasi's *Ratha Thilagam* (1963); and Jayaraj's Malayalam language film *Veeram* (2017), an adaptation of *Macbeth*.

However, if Shakespearean adaptations are easy to locate, one must search patiently to find non-Shakespearean adaptations. The last century experienced transcultural adaptation of *The Thousand and One Nights* (Arabian Nights) stories in Bengali cinema (Mukherjee 2023), and, in Bollywood, novels of Thomas Hardy were adapted in films like *Dulhaan Ek Raat Ki* (1967), based on the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), and *Daag* (1973), an adaptation of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). The number increased at the turn of the century as one finds Bollywoodization of non-Shakespearean texts, most notably, Rituporno Ghosh's *Raincoat* (2004), an adaptation O' Henry's *The Gift of the Magi*; Vikramaditya Motwane's *Lootera* (2013), an adaptation of O' Henry's *The Last Leaf*; and Abhishek Kapoor's *Fitoor* (2016), based on Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*. A perennial problem, however, with transcultural adaptation is that they are primarily unacknowledged and identifying them seems like an impossible puzzle (Mukherjee 2023, 2). In this context, it is crucial to critically analyze Robinson's comment on Ray's adaptation *Ganashatru*: "Had the film been given a different name ('*Public Enemy*' was considered at one point), and had Ray not credited it as an adaptation of Ibsen's play, I wonder whether most audiences would have been aware of any connection" (2004, 342). While Robinson's comment augments Ray's creative genius, it also poses a potential threat to discredit Ibsen's source text, which stimulates Ray's creativity. Therefore, unacknowledged

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[1] The *bhadralok* are the social classes among the Bengali who, since the 19th century, had received some kind of English/western education. They were the chief connoisseur of Bengal's cultural art and literary practices in the 19th and 20th century.

transcultural adaptation not only deprives the source text of its due credit but also disrupts the cross-cultural transmission of the arts.

The significance of Ray's *Ganashatru* is that it is one of the very few (non-Shakespearean) transcultural adaptations in 20th-century Bengali cinema. Before moving into Ray's mastery in the process of transculturation, we shall have a synoptic view of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* (1882). The plot is contextualized in a small coastal town in southern Norway called Bath. The town's main attraction is the Baths spa, which attracts thousands of visitors, becoming the town's significant source of income. Dr. Thomas Stockmann is the chief medical officer in the Bath. He suddenly discovers that the water of the Bath spa is polluted with industrial garbage. Peter Stockmann, the elder brother of Dr. Stockmann and the town's mayor, strongly opposes his brother's appeal to decontaminate water on the excuse of its reconstruction cost. No matter how hard Dr. Stockmann tries, the majority labels him an enemy of the people. Dr. Stockmann resolutely adheres to truth and principle when the majority corners him.

The process of transculturation that Ray communicates in his adaptation shows a Bengali recreation of the text in the celluloid. Robinson recalls how Ibsen's text was reproduced in "Bengal's theatre, especially by *Bohurupee*, a well-known theatre group, a few times during the 1950s-1970s. But apart from translating it into Bengali, the group keeps the text largely unchanged. Ray, by contrast, transplants the play from Norway in the 1880s to West Bengal in 1989" (2004, 342). Ray's process of indigenization or transculturation begins by relocating the story to an imaginary flourishing town called Chandipur in West Bengal. The contaminated water in the Bath spa has been culturally transformed into a Hindu temple's *charanamrita* or holy water. The idea of the temple is 'Ray's masterstroke' because it brings a political-religious context and makes Ray's film truly 'Bengali in ethos and highly topical throughout India' (Robinson 2004, 342). About the origin of the idea of the temple, Robinson writes Ray was unable to recall, though he did admit to being intrigued by the long-running construction saga of a grandiose Orissan-style temple located not very far from his flat in Bishop Lefroy Road, funded by the Birla family (who are Marwaris) (343). In addition, Robinson cites the contemporary cases of polluted water supply in India, including a serious case in the famous south Indian temple of Tirupati in 1988 (343-344).

Accordingly, the film's central character becomes Dr. Ashoke K. Gupta from Ibsen's Dr. Stockmann, and Nisith Gupta, the mayor and the younger brother, is a recreation of Peter Stockmann. The surname Gupta is common in West Bengal and other eastern parts of the country; the word 'Gupta' originates from the Sanskrit word *goptr*, which means 'protector' or 'governor'. It is imaginative on Ray's part how the surname metaphorically enlightens different aspects of the two brothers. While Dr. Ashoke Gupta, by his profession, has the potential to be the protector, Nisith is literally the governor or mayor of Chandipur. Ray retained the name of *The People's Courier* with its nearest Bengali equivalent, *Janabarta*. The officials at *Janabarta* have taken their typical Bengali names with alliterative resemblances to Ibsen's characters. Thus, Mr. Hovstad, the editor of *The People's Courier*, becomes Haridas at *Janabarta*; Aslaksen, the printer and publisher, becomes Adhir Choudhuri; and Mr. Billing,

the sub-editor, is Bireswar at *Janabarta*. Like most of his adaptations, Ray does not crowd his plot with additional characters other than those in the source text, but he drops the characters and events that he feels are irrelevant in his narrative. Mr. Stockmann's two sons, Ejlif and Morten, are absent in Ray's adaptation. Thus, the character of Morten Kiil, a tanner and Mrs. Stockmann's adoptive father, whose fortune Stockmann's two sons will inherit, has also been dropped.

3. RAY'S AUTHORSHIP IN *GANASHATRU*

The term *auteur* has its origin in French film criticism, which referred to either "the author who wrote the script, or, in the more general sense of the term, the artist who created the film; gradually, the latter sense came to replace the former, and the auteur was the artist whose personality was 'written' in the film" (Caughie 1981, 9). John Caughie, in his book *Theories of Authorship: A Reader* (1981), identifies the significant traits of *auteurism*: "a film, though produced collectively, is most likely to be valuable when it is essentially the product of its director; that in the presence of a director who is genuinely an artist (an auteur) a film is more than likely to be the expression of his individual personality; and that this personality can be traced in a thematic and/or stylistic consistency over all (or almost all) the director's films" (9). However, in the history of film criticism, several theorists have questioned the relevance of studying film authorship on many occasions. David Gerstner favored the critical discussion of film authorship, pointing out that "authorship is always a way of looking at films, and obviously other ways exist as do other questions" (2003, 28).

According to adaptation scholar Thomas Leitch, "many directors whose films are based almost entirely on literary adaptations have nonetheless established a reputation as auteurs" (2007, 236). Leitch possibly points out that a filmmaker's repeated attempt to use literary sources contributes to the consistency of his filmmaking style and, thereby, establishes an aspect of authorship. In his entire film oeuvre, Satyajit Ray adapted twenty-six times from literary sources among his twenty-nine feature films. Not only literary sources, but Ray's inclination to literary source text could also be more specifically identified as classical works of the canonical writers, primarily from Bengali literature. From the very first film, *Pather Panchali* (1955), which is an adaptation of Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's classic Bengali novel *Pather Panchali* (1929), Ray successfully established his auteurism in selecting canonical writers and their classical texts for adapting them into film. Along with *Pather Panchali*, Ray adapted three more films from the Bengali literary classics of Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay. Alongside Bandyopadhyay, Ray selected the canonical texts of stalwart Bengali literary masters like Rabindranath Tagore, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, Narendranath Mitra, Sunil Gangopadhyay, et al. Ray adapted three short stories of Tagore into an anthological feature film *Teen Kanya* (*Three Daughters*) (1961), and further made two more Tagore adaptations, namely *Charulata* (The *Lonely Wife* 1964) and *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World* 1984). However, Ray sometimes received criticism, particularly following the release of

Charulata, for using cinematic liberty and breaking the fidelity in translating the canonical text onto the screen (Ray 2005, 142-143). Nevertheless, he has defended his artistic choices, delineating the differences in medium specificity between literature and cinema (143-175). Most importantly, his commercial and critical success in adapting the canonical texts into films cemented this prospect of authorship as a forte of Ray's filmmaking.

In art and literature, it is always a matter of great contention as to what contributes to the definition of a classic. In his seminal essay, "Why Read the Classics?" Italo Calvino interprets classics as texts that invoke rereading, not reading, because a classic text "has never finished saying what it has to say."(1986). To a generation of contemporary readers, the classics travel "bearing the traces of readings previous to ours and bringing in their wake the traces they themselves have left on the culture or cultures they have passed through" (Calvino 1986). Therefore, the classics champion the burden of time and the diversity of cultural forms by offering relevant meanings to their receivers. It also holds true that the classics account for the most number of adaptations across different ages and cultures. It is also observed that even a single classic text is retold multiple times in different medial forms. Therefore, in the scholarship of adaptation studies, "there is a special value in looking at adaptations of texts that have often, even continuously, been adapted... to consider how the story is changing and what this reveals about the society that made it" (Sullivan 2023, 110-111).

Towards the swansong period of filmmaking, the authorship of selecting the canonical text of classical writers led Ray to turn to the Western classical text *An Enemy of the People* (1882) by Ibsen. The classic status of Ibsen's play stems from the fact that it is still reread across different cultures and retold in different medial forms. Outside the Bengali literary corpus, Ray only considered the classical Indian Hindi writer Premchand's Hindi literary texts for two of his adaptations –*Shatranj Ke Khiladi* (*The Chess Player* 1977) and *Sadgati* (*Deliverance* 1981). Ibsen's play is Ray's only adaptation of non-Indian classical text. Although he adapted Ibsen's text in the late 1980s, according to Surabhi Banerjee, Ray's acquaintance with Ibsen's *An Enemy* took place many years earlier, around 1946 or 1947, and he considered a cinematic adaptation some ten or fifteen years later, which eventually didn't become possible (1996, 115). However, Ray's disenchantment with the quality of Bengali literature during the 1980s forced him to return to Ibsen's classic text for adaptation (Robinson 2004, 348). Ibsen's text also allowed Ray to explore the deterioration of social life and moral values in 1980s Bengal. Above all these concerns, it must be noted that Ray didn't compromise with the source text selection and chose a classical text, which has been an inherent feature of his auteurism.

Ray's preference towards classical texts may result from his growing up in a family of rich literary traditions and cultural practices. Satyajit Ray's grandfather, Upendrakishore Ray Chawdhury (1863-1915), was an eminent Bengali children's literature writer. He was also the founder of the famous Bengali Children's magazine *Sandesh* in 1913, and Satyajit also served as an editor of this prestigious journal. Satyajit Ray's father, Sukumar Ray (1887-1923), was an innovative Bengali poet who pioneered nonsense literature in Bengali, marked by his classic creations like

HaJaBaRaLa (*Mumbo-Jumbo*, 1921) and *Abol Tabol* (*The Weird and the Absurd*, 1923). Sukumar's own sisters, Shukhalata Rao (1886-1969), a writer and an artist, and Punyalata Chakrabarty (1890-1974), contributed to Bengali children's literature. The Ray family also shared a close bond with the Tagore family, whose contribution to Bengali art, culture, and literature was immensely enriching. Upon Rabindranath Tagore's recommendation, Satyajit Ray spent two years and pursued art education in Kala Bhavana (Institute of Fine Arts) at Tagore's university, Visva Bharati. This proximity and tutelage under great literary and artistic luminaries might have significantly contributed to Ray's enhanced intellectual comprehension of the literary classics.

Ray's first job at D.J. Keymar's Advertising Agency as an illustrator and cover designer of the books also familiarized him with many classical books –poetry anthologies by post-Tagore poets like Bisnu Dey and Jibanananda Das, Jim Corbett's adventure classic *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India*, to name a few (Robinson 2004, 58). It is surprisingly true that Ray first came across Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's book *Pather Panchali* at the Keymar's, which resulted in his adaptation of the landmark debut film *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Little Road* 1955). In his recent visits to Ray's library, Barun Chanda enlightens how the bookshelves of the library accommodate separate sections of books on literary classics and different aspects of filmmaking –films and filming, scripts, plays, poetry, fiction, science fiction, and crime thrillers (2022, 293). He provides an exhausting list of books from each category, like John Gassner and Dudley Nichols's *20 Best Film Plays*, books by Arthur C. Clarke, autobiographies of Luis Bunuel and Akira Kurosawa, Woody Allen's screenplays, the screenplay of *Tom Jones* by John Osborne, Rob Roy by Walter Scott, *The Three Musketeers* by Alexander Dumas, *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens (293-297). Although Ray's films are based on Bengali classics, Chanda's list, quite surprisingly, barely accounts for a Bengali book, given the reason that "right from his boyhood days Ray was more comfortable reading English, rather than Bengali" (302).

One consistent hallmark of Ray's cinematic authorship lies in his deliberate choice to collaborate with a recurring group of actors across a significant portion of his filmography. Regarding working with actors repeatedly in his films, Ray expressed that he "builds up a relationship that makes it easier to do another film. It becomes a quicker and easier process (Cardullo 2007, 109). In *Ganashatru*, the principal male and female characters feature from Ray's most familiar set of actors. Soumitra Chatterjee, the male lead who plays Dr. Ashoke Gupta, appears in as many as fourteen of Ray's films. Another male lead, Dritiman Chatterjee, a versatile actor from Bengal playing the crucial role of Nisith Gupta in *Ganasharu*, features as one of the central characters in three of Ray's films since *Pratidwandi* (*The Adversary* 1970). Ruma Guha Thakurta, who plays the female lead, Maya, has also previously been a part of Ray's filmmaking world. Dipankar Dey, portraying Haridas in Ray's adaptation, features in a total of five films since his appearance in Ray's film in *Seemabadhha* (*Company Limited* 1971). Two other actors, Mamata Shankar and Bhisma Guhathakurta, who play the significant roles of Indrani and Ronen in the film, are cast in more than one film in Ray's *final trilogy*. Therefore, in *Ganashatru*, Ray consciously opts for the

familiar set of actors to get the intended result that the portrayal of the characters demands in the film.

Ray adeptly utilized these actors to embody diverse characters as per his films' requirements; concurrently, it holds true that the actors demonstrate mastery in portraying an array of characters effectively on screen. Consequently, they all continue to have long-standing careers in the realm of acting, particularly in Bengali cinema. In the case of Soumitra Chatterjee, he established himself as a versatile and feted actor in Bengali cinema, continuing to work until his demise in 2020. In the recent recoveries of Mr. Chatterjee's diaries, carried out by Amit Ranjan Biswas, the actor unravels the mystery of his profound acting skills by claiming, "I am a blotting paper. I absorbed life in it, which I successfully pour into my acting" (2023, 22).[2] Dhritiman Chatterjee has significantly contributed to Bengali cinema, along with his screen presence in Hindi cinema and different regional cinemas in India. Satyajit Ray once highly praised Dritiman's screen presence by claiming that "a star is a person on the screen who continues to be expressive and interesting even after he or she has stopped doing anything. This definition does not exclude the rare and lucky breed that gets five or ten lakhs of rupees per film; and it includes anyone who keeps his calm before the camera, projects a personality and evokes empathy. This is a rare breed too, but one has met it in our films. Dhritiman Chatterjee of *Pratidwandi* is such a star" (1994, 98). Besides them, Ray's choice of actors like Dipankar Dey and Mamata Shankar plays a crucial role in Bengali cinema nowadays.

However, the most crucial aspect of Ray's authorship, which develops since his 1970s films, specifically with the first installment of *the Calcutta trilogy*, *Pratidwandi*, is the protagonist's refusal to succumb to bureaucratic as well as corporate corruption in Calcutta as a means to secure employment. While the filmmaker exposes how corruption creeps into all aspects of daily life, his protagonists tend to stay away from such vile means of life. In *Pratidwandi*, the protagonist Siddhartha turns down all the dishonest ways of life to fight against unemployment in 1970s Calcutta and ends up getting a job far away from the city. In the last part of the trilogy, *Jana Aranya* (*The Middle Man* 1975), the male lead, Somnath, an unemployed young man, decides to start his own business as a salesman and is caught up in the turmoil between choosing the moral or immoral way of life to prosper in the business. Finally, he surrenders to the dishonest practice in his job, where only grief and remorse constitute his means of resistance.

Nevertheless, in *the final trilogy*, the denial of corruption culminates in strong resistance from the protagonists, for which Robinson thinks Ray employs "sombreness of theme and a directness of language" against any form of corruption in social life (2004, 339). In *Shakha Proshakha*, the second installment of *the final trilogy*, the

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[2] The recent retrieval of Mr. Soumitra Chatterjee's diaries, under the title "Chittir Mittir: Portrait of a Friend" ("Soumitra Chatterjee-Reflections from His Diary"), has been undergoing bimonthly publication in the *Robba*r (Sunday) pages of *Sanbad Pratidin* Bengali newspaper. This endeavor has been spearheaded by Amit Ranjan Biswas.

protagonist, Anandamohan Mojumder, a seventy-year-old industrialist, leads a corruption-free life. He garners honor and recognition for fostering humanitarian causes for society, and his greatness is celebrated by naming the township in his name. However, the film gradually reveals that all Anandamohan Majumder's sons, except Proshanto, adopted corrupt means in their professional lives to achieve success. The knowledge of his sons' dishonest way of life disheartens the father, who has already suffered a heart attack and lives under intense medical care.

Dr. Gupta in *Ganashatru* emerges as arguably the most resilient of Ray's protagonists. He displays steadfast resistance against the political and religious corruption prevalent in Chandipur. Dr. Gupta's opposition to corruption stems from his inherent qualities like –a deep-rooted commitment to his town, profound responsibility towards his medical profession, modernist rationality, and empathetic humanism. All these qualities of Dr. Gupta strengthen and motivate him at different stages of his persistent battle against the administrative corruption of the town in handling the health crisis.

Dr. Ashoke K Gupta serves as a medical practitioner in the municipal hospital in Chandipur. He has been practicing medical activities in Chandipur for over twenty-six years. Besides, in the film's opening, one learns from Maya, Dr. Gupta's wife, that Dr. Gupta was born in Chandipur. He moves to Calcutta to pursue a medical degree from Calcutta University. He gets married and practices there as a doctor. His attachment to his birthplace soon brings him back to Chandipur from Calcutta. Maya also informs us that they prefer small towns like Chandipur over Calcutta. In response to Nisith's question, whether Dr. Gupta prays for the well-being of Chandipur, the latter vociferously claims, "I care for the town a hundred times better than anybody else, and there is no competitor for me in this regard, not even you (Nisith)" (00:11:22). These initial revelations in the film about Dr. Gupta's love and attachment to his native place, Chandipur, serve as strategic means to ascertain Dr. Gupta's deep rootedness to Chandipur.

As an imaginary town, Chandipur is situated outside the metropolis of Calcutta in West Bengal. As a rapidly growing town that provides its people with basic amenities like hospitals, schools, banks, and printing houses, in addition to avenues of cultural practices like theatre in 1980s West Bengal, Chandipur has the status of a municipality town. The town is home to a large population, and a place like Bhubanpally, where the Tripureswar temple is located, is one of the densely populated parts of Chandipur. Because of all these facilities, Dr. Gupta is tempted to eulogize, "Chandipur has no shortcomings anymore. I believe our town ranks as incomparable amongst the smaller towns around" (00:09:05). The municipal status of Chandipur also indicates the economic rise of the town, a major portion of which comes from tourism generated by the temple. However, it is noteworthy that the corrupted state of affairs in 1970s Calcutta, as depicted in *The Calcutta trilogy*, also afflicts the lives of residents in a small town like Chandipur.

It is due to the urge to serve his people with a firm commitment that Dr. Gupta discovers the contaminated water of the Tripureshar temple, which has been rapidly spreading jaundice (Infective Hepatitis) among his patients and other visitors in Chandipur. He secretly sends the water of the suspected area for a lab

test in Calcutta and confirms the contamination of water only when he receives the test report from Calcutta. However, his efforts to decontaminate the water face challenges from the concerned authorities of the town. Nisith, Dr. Gupta's younger brother and the town's mayor, significantly thwarts Dr. Gupta's endeavors. Nisith is a three-time elected chairman of the Chandipur municipality. He is also the president of the Bharghav Trust, which is responsible for establishing the town's hospital and temple. Besides, he is a business partner of Mr. Bharghav, the rich and influential businessman in the town who also owns the Bharghav Trust. Moreover, Nisith is ambitious about the rapid growth of Chandipur and dreams of making the place one of the top tourist attractions in West Bengal.

When Dr. Gupta solicits Nisith's assistance in decontaminating the temple's holy water, Nisith disapproves of the former's appeal. Nisith confronts his elder brother to ask if the latter has any idea about "how long it may take to identify and repair the leakage of the underground pipe where the dirty water of the gutter pollutes the drinking water. The temple should be kept closed during the reconstruction period. Thousands of visitors will know the reason behind the sudden closure of the temple" (00:32:20). Inevitably, he is worried that the shutting of the temple might potentially induce panic among the visitors, thereby discouraging their uninterrupted visit. The event can shatter Nisith's dream of turning Chandipur into one of the top tourist attractions of West Bengal. Therefore, Nisith seems to take special care to stop spreading any sort of defamation about the town.

Nisith consistently exhibits cunning and opportunistic behavior. Maya shares the family's past and how Nisith overlooked the old debts and forced Dr. Gupta to repay them single-handedly. Haridas, the editor of *Janabarta*, smells foul play among the temple authorities in claiming the revenue shares. One suspects that Haridas takes a jibe at Nisith, who is also the temple committee chairman. Even as a town's mayor, Nisith, entitled to care for Chandipur, is only bothered about monetary loss due to the sudden closing of the temple above the colossal health crisis. An unhindered prosperity of Chandipur should secure Nisith's subsequent turn as the town's mayor. Likewise, all of Nisith's endeavors toward the upliftment of the town are hidden behind some personal gains. Unlike Dr. Gupta, Nisith could go to any extent not to invite any harm to his personal interests concerning Chandipur. Eventually, he threatens Dr. Gupta about potentially losing his job in the hospital upon further involvement in water decontamination.

Apart from the economic concern, Nisith's disagreement with his brother stems from an ideological hiatus. Regarding the treatment for his digestion problem, Nisith informs Maya, "since my brother's medicine doesn't work for me, I take recourse to *kobiraji*" (ayurvedic medicine) (00:06:20). Undoubtedly, building a temple in Chandipur was Nisith's brainchild. He believes that his disease of spondylosis is magically cured because of his continued one-week visit to the temple. Therefore, Nisith and his wife are regular visitors to the temple. Along with this personal belief and attachment to the temple, Nisith agrees with Mr. Bharghav that the temple's holy water can never be contaminated because of its properties, like holy basil, *bael* leaves, and the Ganges water. Thus, Maya shares with her husband that "his brother may dress attire like a sahib, but he maintains religious rituals and pujas piously" (00:38:25).

Unlike Nisith, Dr. Gupta's cultural and religious beliefs must pass through scientific scrutiny. Furthermore, he certainly disapproves of Nisith's belief as the latter believes "holy basil can remove all the impurities of the water" (00:32:35).

Disillusioned by his brother's perplexing decisions, Dr. Gupta seeks support from the only newspaper of Chandipur *Janabarta* to publish his article to spread awareness among the townspeople. It turns out that Haridas, the editor of *Janabarta*, proves to be a hypocrite. From the film's beginning, one observes that he maintains a cordial relationship with Dr. Gupta, frequently visiting his house. And so does Adhir Choudhury, the printer and publisher of *Janabarta*. Their 'progressive daily' turns their back on Dr. Gupta when he needs them to publish his article. Instead, they are easily manipulated by Nisith that Dr. Gupta's urge to decontaminate the temple's holy water is an attack on the temple and religious beliefs. Consequently, Haridas and Adhir believe that publishing such an article might spoil the reputation of their newspaper.

Dejected by the responsible authorities' denial to publish his article, Dr. Gupta decides to hold a public meeting to read his essay and make people aware of the impending danger. A shrewd intervention of Nisith, Haridas, and Adhir in the event is meant to mislead the majority against Dr. Gupta. They successfully interrupt Dr. Gupta from reading his article before the people. Instead, Nisith plots an opportunity to prove Dr. Gupta is anti-religious and agitate the mob against him. Nisith coerces Dr. Gupta to confess before the crowd that he has not visited the temple even once in the last ten years. Forcibly, Nisith proves Dr. Gupta does not believe in any temple rituals, hence attacking the temple's holy water.

Despite the public meeting's majoritarian verdict that Dr. Gupta is an 'enemy of the people,' the meeting presents Dr. Gupta as 'mild-mannered, even-tempered, and a specialist of his profession' (Robinson 2004, 343), who is starkly different from Ibsen's Dr. Stockman. Indeed, Dr. Gupta proves to be a rational person, and his rationality develops from his nurturing of the scientific truths. Dr. Gupta prioritizes what science teaches him over religious sentiments. Therefore, he differentiates between scientific truths and religious dogmatism. At the same time, he explains that the purifying of contaminated water is not entirely a religious discussion. He upholds his rational approach and appeals to the townspeople to pay heed to him 'about the scientific ideas of hygiene' (343). He promises that his efforts will rescue Chandipur from the prevailing danger and restore its glorious old days. Dr. Gupta retorts to Nisith's questions, "Are you a Hindu?" (01:19: 40) Dr. Gupta confirms that "there should not be any doubt that I am a Hindu" (01:20: 00). One may agree with Dr. Gupta's statement, given that he chooses to hold the meeting in the Nat Mandir, a religious place, as one sees the idol of Goddess Durga at the back of the stage where Dr. Gupta addresses the audience. Dr. Gupta may have preferred some other place than Nat Mandir if he is anti-religious. He even reaffirms, "I respect others' religious sentiments and cannot think of attacking their religious beliefs even in my dream" (01:20:42). Though, he confesses his reservations against some of the dogmatic religious practices.

Nevertheless, it appears that Dr. Gupta's rationalistic principles cannot convince the majority. In fact, Ray believes that 'there is a grain of truth in Dr.

Stockmann's statement' that "it's the fools who form the overwhelming majority" (Robinson 2004, 342). The film draws particular attention to the conversation of a bunch of people coming to attend Dr. Gupta's public meeting. Before Dr. Gupta begins, as those people exchange words among themselves, it is noticeable that a few of them attend the public lecture without having any idea of what Dr. Gupta will address in the meeting. One person confesses, "I only followed the audience and entered it" (01:08:08). The other person reveals, "I do not miss public meetings. But do not ask me about the topic" (01:08:10). Their ignorance can hardly be justified as the wall posters have already informed that Dr. Gupta will discuss the 'Health Crisis of Chandipur on 5th January 1989 at Nat Mandir' (01:07:40). Their ignorance and lack of judgment have been the focus of Ray's mise-en-scene. One may argue that this kind of majority can be an easy victim of manipulation, as exemplified by Nitish's actions in the meeting to drive them against Dr. Gupta.

Notwithstanding the constant setback from Nisith and the majority, Dr. Gupta receives persistent support from 'a beleaguered minority' (Robinson 2004, 343). The minority comprises Maya, his wife, and Indrani, his daughter. Unlike Catherine in Ibsen's text, Maya always stands with her husband through thin and thick. Maya, who is proud of her 'science-educated husband,' confesses that she no longer differentiates between her husband's and her desires when Dr. Gupta enquires if she ever feels like visiting the temple. Indrani, Dr. Gupta's only daughter and a schoolteacher by profession, is her father's biggest supporter. She, too, advocates a very scientific and rational approach in her professional and personal life. She complains about the education system and regrets the content she must teach her students. Above all, she turns down Haridas's proposal of translating an English story into Bengali for *Janabarta* because she does not believe in what the story offers on supernatural power and its control on earth. She highly appreciates her father when Dr. Gupta writes the essay for public awareness and encourages her father to publish the same.

Dr. Gupta's other persistent supporter is Ranen Halder, a part of the 'beleaguered minority,' an extended family member, betrothed to Indrani. He has established a theatre group along with the other educated young people of Chandipur. This group also runs a quarterly journal called *Mashal* (A Torch). As the name signifies, the journal looks forward to enlightening the readers from the darkness of ignorance. He encourages Dr. Gupta with all his efforts. When Dr. Gupta fails to book a hall for the public meeting in the town, Ranen helps him avail the Nat Mandir, where Ranen and his group perform theatre, to hold the meeting. In order to avoid any unnecessary interruption in Gupta's meeting, Ranen assures his team to take control of the situation, although Nisith outpowers them on that occasion.

Ranen's real engagement initiates after Dr. Gupta is labeled 'the enemy of the people.' When the mob attacks Dr. Gupta's house, and he loses his job in the hospital, Ranen informs Dr. Gupta that his theatre group and the educated youth of Chandipur stand in full support of Dr. Gupta. Ranen ascertains that his group will print Dr. Gupta's essay as a pamphlet and circulate it among the masses. They are determined to campaign for Dr. Gupta until the authority agrees to decontaminate the temple water. To their utmost astonishment, Maya and Dr. Gupta listen to the

chanting, "Long live Dr. Ashoke Gupta" (01:33:25) as it echoes on the streets of Chandipur and close to Dr. Gupta's house.

In spite of the majority's opposition to Dr. Gupta, his avowed 'empathetic humanism' never dies (Mukhopadhyay 2017, 39). Dr. Gupta empathizes with the majority, which forces him to leave Chandipur once he is labeled 'an enemy of the people.' In his conversation with Maya, Dr. Gupta regrets the situation of the town and the decision of the majority: "Should I leave? What about the contaminated water, then? What about my patients? Should I forsake Chandipur in these difficult days? Do they never understand what mistake they are committing?" (01:24:20). At this critical juncture, along with the support of 'the beleaguered minority,' Dr. Gupta's empathetic humanism drives him to work for the majority again. Dr. Gupta keeps faith in humanism and solidarity and proudly proclaims, "I may be an enemy of the people, but I have many friends. I am not alone" (01:34:00).

In addition to his rational thinking about scientific truth, Dr. Gupta also embraces humanism. In this context, it is crucial to remember what Mukhopadhyay has to offer about Satyajit Ray being both a rationalist and a humanist –"as a rationalist, he has to defend reason at all costs. But he is also a humanist, and this humanism has a broader scope than his rationalism. It needs to be underlined that Ray's humanism is not grounded in a mere celebration of human reason; rather, he foregrounds an empathetic humanism, a humanism centered on universal love for humanism, even when those human beings are innocently irrational" (2017, 39). It goes without saying that Dr. Gupta, too, shares Ray's humanism as Ray identifies himself with Dr. Gupta, claiming that "the doctor in *Ganasatru*, that's me, and what that doctor believes- that's what I believe in" (Cardullo 2007, 210). Dr. Gupta shares Ray's ideals of fighting against evil forces in society and advocating humanism as a crucial way of life. It is both Dr. Gupta's dynamic fighting spirit and his humanism that prepare him to battle the odds of society.

4. CONCLUSION

Film critic and writer Chidananda Dasgupta observes, "the simplistic weakness of *Ganashatru* is so obvious and so plentiful that it is difficult to admit into the body of his oeuvre" (2001, 134). Another film critic and writer, Bhaskar Chattopadhyay, writes, "there is a common belief among film enthusiasts, particularly among those who have watched Satyajit Ray's films quite keenly, that *Ganashatru* is, by far, his worst film... The film suffers from some extremely poor technical treatment, a few things need to be said about some of the other criticisms against it" (2021, 169). Thus, critics and scholars often see *Ganashatru* as one of Ray's lesser-accomplished works and tend to compare the merit of this film with his earlier films. This paper denies any rigid definition of a film's merit. It conveys that our focus on the technical rigor of art might cause us to overlook several other aspects that may merit our attention. It is also sometimes overlooked that *Ganashatru* achieved a remarkable feat of transcultural adaptation. Ray's recreation of Ibsen's text, which was almost a century old when Ray adapted it, and its apt contextualization are undoubtedly

successful feats of a genius filmmaker. That is why one is tempted to agree with Robinson that 'Ray has transformed Ibsen into Ray' in *Ganashatru* (2004, 343).

   Ganashatru proves to be one of Ray's finest films, where he achieves the signature aspects of his film authorship. Ray's filmmaking was hindered until *Ganashatru* by a severe illness following the completion of *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World* 1984). Even at the time of shooting for *Ganashatru*, Ray was surrounded by nurses and doctors with an intensive care unit in an ambulance standing by at the door (Dasgupta 2001, 133). In such a challenging situation, Ray expressed that he had been under doctors' orders not to work outside the studio; still, he was allowed to work because "getting behind the camera exhilarated him and made him feel much better than did his medicines" (133). Therefore, due to this unusual circumstance of filmmaking, Ray relied more on expressing his authorship to make a successful film. Moreover, the critical discussion in this current paper demonstrates that Ray effectively employs three aspects of his authorship –choosing to adapt a classical text, casting the familiar set of actors, and establishing his protagonist's resistance to corruption. A combination of these elements not only establishes *Ganashatru* as one of Ray's greatest creations, but also convinces scholars to acknowledge the film as a masterpiece of the director's career.

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