THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

The Contemporary Ecogothic Novel:

Time, Intimacy, Affect, Form

Heather Ray Milligan

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

English Literature

University of Edinburgh

2024

Word count: 72,957

Abstract

With this thesis, I map the intersection of ecocriticism and Gothic in twenty-first-century fiction to offer three original contributions to literary studies. Firstly, I present a definition of the contemporary 'ecogothic' novel through close readings of works by major and understudied Anglophone authors Hanya Yanagihara, Jeff VanderMeer, K-Ming Chang, and Alexis Wright. These texts challenge the conventions of the novel form and thus offer an opportunity to elucidate how awareness of ecological crises produces innovations in tone, genre, setting, character, and plot. My definition of the ecogothic novel emphasises four primary features: 1) a temporality that is oriented towards the past; 2) intimate entanglements with both human and nonhuman others; 3) ambivalent and negative affects; and 4) nonlinear, palimpsestic, and meta-narrative forms.

Secondly, I position ecogothic fiction as a dark counterpart and challenge to dominant concepts in the environmental humanities. Through an analysis of the ecogothic's complex affective repertoire of fear, desire, disgust, guilt, and horror, I complicate ideas of 'porosity' (Alaimo 2010; Morton 2010) and 'entanglement' (Haraway 2007) as purely positive experiences. I draw attention to ambivalent states of relation in which distance and autonomy prove necessary to respecting the agency of human and other life, particularly in the contexts of colonial invasion, habitat destruction, and disease transmission.

Thirdly, I trace an historical development whereby ecogothic fiction increasingly emerges as a vehicle for articulating racial and decolonial politics. Whereas the Gothic tradition is historically encoded with anxieties about imperial expansion, racialised others, and reverse colonisation, the contemporary ecogothic often centres Indigenous peoples and people of colour as the beset subjects of Gothicised

landscapes made uncanny by colonisation, extractivism, and development. These novels express potent fears about homogenisation across lines of gender, sexuality, culture, and biodiversity under a globalised ‘racial capitalism’ (Robinson 1983). At its most radical, I argue the ecogothic novel has the capacity to re-historicise and re-politicise environmental crises by recovering these haunting origins of collapse.

Through these three central contributions—a new definition of ecogothic, an intervention in adjacent critical debates, and an analysis of the genre’s political implications—I argue in favour of the ecogothic novel’s affective, ethical, and formal complexity in grappling with environmental phenomena and intervening in critical and creative discourses.

Lay Summary

As the effects of climate change and ecological devastation accelerate at compounding rates into the twenty-first century, contemporary fiction is producing innovative new forms to grapple with our altered reality through experimental approaches to plot, character, setting, narrative time, and perspective. While much climate fiction looks ahead to futures of apocalyptic societal collapse or salvific technological solutions, in this thesis I focus on a genre that turns instead towards the past to uncover the origins of today’s calamities: the *ecogothic*. I argue contemporary ecogothic fiction foregrounds overlooked legacies of invasion, settler colonialism, extractivism, and pollution, and thus provides vital historical and political contexts for global environmental crises.

My thesis contributes to the burgeoning field of ecogothic studies a new definition of the twenty-first-century ecogothic novel centred on four primary features:

1) an approach to time that is oriented towards the past, inheritance, and hauntings, 2) depictions of entanglement with others, human and otherwise, 3) the production of negative and ambivalent emotions, and 4) forms that use multiple, layered narrative perspectives and timelines to self-reflexively engage with the Gothic tradition. I explore these formal aspects of ecogothic through close analysis of works by major and understudied Anglophone authors Hanya Yanagihara, Jeff VanderMeer, K-Ming Chang, and Alexis Wright, in dialogue with critical theory from the environmental humanities, new materialisms, queer theory, and Indigenous studies.

With this new definition, I seek to illuminate the unique interventions ecogothic makes in creative and critical discourses around extinction, climate justice, and decoloniality. I find the contemporary ecogothic novel operates as the dark counterpart to much ecocritical theory, complicating and even challenging dominant ideas around porosity, entanglement, and the emotions necessary to motivate social change. Furthermore, I trace an historical development whereby twenty-first-century ecogothic increasingly engages with racial and decolonial politics and uses this political lens to interrogate the Gothic tradition. These findings add nuance to understandings of the development of Gothic in the twenty-first century, the transformation of the novel form in the context of rapid environmental changes, and the relationship between cultural production and climate politics.

Acknowledgements

The PhD programme is a chrysalis from which you hope, one day, a scholar will emerge—and yet you have the nagging sensation it could be anything, anything at all: a flock of crows or endless yards of magician's ribbon. Special thanks to my brilliant supervisors, David Farrier, Timothy C. Baker, and especially Benjamin Bateman for their mentorship and support in guiding this research and for modelling such generous pedagogical practice. I am grateful to The Carnegie Trust for funding my PhD and for charitably extending that funding through a pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, allowing me to dedicate 3.5 years to absorbed research—without which this doctorate would not have been possible. Thanks to my teaching mentors, Alex Lawrie and Rebecca Tierney-Hynes, and to the thoughtful undergraduate students I enjoyed tutorial discussions with. Though we were often ships passing in the night of strange times, affectionate wishes to my doctoral cohort, Ash, Eftihia, Umar, Ritobina, Kai, Lewis, and adopted postdoc Alberto, and to Megan and Beth for their solidarity while completing theses of their own in different cities. Bountiful love and gratitude to my parents, Carol and Ray, who made time and money for books when there wasn't always much to go around—and to Sandy, for reminding me of the world outside. Most of all to Sam, for countless conversations shared, drafts read, dinners cooked, and bookcases perilously over-stacked.

In 2018, I dedicated my undergraduate dissertation to striking university workers; in 2022, in the midst of the same dispute, I became one of them. Thanks to those across the country fighting against inequality and precarity, in hope and rage for what higher education ought to be and what it may yet become.

* * *

An edited version of Chapter IV has been published as:

‘How to Blow Up a Novel: Pipeline Insurgency and Narrative Form in Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria*’ in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 2023, pp. 1-15.

DOI: 10.1080/00111619.2023.2244876.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

A New Climate for Gothic

I-cene, You-cene, We All Scream Anthropocene

In ecocriticism, climate change is often figured as a crisis of meaning or of the imagination (Buell 1995; Farrier 2019). As Eugene Thacker writes, '[t]he world is increasingly unthinkable—a world of planetary disasters, emerging pandemics, tectonic shifts, strange weather, oil-drenched seascapes, and the furtive, always-looming threat of extinction' (2011, 1). Whether the 'slow violence' of pollution (Nixon 2011), the 'hyperobject' of climate change (Morton 2012), or the vast temporal scales of 'deep time' (McPhee 1980), it is now generally accepted that global environmental crises are notoriously difficult concepts to organise into complete, coherent, or causal narrative forms. In his now ubiquitous theory of slow violence—applied to phenomena as disparate as radiation poisoning, ocean acidification, and climate change—Rob Nixon describes 'violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space' (2011, 2). For Timothy Morton, too, today's environmental challenges pose particular problems of scale since our world is constituted by phenomena 'that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans' (2013, 1), from the totality of global capitalism to the vastness of the solar system. These hyperobjects operate on different magnitudes to that of human bodies and lifespans and can accordingly be glimpsed only in part.

If touchstone concepts in the environmental humanities overwhelmingly treat ecological concerns as vast, dispersed, and irreducibly complex, questions of

responsibility become difficult to disentangle. This representational problem has troubling political ramifications because an overemphasis on complexity or diffuse agency can allow guilty parties to escape accountability. As Eva Giraud argues in *What Comes After Entanglement?* (2019), to view human agency as fundamentally compromised or limited can 'make it difficult to determine where culpability for particular situations really lie' (2). Speaking of the 'nonhuman turn' in the environmental humanities—a term encompassing animal studies, affect theory, actor-network theory, object-oriented ontology, and new materialism—Richard Kerridge identifies 'something paradoxical about dispersing and qualifying our notion of human agency at the very moment we need to make an unprecedented demand upon that agency' (2014, 367). To lay claim to a compromised, weak, or partial human agency can be a form of shirking or downplaying responsibility for climate change and ecological destruction at precisely the moment their catastrophic impacts have become impossible to avoid. As Min Hyoung Song points out in *Climate Lyricism* (2022), '[w]hile it is obviously dangerous to overestimate the power of human agency, there is also grave danger in underestimating it' (3). Particular actions undertaken by particular individuals—acting alone, as part of communities, corporations, political groups, or as representatives of nation states—directly cause climate change and environmental harm. And if particular actors cause environmental harm, then interventions can be made, behaviours changed, and the very worst consequences evaded.

While recognising the usefulness of concepts like slow violence and hyperobjects for illuminating the challenges of scale posed by environmental problems, it is my contention, firstly, that to become too occupied with irrepresentability or unknowability carries political dangers of inertia, denialism, and affective

overwhelm. Treating climate and environmental crises as *too big* to be truly comprehended, let alone acted upon, locates these crises outside of human agency and intervention—despite their status as anthropogenic creations. Furthermore, what is often posited as 'unthinkable' (Thacker 2011, 1) in the environmental humanities might be more accurately described as what we do not *want* to think about: topics that direct our attention to precarious populations, whether communities on the frontlines of extractivism or species on the brink of extinction.[1] Secondly, I propose that productive literary responses to these representational challenges currently exist in ecogothic fiction. The Gothic traditionally reckons with repressed knowledge; today, it finds renewed charge in the half-buried horrors of social and ecological exploitation upon which everyday life functions. Ecogothic reckons with repressed knowledge of ecological damage, its victims, and the actors responsible; in doing so, it restores vital historical and political contexts for environmental collapse. With this thesis, I aim to demonstrate how ecogothic fiction complicates and challenges dominant concepts in the environmental humanities with implications not only for the academy, but for how we understand the political stakes of literature's engagement with human–environment relations.

Of course, individual responsibility and capacity to act are stratified, as ongoing discussions about the Anthropocene, its terminology and dating, remind us. To briefly summarise a now well-rehearsed debate, the 'Anthropocene' is a term proposed by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000 to delineate a new geological epoch marked by human terraforming of the Earth—an era distinct from the relative stability and predictability of climate conditions that defined the Holocene. The question of

[1] My thinking here builds upon Rebecca Duncan's (2023) illuminating account of moving beyond theories of globalisation in Gothic studies towards a 'world-ecology' (Jason Moore's terminology) that is better able to account for how industrial processes of mining, manufacturing, and waste disposal have increasingly been outsourced to the Global South.

when this human-defined epoch began—if it can be said to exist at all—is hotly debated, in part because the implications of such an epoch in which humans now act as geological agents (Chakrabarty 2009) hold different kinds of significance for humanities and social science disciplines than they do for geology and earth sciences. For Kathryn Yusoff, 'the origins of the Anthropocene are intensely political in how they draw the world of the present into being and give shape and race to its world-making subjects' (2018, 24-5). The socio-political stakes of the Anthropocene are high because the concept inscribes assumptions about who or what counts as 'human', whose behaviours are harmful, and who is ultimately named culpable for catastrophic environmental damages. As Sylvia Wynter notes, the 'larger issue is, then, the incorporation of all forms of human being into a single homogenized descriptive statement that is based on the figure of the West's liberal monohumanist *Man*' (2015, 23).

In response to these concerns, Jason Moore has argued instead for the 'Capitalocene' to attribute global changes to 'the endless accumulation of capital' (2016, 5) under a capitalist mode of production that operates on a logic of extraction from nonhuman entities as 'natural resources'.[2] Donna Haraway and others (2015) have suggested 'Plantationocene' in recognition of the homogenisation of ecologies, the translocation of invasive species, exclusion of beings that do not serve immediate human interests, and the violence of slavery and other forms of exploited human labour put to manually shaping and maintaining such uniform spaces. Haraway's other intervention treats the Anthropocene as a 'boundary event' that will ideally be 'as short/thin as possible' before ushering in the 'Chthulucene' (2015, 160), a new age of

[2] While Jason Moore and Donna Haraway both use 'Capitalocene' extensively in their work, they credit its coinage to Andreas Malm, who began using the term as a graduate student in presentations in 2009.

ecological restoration and regeneration. Haraway's latter concept simultaneously riffs on and rebuffs H. P. Lovecraft's 'misogynist racial-nightmare monster' (2015, 160), Cthulhu, the spectre of gender and racial prejudice that lurks beside utopian visions of more-than-human assemblages. I turn my gaze to those monsters whose presences, like Cthulhu's, inform environmental humanities concepts even as they are ostensibly rejected from the field.

Mindful of the controversies just described, I opt to use 'Anthropocene' in this thesis for a number of reasons. Firstly, suggested alternatives do not identify 'agents' as such; capital and plantations are human inventions that do not exist independently of humanity. Laying responsibility with 'capitalism' or 'plantations' obscures those particular agents that ought to be held to account by shifting the blame to abstract networks of organising power and land. Neither are industrial extraction and expansion limited to a capitalist mode of production; the Soviet Union and China were as intently expansionist and ecologically destructive in the twentieth century under communist leadership as capitalist states. While undeniably devastating, capitalism is not the only destructive means of 'organizing nature' (Moore 2016, 7). I am more persuaded by arguments made by Heather Davis and Zoe Todd (2017) that seek to backdate the Anthropocene to indicate that the blame lies not with 'humans' as they have always existed—or some fundamental fault in human 'nature'—but with particular ideologies and economic modes of production mutually reproducing one another: colonialism, extractivism, growth. This project of seeking for origins that entwine environmental and socio-political harms further aligns with the ecogothic mode, which, as I intend to

demonstrate, turns toward the past to unearth concealed histories of non/human suffering and exploitation.[3]

In this Introduction, I provide an overview of recent thinking in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities to situate the project and its contributions. I introduce the concept of 'ecogothic' through notable work in the field since its inception and provide distinctions between ecogothic and other forms of climate fiction. I then propose my own definition of the contemporary ecogothic novel centred on four main features: time, intimacy, affect, and form. I conclude the Introduction with a reflection on relationships between the primary texts, their diverse authorship and geographies, a note on my positionality as a researcher, and a roadmap of the thesis.

Environmental Fictions: Realist, Apocalyptic, Ecogothic

While the hyperobject cannot be seen in its totality, it can be abstractly *thought* (Morton 2013, 3), and this representational gap is precisely where fiction can be enlisted to assist in the comprehension of global environmental problems. Literary forms are embodied, affective—a different kind of speculative processing to scientific data collection and modelling, capable of representing overlapping and compounding crises: environmental, political, ethical, temporal, epistemological, and aesthetic. Despite—or perhaps in recognition of—the numerous challenges to representing environmental crises outlined above, contemporary fiction is producing innovative forms for addressing climate and ecological collapse. I turn now to three such ascendent literary genres: 1) climate realism, 2) apocalypse fiction, and 3) the ecogothic.

[3] I use 'non/human' to refer to both humans and nonhumans collectively and to indicate their intricate entanglements.

Climate Realism

Climate change has gained exceptional status among today's ecological crises for multiple reasons: climate is intrinsically global whereas other crises are more localised (if broadly dispersed); climate change accelerates and exacerbates other forms of environmental degradation, like deforestation, ocean acidification, desertification, and the spread of invasive species; and climate change has contributed to the five largest mass extinction events of the past (Bond and Grasby 2020), establishing an historical precedent for being the most disruptive and destructive force for planetary life. While bearing in mind the specificity of climate change as a particular ecological problem caused by injecting carbon dioxide from outside the carbon cycle into the atmosphere and thereby destabilising the global climate system, it is clear that climate change now occupies a more generalised and symbolic place in the cultural imagination as a focal point for concerns about futurity, longevity, stewardship, deep time, and extinction.

In *Climate Crisis and the 21st-Century British Novel*, Astrid Bracke asserts that cultural awareness of climate change is now so entrenched that a 'climate crisis shorthand' can be identified in contemporary texts, whereby 'a few words or an image are often enough to encapsulate what is essentially a complex issue' (2018, 2). Ben Lerner's 2014 novel *10:04* provides an example of the climate crisis shorthand in contemporary realist fiction through his narrator's neurotic reference to the weather being 'unseasonably warm' (7, 16, 32, 63, 66, 153, 164, 213, 231).[4] Bracke points to these fleeting moments of worry or acknowledgement as indicators that the climate

[4] A similar passage occurs in Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) when narrator Julian muses on a winter that seemingly failed to arrive: 'the impression of unseasonal, somewhat uncanny, warm weather persisted in my mind, keeping the world, as I experienced it, on edge' (150). Often intersecting with autofiction, climate change realism, as I am calling it, includes Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour* (2012), Jenny Offill's *Weather* (2020), Madeleine Watts's *The Inland Sea* (2021), and Daisy Hildyard's *Emergency* (2022).

crisis has ‘become part of the contemporary cultural consciousness’ that ultimately ‘forms an inherent background to twenty-first-century life’ (2018, 1). Productive engagements with and reconceptualisations of the climate crisis may now be found in ‘texts that do not take climate crisis as their central or only topic’ (Bracke 2018, 6). Jorgen Bruhn and Heidi Hart concur that ‘even in works not explicitly addressing climate crisis, Earth is no longer a “normal” place in which to live’ (2020, 6). Adam Trexler makes a similar, if more expansive, claim in *Anthropocene Fictions* that climate change has already fundamentally altered the novel form: ‘When the novel incorporates things implicated in climate change—climate models, glaciers, cars, future hopes, weather—it becomes impossible to read without the preoccupation of climate change’ (2015, 15). Climate change is rendered a shadowtext of contemporary fiction: ever-present yet addressed only obliquely. For Song, this estranging approach to ‘the everyday’ in fiction helps to reject perceptions of climate change as ‘happening somewhere far away and in an always deferrable future’ (2022, 5). Climate change seeps in at the edges of contemporary realist fiction through anxious preoccupations with the weather, altered seasons, and the sense of a foreshortened future.

There is a danger, however, that in rendering climate change part of the everyday, it becomes mundane, unremarkable, naturalised, and so unactionable. Stephanie LeMenager argues ‘the everyday relies on human habit and its complement of forgetting’ (2017, 221). Depicting the everyday reality of climate change as an underlying anxiety potentially makes it easier to adjust to, ignore, and deny. The danger of waiting for climate change to become more spectacular, more pressing—a pivotal moment or event that we might decisively point to as ‘climate change’—is that such a singular moment may never arrive. As Roy Scranton warns,

> We are unlikely to see any one global “Event” that will mark the transition we’re waiting for, make climate change “real,” and force us to change our ways. The next 30 years are likely, instead, to resemble the slow disaster of the present: we will get used to each new shock, each new brutality, each “new normal.” (2019, n.p.)

Scranton’s description of the ‘slow disaster of the present’ echoes Nixon’s problem of slow violence and the difficulty of capturing the rhythms of environmental degradation in conventional narrative forms. The paradox for reading and writing climate change is that it is at once pervasive—signalled in shorthand allusions to the strangeness of warmer winters—and intangible: too monumentally dispersed across time and space for the comprehensible, human-scale events of the plot of a novel. Scranton implies that even if fictional narratives *can* be made to represent the slow disaster of climate change—which the aforementioned novels arguably *do*—they may nevertheless fail to produce the desired emotional responses or changes in readers’ behaviour appropriate to the scale of the problem. Intent on reflecting our familiar anxieties and everyday forms of denial back to us, a naturalistic approach potentially falls flat.

Apocalypse—Soon!

In contending with the vast spatial and temporal scales of global climate change and attempting to communicate the urgency with which action needs to be taken, environmentally conscious fiction has often utilised eschatological narrative structures that centre on an event (*the* Event) of apocalyptic magnitude. Popular literary fiction like Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006) deploys disaster narratives in which the familiar world ends in a ‘long shear of

light' (McCarthy 2009, 54) leaving lonesome narrators to stalk desolate lands as the proleptic archivists of anthropogenic catastrophe.[5]

Apocalypse narratives seek to 'illuminate the true nature of what has been brought to an end' (Berger 1999, 5), operating on the assumption that the barbarity and absurdity of the carbon era cannot be fully apprehended until its close. Apocalyptic depictions of the climate Event seek to bring that revelatory end into focus by emphasising the likely outcomes of continued extraction and consumption, such as economic and ecological collapse, resource depletion, and critical biodiversity loss. Scientific reports and predictions on climate change perform a similar function by generating visions of the future and consequently shaping how climate change appears in the collective imagination. Bracke observes how the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) not only makes recommendations for global policy but also 'provides the images and language that shape cultural awareness of climate crisis' (2018, 3). Ted Toadvine suggests that, today, 'environmental prophesies and eco-dystopian fiction […] have fed and borrowed from each other to the point where they can no longer rigorously be distinguished' (2017, 221). Importantly, Toadvine's observation of the comingling of fictional and nonfictional narratives indicates that climate fiction does not merely reflect or respond to scientific understandings of environmental problems; it also actively contributes to and shapes how ecological problems are conceived of in broader cultural and scientific imaginaries. He calls these interwoven predictions the 'eco-eschatological narrative' (221).

[5] It is worth noting that these novels, frequently cited as touchstones of the cli-fi genre, are not about climate change in the sense of a specific intervention in the carbon cycle described above (likely because of the narrative problems climate change poses to time, setting, and plot); rather, they grasp the socioeconomic and geopolitical challenges exacerbated by climate change effects, be they floods, nonhuman animal die-offs, resource scarcity, or human displacement and migration.

Whether they appear in climate novels or IPCC reports, eco-eschatological narratives are contentious. Critics have queried the effectiveness of depictions of climate collapse in fiction and film because they engineer what Timothy Clark calls 'a pleasurable destructiveness': ironically, '[t]he more graphic the depiction of flooding or drought, the more it becomes a phantasmagoria' (2015, 182). When portrayed as a discrete event—a sudden catastrophe or transition—climate change suffers a temporal-affective problem: if the disaster is depicted too close to the reader's present, one risks fostering denialism when the apocalypse does not materialise as predicted; but if depicted too far in the future, the reader is falsely reassured about the distance between themselves and the collapse scenario and can enjoy the disaster as fictitious spectacle (Bracke 2018, 24). As Timothy C. Baker notes, 'a story of climate change as such leads either to catastrophe, with all its narrative comforts, or to an overly optimistic resolution' (2022, 14). A further problem is that, particularly in Hollywood disaster movies like *Interstellar* (2014) or children's animated films like *WALL-E* (2008), climate change is framed alongside imaginary threats like intelligent killer robots and yet-to-be-invented technological solutions such as the mass migration of human beings to other planets. In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2017), Amitav Ghosh laments that climate change is often relegated to science fiction 'as though in the literary imagination climate change were somehow akin to extraterrestrials or interplanetary travel' (7).

Further criticisms of mainstream climate fiction and its eco-eschatological trajectories target embedded narratives of white saviourism and Indigenous erasure. Close reading Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013), Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017), and Bong Joon-ho's film adaptation of *Snowpiercer* (2013), Briggetta Pierrot and Nicole Seymour identify a tendency within popular cli-fi

to ‘simultaneously invoke and erase indigeneity’ (2020, 95). These texts centre white protagonists who employ traditional Indigenous knowledge to survive and thrive in disaster zones, even as the texts invisibilise actual Indigenous peoples. The depiction of climate collapse, of who survives or ‘solves’ the problem, is deeply political. In ‘Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto’, activist group Indigenous Action calls eschatological trajectories the ‘fetishized endings’ of Western linear narratives in which ‘[s]o many are eagerly ready to be the lone survivors of the “zombie apocalypse”’ (2020, 2). The American frontier was once rendered a ‘New World’, too—an opportunity to ‘begin again’ on an ostensibly uninhabited continent. The language of apocalypse—a mythic trajectory toward certain annihilation—supplants human agency with supernatural force, cementing colonial power structures and laundering culpability for genocide (Hardin 2003; Rifkin 2017). Apocalyptic narratives reiterate colonial fantasies of white conquest by depicting a world emptied of Indigenous peoples and their multispecies kin while divesting settlers of culpability for that loss.

Perhaps most problematic in apocalypse fiction is the dominant presumption that the climate crisis is an unprecedented concern of the twenty-first century. Kyle P. Whyte argues,

> the hardships many nonIndigenous people dread most of the climate crisis are ones that Indigenous peoples have endured already due to different forms of colonialism: ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration. (2018, 226)

In this light, the climate crisis might be more accurately framed as ‘the experience of déjà vu’ (Whyte 2018, 227, citing Robin Wall Kimmerer): an ongoing crisis many

centuries in the making. Lawrence Gross describes the enduring legacy of colonial contact on Indigenous peoples as ‘postapocalypse stress syndrome’, its symptoms including heightened rates of substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, mental illness, and suicide among Indigenous people (2014, 33-51). This is not to overlook the resilience and continuation entailed by Indigenous ‘survivance’ (Vizenor 2019, 1); as Gross writes, ‘Native Americans have seen the end of their respective worlds […] Indians survived the apocalypse’ (2014, 33). Rather, the problem with apocalyptic climate fiction is the genre’s focus on climate change as a recent, unprecedented development, which obscures complex histories of ecocide and Indigenous dispossession. As Davis and Todd put it, ‘[t]he Anthropocene […] is really the arrival of the reverberations of that seismic shockwave into the nations who introduced colonial, capitalist processes across the globe in the last half-millennium in the first place’ (2017, 774). To risk a broad strokes characterisation, popular climate fiction is, generally speaking, embroiled in a progressive teleology, accompanied by triumphant survival narratives, and prioritises the continuation of Western civilisation over the survival of other cultures and species.

Given the deficiencies of climate realism and eco-eschatological narratives, I turn now to the ‘ecogothic’ as an alternative mode for apprehending complex histories of ecological crises as irrevocably bound up with socio-political, economic, and racial injustices.

Eco/Gothic

The Gothic is notoriously difficult to fix within strict generic or periodic boundaries because of its tendency to bleed into other genres (horror, science fiction, romance) and its perpetual resurrection since its late-eighteenth-century origins. Rather than

offer a rigid chronology, I present a way into the Gothic through its thematic and aesthetic preoccupations. The Gothic is 'marked by recurring sets of characters, settings, motifs, and themes […] that generally work in concert to elicit "negative" affect' (Weinstock 2023, 15). In combination, these conceits and affects create a recognisably Gothic aesthetic—what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls the Gothic 'formula' (1986, 10).

One of the defining touchstones of the Gothic is the 'uncanny': a sense of uncertainty and eeriness resulting from something at once familiar and strange. Sigmund Freud famously defined the uncanny ('*das Unheimliche*') as a state of anxiety produced by 'something familiar and old – established in the mind and which has become estranged only by the process of repression' ([1919] 2018, 93). Freud's framing is revealing when we consider the Gothic's persistent concern with the past and with (a lack of) control, particularly the terror of being trapped in the circumstances of one's birth. Conversely, for Ernst Jentsch, the uncanny has to do with confusion between subject and object: an atmosphere generated when something inanimate suddenly appears animate (like a doll), or the reverse, when something animate becomes inanimate (such as a corpse). Negative affect is 'elicited by a sense of categorical confusion as humans and nonhuman beings and objects swap places' (Weinstock 2023, 3). Jentsch stresses disorientation and intellectual irresolvability whereas Freud focuses on the repressed, repetition, and doubles (Richardson 2019, 1066-7). Taken together, these definitions of the uncanny incorporate a range of stock Gothic images, from the in/animacies of automatons, zombies, and haunted houses to the past's return in recovered manuscripts, ghosts, and disturbed burial grounds.

What Freud and Jentsch agree on is the uncanny's production of negative affect.[6] The Gothic is a genre of fear, unease, dread, horror, disorientation, and paranoia but also of desire, longing, excitement, and ecstasy. Jack Halberstam articulates this characteristic (and often ambivalent) affective interplay as 'fear of and desire for the other, fear of and desire for the possibly latent perversity lurking within the reader herself' (1995, 13). The Gothic expresses the thrill and terror of proximity to otherness, particularly in hybridised bodies such as vampires, werewolves, and Frankenstein's creature, and even of becoming other to oneself in doppelgängers and tales of madness. Jerrold E. Hogle describes the genre's simultaneous:

> Threats of and longings for gender-crossing, homosexuality or bisexuality, racial mixture, class fluidity, the child in the adult, timeless timeliness, and simultaneous evolution and devolution […] as possibly evil *and* desirable. (2002, 12)

The transgression of boundaries between living/not living, rational/irrational, male/female, human/nonhuman, sanity/madness, domestic/wilderness, beauty/monstrosity delights, excites, and horrifies. For this reason, Gothic literature occupies murky political territory, since its 'representation of "evil" can be used for radical or reactionary ends' (Smith and Hughes 2013, 2). For the reactionary Gothic, the troubling of binary categories *is* the source of terror. Reactionary Gothic seeks to assert control over that which it identifies as wild and transgressive, whether the animalised, (trans)gendered, and/or racialised Other or the unruly environment to be

[6] I am mindful of Catherine Spooner's contention that Gothic, especially in the post-millennial period, 'can increasingly be described as comic, romantic, celebratory, gleeful, whimsical or even joyous' (2017, 3), exemplified across an archive of texts including *The Addams Family* (1964-66), *The Rocky Horror Show* (1973), the transmedia works of Neil Gaiman and Tim Burton, *What We Do in the Shadows* (2014–) and the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007). However, I argue the ecogothic specifically produces and engages negative and ambivalent emotions, so it is this affective Gothic genealogy that I am interested in.

tamed into productive agricultural space or orderly suburbia. Radical (readings of) Gothic meanwhile celebrates its liminality and capacity for disruption, its usurpation of binaries and upending of hegemonic structures of power and control. Hogle continues,

> No other form of writing […] is as insistent as Gothic on juxtaposing potential revolution and possible reaction – about gender, sexuality, race, class, the colonizers versus the colonized, the physical versus the metaphysical, and abnormal versus normal psychology – and leaving both extremes sharply before us. (2002, 13)

It is this sense of political ambiguity and open possibility that so draws me to the Gothic as it refracts the Anthropocene's challenges and confusion. Whereas other genres of climate and eco-fiction like those outlined above often fall prey to triumphalist narratives of human-orchestrated solutions and survival or to the pleasurably cathartic doom of apocalyptic endings, the Gothic wallows in complex feelings, motivations, and culpabilities.

Echoing scholars like Halberstam and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Xavier Aldana Reyes identifies the Gothic's adaptive capacity to 'develop[] horrors that speak of the anxieties of its time', a feature that makes the Gothic 'eminently contemporary' (2014, 57). Halberstam describes a postmodern transition in Gothic writing away 'from a specifically unnatural body to nature itself' (1995, 24), a diagnosis that suggests Gothic's monsters are no longer housed (only) in bounded, humanoid bodies. Instead, the monster *is* the ecology, the familiar environment turned haunted house ('ecology' derives in part from the Greek word *oikos* for 'home'). Dawning awareness of the vast scope of twentieth- and twenty-first-century environmental problems has seeped into Gothic knowledge, producing a new generic iteration: the ecogothic.

A relatively new field of critical inquiry, the 'ecogothic' offers a fruitful lens for analysing the affective, political, ethical, and temporal dimensions of climate and ecological collapse in fiction.[7] The term first emerged in academic discourse in 2013 with the essay collection *Ecogothic*, edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes, and has since been the subject of multiple special issues and conferences. 'Ecogothic' broadly denotes the intersection of ecocriticism and Gothic literature. Its frameworks interrogate familiar subjects of Gothic writing such as fear, monstrosity, and the body with renewed emphasis on the role of the environment, nonhumans, and non-anthropocentric narration (Del Principe 2014, 2). As David Del Principe writes, 'the Gothic is wont to remind us that we are shaped not only by where we come from, but by what we eat, and how we interact with the environment and all forms of life' (2014, 1). The ecogothic emphasises the darker side of these relationships: 'the more disturbing and unsettling aspects of our interactions with nonhuman ecologies' (Keetley and Sivils 2017, 1). The ecogothic is thus borne of contact between the human and nonhuman where perceived boundaries between the two blur or come into conflict.

The emergence of a direct and focused discourse of the 'ecogothic' is perhaps unsurprising at a time when geological processes display a seemingly 'supernatural agency' (Taylor 2018, 114) in their accelerated speed and volatility. In the inaugural issue of *Gothic Nature*, editors Elizabeth Parker and Michelle Poland assert that 'from climate crisis and collapsing permafrost to mass extinction and microplastics inhabiting our bodies, Gothic depictions of Nature seem to have slipped, uninvited, into reality' (2019, 1). The Gothic not only maps onto but *co-constructs* our vision of the

[7] Scholars variously render the term ecogothic, EcoGothic, and ecoGothic. I use 'ecogothic' in this thesis to emphasise how the presence of the 'eco-' prefix, which indicates new awareness of ecological entanglement and nonhuman others, destabilises the colonial authority of the Gothic tradition.

Anthropocene: its tendrils reach from the overgrown ruins of Chernobyl nuclear site to the suspected origin of the COVID-19 virus in bats, a species long associated with vampirism, disease, and death (Parker and Poland 2021, 3).

Scholars have used the ecogothic as a critical lens—rather than a specific genre or literary period[8]—to analyse literature, cinema, video games, and music, and to yield fresh insights about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts in relation to topics such as industrialisation, consumption, and imperial exploration. The ecogothic is a capacious category, and its rapidly expanding intertextual archive invites recognition that these are perhaps *not* such unprecedented times after all. Rather, as Tom Hillard notes,

> such things were always there, *haunting us all along*—anxieties about the dangers of the natural world and our place in it, ethical perils of unchecked scientific experimentation and extractive industries, the unstable boundary between human and nonhuman, and a growing dread over human-caused environmental change. (2019, 30, emphasis in original)

From this perspective, the Gothic has always been *ecogothic* in its attention to changing relations between human and nonhuman entities.

Despite the ecogothic's expansive textual and visual archive, some literatures have yet to receive much notice. There has been surprisingly little attention dedicated to ecogothic's twenty-first-century prose forms and there remains a lack of rigorous analysis around the genre's intersection with race, coloniality, and indigeneity. In the

[8] Elizabeth Parker and Simon C. Estok have argued the ecogothic functions as a theoretical mode or approach, whereas ecohorror is a genre. For a fuller discussion, see Elizabeth Parker, '"Just a Piece of Wood": Jan Švankmajer's *Otesánek* and the EcoGothic', in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, edited by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 215-25, and Simon C. Estok, 'Theorising the EcoGothic', *Gothic Nature*, vol. 1, 2019, pp. 34-53.

edited collection *Haunted Nature*, Sladja Blazan argues 'Indigenous cosmologies connecting life and death and human and nonhuman through depictions of haunted ecologies are rather seldom part of the academic discussions': an omission that obscures 'current popular culture's indebtedness to Indigenous story-telling traditions and philosophy' (2022, 67). A lack of attention to Indigenous and global influences on ecogothic fiction partly stems from the Gothic's European cultural and historic roots and scholars' subsequent wariness of inscribing other cultural traditions within Gothic's terrain. Andrew Hock Soon Ng argues, however, that the (eco)Gothic need not be a 'colonial imposition' outside of its Anglo-American heritage 'if the framework itself is open to recalibration and resistance by the text under investigation' (2008, 3). In Ng's view, the Gothic can be a tool for orchestrating comparative literary studies.

The Gothic has an historically fraught relationship with race and indigeneity, but that tension can itself be a site for generative anti-colonial analyses. For example, in Kim TallBear's discussion of the conspicuous absence of settler scholars acknowledging Indigenous intellectual traditions and ontologies in the environmental humanities, TallBear turns to the 2001 Gothic horror film *The Others* (dir. Alejandro Amenábar), a haunted house story, to illustrate the dynamic of Indigenous spectralisation:

> Indigenous people, our movements and our voices are the others it seems the new materialists—indeed most of Western thought—cannot fully comprehend as living. They may hear us like ghosts go bump in the night. Once forced to see us, they may be terrified of the claims we make on their house. The invisibility of our ontologies, the very few references to them in their writing, and reference to indigenous thought by other theoretical traditions as "beliefs" or artifacts of a waning time to be

> studied but not interacted with as truths about a living world—all of this is to deny our vibrancy. (2017, 198)

TallBear's damning assessment of the state of new materialism acknowledges the Gothic's legacy of 'de-animating living indigenous peoples' (2017, 180) by transforming them into ghosts, spirits, and haunting relics on their own stolen land, separated from multispecies kin and denied recognition as fully living persons. But her example also indicates the potential of the Gothic mode for vividly portraying Indigenous experience: the terror of invasion, the uncanniness of altered environments, the horror of subjectivity denied. Following this intriguingly complex combination of critical applications, then, this thesis traces the ways Indigenous-authored texts deliberately engage with, seek to transform, and resist characterisation as 'eco/Gothic'.

A New Definition

The novels I have selected for critical analysis in this thesis share certain aesthetic, thematic, and formal features: shot through with spectres and ghosts, toxic environments, porous borders, colonial crimes, violations of the sacred, uncanny animals, monsters, and hybrids. Their authors combine realist and nonrealist styles and incorporate elements of science fiction, horror, surrealism, conspiracy fiction, epic, nature writing, and Anthropocene Noir. Their haunted environments—from tropical jungles to abandoned lighthouses, polluted coastlines, mines, pipelines, landfills, and jail cells—leave traces that shape the lives of generations that come after, such that the violence of the past never really goes away.

In a departure from existing scholarship that treats the ecogothic as a critical lens applied by scholars to diverse texts spanning hundreds of years, I approach the

ecogothic as a distinct—and distinctly *contemporary*—genre. Caroline Levine defines the work of genres as organising 'constellations of elements into historically recognizable groupings of artistic objects, bringing together forms with themes, styles, and situations of reception' (2015, 13). While this study of early twenty-first-century texts lacks the clarity of a long historical view, I propose there now exists a recognisable group of traits (themes, styles, forms), which, taken together, delineate an emerging ecogothic genre. This genre is deeply interwoven with, yet emerges as distinct from, the Gothic tradition in the way that 'the late twentieth century is not only a moment of rupture and novelty, but also one characterised by a deepening of the extractive and exploitative relationships developed during formal colonialism' (Duncan 2023, 10). As the material conditions of extractivism have rapidly intensified and its ecological effects accumulated, so new cultural forms have arisen, even as they carry traces of older forms rooted in earlier historical transformations.

Across the thesis, I extrapolate four primary features that define the contemporary ecogothic novel:

1) Time: the ecogothic is oriented towards the past, attuned to origins, hauntings, and inheritance, especially as they pertain to ecological collapse and disrupted human–ecological relations.
2) Intimacy: ecogothic is attentive to non-/post-human agencies and to entangled relations that exceed anthropocentric perspectives.
3) Affect: ecogothic dwells in and produces negative and ambivalent emotional states including fear, anxiety, guilt, horror, disgust, disorientation, disassociation, melancholy, mourning, paranoia, shame, and humiliation.
4) Form: ecogothic utilises nonlinear, palimpsestic, and metafictional narrative structures that operate at the limits of the novel form to interrogate

> knowledge production, meaning-making processes, and the legacies of the Gothic tradition.[9]

Though these elements appear to some extent in all of the novels studied, I home in on one of these defining features (time, intimacy, affect, form) as a focal point for each of the analytical close-reading chapters. My new definition of the contemporary ecogothic novel forms an organising structure for the thesis. It is not designed to create a rigid or exclusive typology but to elucidate what the ecogothic uniquely contributes to both creative and critical discourses in its representation of environmental phenomena.

With this framework and the analyses contained therein, I aim to make three contributions to literary studies and the environmental humanities. Firstly, I offer a new definition of 'ecogothic': what it does, how it differs from other kinds of climate fiction, and why it is valuable. Secondly, I investigate the potential of ecogothic fiction to intervene in dominant environmental humanities' discourses. The ecogothic foregrounds concern for history over or alongside concern for the future, it troubles the polarisation of hope and despair as a limited binary for environmental affect, and it challenges the position that porosity and entanglement can be embraced as purely positive experiences. Thirdly, I trace ecogothic's engagement with race and decolonial politics and the potential limitations of that engagement. At its most radical, I argue the ecogothic has the capacity to re-historicise and re-politicise climate and ecological crises by emphasising legacies of invasion, settler colonialism, extractivism, and heteropatriarchy as the origins and reproducers of destructive human–ecological relations today.

---

[9] On terminology: Sarah Dillon notes, 'Where "palimpsestic" refers to the process of layering that produces a palimpsest, "palimpsestuous" describes the structure that one is presented with as a result of that process, and the subsequent reappearance of the underlying script' (2007, 4).

Time

The Gothic genre traditionally sees buried secrets from the past re-emerge to haunt the present, whether in textual form (as lost manuscripts and recovered fragments) or bodily presences (ghosts, monsters, and other supernatural phenomena). Gothic time is irruptive, pervaded by recurring, cyclical, parallel, and alternate histories. In *American Gothic Fiction* (2004), Allan Lloyd-Smith writes that the genre 'is about the *return* of the past, of the repressed and denied, the buried secret that subverts and corrodes the present, whatever the culture does not want to know or admit' (1 emphasis in original). Updated for a newly self-aware Anthropocene epoch, ecogothic time is an appropriate mode for approaching the climate crisis for multiple reasons. Firstly, ecogothic fiction depicts climate collapse as an ongoing, interactive historical process ('the return of the past'); secondly, it unearths criminal and unethical acts, 'the buried secret[s]' that surround practices of extractivism and pollution; and finally, ecogothic unsettles the dominant psychology of denialism, 'whatever the culture does not want to know or admit,' with its foregrounding of taboo subjects and dark revelations.

Focusing on time helps to differentiate ecogothic from the more popular genre of climate change fiction (or 'cli-fi') mentioned above and catalogued in depth by ecocritics like Adam Trexler and Astrid Bracke. Climate change fiction typically renders the disaster event in the present or future: a time beset by extreme temperatures, disaster events like floods and wildfires, and either a breakdown in societal norms or an intensification of authoritarian governance. Cli-fi narratives are wedded to the idea of climate change as a discrete event: a challenge for individual heroes to overcome in feats of skilful survival, often taking cues from action and thriller narratives. Texts

frequently included in cli-fi collections are Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–2013), Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013), Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* (2015), Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018), Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019), and Kim Stanley Robinson's corpus of work. Cli-fi offers moral parables, guides for survival, and ultimately attempts to 'raise awareness' of climate collapse. The genre's perspective is undergirded by a faith in linear, teleological progress and compounding technological development to overcome the challenges of climate change, whether through green capitalism or interplanetary imperialism. As such, climate fiction often manifests a 'heteroreproductive futurism—which looks ever-forward, to new life and new generations—and locates value in the past and present' (Seymour 2013, 213).

If the message of much climate fiction today is to be a good ancestor—as implied by the proliferation of novels featuring children as hopeful symbols of futurity[10]—ecogothic fiction instead explores what it means to be a good descendent or *inheritor* of historical circumstance. Ecogothic turns toward the past with an awareness of the lingering potency of history, ghosts, and inheritance. Its narrative forms are shaped less by plots of discovery, exploration, and survival, and more by relationality, hauntings, and ambivalent kinships—the humiliation of the human in the face of overwhelming ecologies and one's own anticipated demise. Crucially, ecogothic treats the disaster event (the imperial invasion, the founding genocide, the mass extinction of native species) as something that has already happened, its symptoms played out in the present as the return of repressed crimes. In Sharae

[10] Lee Edelman's (2004) critique of the Child as the central motif of reproductive futurism is relevant here. Cli-fi novels where parenthood and/or pregnancy feature as major themes include *Children of Men* (1992) by P. D. James, *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy, *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) by Louise Erdrich, *The End We Start From* (2018) by Megan Hunter, and *A Children's Bible* (2020) by Lydia Millet.

Deckard's terms, the 'nested temporalities' of ecogothic literature, 'imagin[e] past catastrophes as cumulative processes undergirding compound crises in the present' (2021, 180). Catastrophe does not loom in the near or distant future; catastrophe is the continuation of things as they already are. For ecogothic fiction, a future of human intergalactic mastery is impossible because it rests upon the same logic of extractivist growth responsible for climate and ecological collapse in the first place.

There is a cumulative aspect to ecogothic time. In 'Anthropocene Air', Tobias Menely asserts '[t]he catastrophe of the present is not its break with the past but its accretion of the past, a thickening of the air' (2014, 100). As the density of greenhouse gases increases, the atmosphere of the present becomes weighty with the material baggage of past human activity. Menely aligns his argument with that of Walter Benjamin in his famous essay 'On the Concept of History', in which Benjamin depicts history as the amassing of atrocities: 'one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage […] What we call progress is *this* storm' ([1940] 2005, IX). Menely's ecological slant to the Angel of History motif indicates the cumulative consequences of the invention of the steam engine or the deforestation of the Americas as material traces that linger in the atmosphere. We breathe in pollutants produced by past generations of industrialists and are changed by them; the air bequeaths a toxic inheritance. The elusive quality of the polluted air prompts Nick Mansfield to describe climate change as a kind of 'ghost' through which 'the material violence of the past emerges, reincarnate, re-fleshed, in our future' (2008, 14). A haunting that signifies both our repressed past and corrupted relationship with Nature, the climate crisis is an ecogothic monster akin to Frankenstein's abject creation: 'What returns from the past is what we have made' (Mansfield 2008, 6).

By framing climate change as the ghostly accretion of history, both Menely and Mansfield invoke 'hauntology', Jacques Derrida's term in *Specters of Marx* (1993) for the resurgence of political ideals of the past. Amidst the collapse of communist states in the twentieth century, Derrida employed the figure of the ghost to signify Marxism's transhistorical presence: 'a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back' ([1993] 2006, 123). The ghosts of failed revolutions persist in the cultural imaginary, reminding us of 'those moments when a different path might have been taken, turning points whose promise remains unfulfilled' (Coverley 2020, 10). For Mark Fisher, who helped to revive the concept through readings of music and pop culture in the early 2000s, hauntology is a response to 'the closed horizons of capitalism realism' (2014, 26). Since the future is made unavailable—closed by an ongoing neoliberal consensus and anticipated climate collapse—hauntology channels nostalgia for those historical moments imagined to be charged with radical political potential. Fisher presents hauntology as an anti-capitalist politics grounded in the return of the past. Like Benjamin argued in 1940, revolutionary action must be 'nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than by the ideal of liberated grandchildren' (2005, XII). Hauntology is a project of intergenerational justice, a challenge to those living to take up the mantle of the revolutionary dead. In Derrida's terms, '[t]here is no inheritance without a call to responsibility' (1994, 56).

Hauntology resonates with ecogothic's pervasive ghosts, whose presences indicate 'a desire to look beneath and to search for alternatives to received histories, wisdoms and narratives of what has gone before' (Shaw 2018, 107). If the irruptive presence of the past in the present is a Gothic phenomenon, it is also a mode of archival practice: a means of accessing otherwise suppressed and forgotten histories. Rebecca Richardson describes how 'ecocritical approaches position us in relation to

history […] where, beyond seeking causes and effects, we also seek uncanny resonances, a sort of communion across time' (2019, 1064). Inspired by hauntology, queer archival practices, and Indigenous literatures of refusal, I take a position of intentional openness to ghosts and unsettled histories in this thesis, which is simultaneously a movement away from resolution and reconciliation, understanding that such efforts can entail the depoliticised erasure of the past. In one's anxious desire to appease or even exorcise the ghosts that haunt, the archivist risks failing to 'acknowledge the trauma or the loss and seeks instead to hush the voices or to "understand" or master them with meaning and discourse' (Freccero 2006, 71). Indeed, as recent scholarship in Indigenous studies attests, the *refusal* to forgive and forget is a political and ethical orientation (Simpson 2014; Coulthard 2014). Ecogothic's primary temporal intervention is its unsettling of history, its refusal to keep secrets buried and victims forgotten. As Anna Tsing et al. write, '[w]hereas Progress trained us to keep moving forward, to look up to an apex at the end of a horizon, ghosts show us multiple unruly temporalities' (2017, 8).

Intimacy

The ecogothic enacts a different way of writing non/human relations, repositioning humanity as one (temporary, in flux) species among many. Ecogothic is inclined to think, as Baker writes in his discussion of Daisy Hildyard's work, 'of the self as an animal body […] in connection with other animals' (2022, 15). This is particularly evident in Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* series and K-Ming Chang's novel *Bestiary*, where the human body is comprised of and even spliced together with nonhuman animals. While scholarship of the nonhuman turn typically emphasises affirmative valences of intimacy, desire, and liberation from the restrictive confines of

species' boundaries, ecogothic fiction highlights the potential horror of compromised human agency and bodily autonomy. The reframing of the 'human' not as a bounded, sovereign subject but as an open, porous object among other objects (Weinstock 2023) is hyperbolically played out in scenes where humans are incorporated into the bodies of others as animal, object, or food. Val Plumwood observes, 'Human Exceptionalism positions us as the eaters of others who are never themselves eaten' (2008, 324); the violation of this position provokes extreme emotional responses. Fear of mortality and consumption pervades ecogothic interactions with the nonhuman. VanderMeer's writing in particular is overcome with spores, fungi, and rot, his human characters interpenetrated and consumed by bacteria—a state usually associated with death and decay. The ecogothic is primed to portray these moments where the human is decentred or overwhelmed by the unknowable landscape and the myriad other agencies it contains. However, many of the texts analysed in this thesis simultaneously ask what it would be like to *choose* to be decentred, to willingly surrender oneself to the more-than-human world.

Affect

This thesis builds on work that focuses on the potentially generative capacities of *feeling bad*. Ecogothic fiction dwells in the negative emotions of fear, guilt, anxiety, mourning, melancholy, shame, and alienation, emanating from and/or directed toward humanity's disrupted relationships with the more-than-human world. Such an orientation resonates with queer theory, particularly the work of Michael Warner and Sedgwick on shame, and Leo Bersani on *jouissance*. In this tradition, humiliation and the recognition of the abject in oneself are necessary for forging relations with others. Recent thinking in queer ecology extends that openness to the more-than-human. In

Bad Environmentalism (2018), Nicole Seymour makes the case for 'bad'—in the sense of negative but also *inappropriate*—affects. Seymour critiques mainstream environmentalist modes like sincerity, piousness, scolding, and sanctimony that contribute to negative perceptions of environmentalists and activists. She examines how authors use a range of 'bad affects', including irony, camp, ambivalence, dark humour, and satire to challenge dominant discourses of environmentalism without rejecting the environment itself (2018, 151). Her work can be seen as an ecocritical extension of Sianne Ngai's (2007) formative work on 'minor' feelings—those 'ugly' emotions of irritation, envy, and paranoia thought not to stir the same passionate engagement as terror or fury. While texts may generate different emotional responses in different readers, I approach affect as belonging not only to the reader but also located in the texts themselves (following Teagan Bradway's description of reading as a social relation between reader and text [2017, xxxiv], and Heather Houser's coining of '*narrative affect*' to characterise the way 'affects are attached to formal dimensions of texts such as metaphor, plot structure, and character relations' [2014, 3]). The negative affect of ecogothic fiction is not simply a projection of readers' feelings; it emerges from the novels themselves in the act of reading.

Negative affect can shape narrative forms and trajectories. Song describes the 'slower burn of attentiveness' required to apprehend climate change, which demands 'a willingness to sit with discomfort that doesn't fit too neatly into narrative plots' (2022, 67). We might expect to see fiction elide the satisfaction of neat narrative closures, triumphant solutions, or assurances of progress as it becomes attuned to the new affective rhythms of the twenty-first century. Allison Mackey, too, notes the relationship of negative affect to distorted or alternative temporalities. She gives the example of melancholy—understood in the tradition of Freud and Benjamin as prolonged and

pathological attachment to an inappropriate object—as a fitting emotional response to species die-offs. Mackey suggests ‘any kind of closure would be premature in the context of continued resource extraction and ongoing environmental losses’ (2018, 539), making melancholy’s long duration an appropriate reaction to accelerating extinctions. In this context, Mackey argues negative emotions ‘signal constitutive relationality and an *a priori* responsibility to others, to the land, to other human beings and other species’ (2018, 530)—recognising at the affective level the specificity of threatened lifeforms and their unique losses.

Scholars of Indigenous resistance have also defended the generative capacities of negative emotions. Glen Sean Coulthard identifies anger, resentment, and rage as among those emotions likely to be presented ‘in an unsympathetic light—as irrational, as physically and psychologically unhealthy, as reactionary, backward looking, and even as socially pathological’ (2014, 22). Yet he argues these are the very emotions necessary for motivating resistance. Coulthard writes, ‘Indigenous peoples’ anger and resentment can indicate a sign of moral protest and political outrage […] a sign of our critical consciousness’ (22) too often dismissed by proponents of political ‘reconciliation’ between Indigenous and settler colonial states. Negative affect therefore represents an important starting point and ongoing source of sustenance for engaging ecological ethics, thinking through problems of accountability, avoiding complacency, and for motivating political action.

In thinking about the affective registers of ecogothic, I approach the genre as an ‘archive of feeling’ (Cvetkovich 2003; Freeman 2010) capable of accessing suppressed or damaged histories, often through ‘modes of knowledge that have been deliberately and systematically rejected, devalued, and overwritten by dominant narratives’ (Mackey 2018, 536). The genre thus contains generative potential for

recovering maligned Indigenous, queer, working-class, and nonhuman histories. For Elizabeth Freeman, the Gothic can provide an historical understanding arrived at through affect, making use of 'terror, hallucinations, or sexual transport, themselves alternative or subjugated knowledge practices' (2010, 98) to connect physically, affectively, and intimately with those who lived before. In contrast to the thinking, rational, intellectualising mind, Gothic fiction offers, as Renée Fox argues, 'an affective experience of the real […] in place of verisimilitude and representations of everyday life' (2023, 10)—a transcription of what reality *feels* like achieved through non-realist or even supernatural narratives.

Form

The not-quite-novels chosen for analysis in this thesis speak to ongoing discussions in ecocriticism about if and how the novel form is capable of addressing environmental catastrophe. Will the novel endure, or will it be forced to become something else under the weight of compounding catastrophes?

From an ecocritical perspective, the novel is not only the product of, but also 'a participant in […] the processes of industrialization, urbanization, empire, and capitalism that have brought the Anthropocene into being' (Taylor 2018, 110-1). For Jesse Oak Taylor, the novel helped to cultivate 'the modern subject' through its emphasis on individual and societal development and presumption of a stable, unchanging, and fundamentally inert background ('the environment') against which human dramas play out (2018, 113). Not only does book production rely on harmful practices of habitat clearing, deforestation, and the emission of carbon, the novel also maintained 'an environment of *imagined stability* in the midst of transformation' (Taylor 2018, 113) and is therefore implicated in the construction of political economies that

rely on extractive, unsustainable practices by rendering those practices invisible. Ghosh similarly notes the irony of how the realist novel 'came to shape the narrative imagination in precisely that period when the accumulation of carbon in the atmosphere was rewriting the destiny of the earth' (2017, 7). The part of the contemporary ecogothic novel in constructing—and being constructed by—industrial ideologies and modes of production leaves it in an uncomfortable position, since its investigation of ecological collapse is also an investigation into its own complicity. The novels studied here inscribe an anxiety about literary texts and their capacity to convey truth or meaning. Language is rendered hypnotic, misleading, dangerous, and it consistently fails to impart the whole story.

This anxiety, counterintuitively, makes the novel an appropriate form for addressing environmental catastrophe. As Ngai suggests,

> [In] its growing awareness of its inability to significantly change that society […] literature may in fact be the ideal space to investigate ugly feelings […] since the situation of restricted agency from which all of them ensue is one that describes art's own position. (2007, 2)

In other words, since literature has become self-reflexively aware of its own limitations—its ambiguous capacity to compel change to rapidly deteriorating environmental conditions—Ngai wonders if it is not the perfect medium through which to explore negative and ambivalent affects: feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, numbness, and depression. These are guilty novels for guilty times.

For Rebecca Richardson (2019), the experience of *not knowing*, of uncertainty and epistemic bewilderment, is deeply interwoven with a Gothic environmental uncanny where human logic proves insufficient and the environment perplexes. The ecogothic is an appropriate genre for new forms of environmental writing because the

Gothic *already* contains a tradition of de-centring and overwhelming the human subject. Contemporary ecogothic novels encode the horror of being presented with myriad meanings, of being ensnared in interpretative disorientation. As Halberstam writes, '[t]he production of fear in a literary text […] emanates from a vertiginous excess of meaning […] a rhetorical extravagance that produces, quite simply, too much' (1995, 2). I suggest the ecogothic manifests this sense of excess—of meaning becoming *too much*—most prominently in a palimpsestic narrative structure that operates at the very limits of the novel form. The palimpsest, in Sarah Dillon's definition, speaks to a textual relation 'where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other' (2007, 4). Dillon's emphasis on the palimpsest as a form that expresses the 'simultaneity of intimacy and separation' (2007, 6) is particularly appropriate for ecogothic's ambiguous and ambivalent relations.

The trope of the 'found object' or manuscript is a common motif of Gothic literature, whether it be the literary artefact, constructed truth, or stubborn folk tale that connects seemingly irrational knowledge with indisputable material evidence. Such objects draw attention to the textuality of knowledge production and narrative authority, inviting readers to question how they can verify whether something is really true. Forms of textual obscurity abound in Gothic writing, such as 'riddles, rumors, folklore, unreadable manuscripts and inscriptions, ellipses, broken texts, fragments, clotted language, polysyllablism, obscure dialect, inserted narratives, [and] stories-within-stories' (Nick Groom qtd. in Weinstock 2023, 2). The fragmentary form indicates the incompleteness of knowledge and that texts can be untrustworthy and misleading sources of truth. Writing on *Dracula,* Fox suggests Gothic novels engage an affective apprehension of lived experience: they 'posit a real experience of living in the world,

even as they also work against any claims that there are singular or unifying forms that could truly represent this experience' (2023, 20).

Experimental forms make possible alternative narrative structures that privilege proximity, continuity, and relationality in place of character, plot, and closure. They index partial knowledges and subjective, embodied experiences over objective narrators and systematised modes of thought. Reflecting on the limitations of the novel form in the twenty-first century, Chris Holmes and Thom Dancer suggest 'the failure to know and act […] become esthetic ends in their own right and so reflect the actual limits to human and critical agency that constitute life in the Anthropocene' (2021, 376). Rather than constituting a failure, restriction, or defect of the novel form, novels operating 'at the limit' of what can be known—whose representational authority is compromised—represent, Holmes and Dancer argue, the very experience of living in the Anthropocene amidst frustration, confusion, and helplessness. Contemporary novels work 'within representational forms that stage their own imperfect, partial, and limited perspectives' (Holmes and Dancer 2021, 377). In a different context, Bradway argues for a broader view of narrative with a greater focus on forms 'such as address, metonymy, description, point of view, and character', as well as multiple, conflicting, 'potentially queer temporalities of plot, such as suspense, simultaneity, and surprise' (2021, 712). While Bradway aims to rethink the antagonistic relationship between queerness and narrative, her description of narrative as a form that fosters relationality has implications for environmental writing, too; it is not insignificant that she describes narrative 'as an ecology of interdependent forms' (712). Bradway's essay emphasises narratives of continuity over closure and forms that highlight contiguity, proximity, and touch. 'Contiguity lays one thing beside another' (717), making narrative a matter of

‘surprising associations’ (717) between bodies and forms that can even ‘extend relationality between the living and the dead’ (716).

Methods

Choosing Texts

I place very different authors from different parts of the world together in this thesis to bring out shared concerns and responses to environmental and political crises: what Baker calls ‘fragments […] in constellation’ (2022, xvii). Gesturing to Ursula K. Le Guin’s essay, ‘The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction’, Baker writes of the ‘act of gathering, with an emphasis not on linear development and heroism but on placing diverse objects and ideas in relation’ (11). Ngai similarly talks about the feminist ‘method of disjunctive alignment’ as ‘intended to allow the texts to become “readable in new ways” and thus generate fresh examinations of historically tenacious problems’ (2007, 8). The literary archive curated here combines major and understudied authors, ranging from Alexis Wright’s critically revered epic *Carpentaria* (2006) to Jeff VanderMeer’s quintessential text of the New Weird, the *Southern Reach* trilogy (2014), Hanya Yanagihara’s Gothic debut *The People in the Trees* (2013), whose critical attention is steadily growing (yet remains overshadowed by *A Little Life* [2015]), and K-Ming Chang’s first novel *Bestiary* (2020), which—at time of writing—has received no academic criticism. Placing these diverse texts in new constellations, I hope to illuminate unexpected undercurrents and resonances.

This assembled archive combines Euroamerican, Asian American, and Waanyi Australian literatures. The chapters on Yanagihara and Wright that open and close the close-reading analyses share concerns about the ecogothic as a genre with roots in the colonial imaginary and the potential limitations this imposes on its capacity to

depict Indigenous subjectivities. Rather than using these points of connection to propose some universalist ecogothic theory that disregards the specificities of place and context, however, I hope to draw out how particular land relations are Gothicised by structures of colonialism, extractivism, and pollution—how these structures look different in Micronesia, Florida, the Gulf of Carpentaria, and Taiwan. Dwayne Donald's concept of 'ethical relationality' serves as an aspiration and guide in this task:

> Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. This form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or invisibilize the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a particular person understands and experiences living in the world. (2009, 6)

Geographically *Carpentaria* is the odd-one-out, being set in Waanyi territory in the Gulf of Carpentaria in what is currently northern Australia, while the other texts are based in the United States, with diasporic connections to Hawaii, Papa New Guinea, Taiwan, and China. While *Carpentaria*'s difference is in part pivotal to its inclusion—chosen to illuminate the limitations of ecogothic's reach and capacity to represent Indigenous experience—there are also unexpected similarities between these texts beyond the ecogothic qualities sketched above. Ecocritics have identified certain 'family resemblances' (Buell 1995, 57) in the 'settler colonial imaginar[ies]' (Lynch 2014, 379) of the United States and Australia, particularly their strategies for terraforming Native landscapes, which suggest a fertile basis for comparative literary studies. These scholars have identified possibilities for more expansive—even global—comparative studies of settler nations, their projects of elimination, moves to innocence, and

Indigenous narratives of resilience and refusal. This thesis contributes to such a project by placing ecogothic novels of Euro-American, Asian American, and Indigenous Australian authorship in conversation.

Positionality

Since this thesis is concerned with embodiment, ways of knowing, and place, it would be remiss for me not to introduce my own positionality and land relations; as Max Liboiron points out, to remain 'unmarked' (or unremarked) with regards to nation and affiliation 're-centres settlers and whiteness as an unexceptional norm' (2021, 3). I was born in London and spent my childhood scrambling over the pebble beaches of Brighton before moving to Ayr on the west coast of Scotland at the age of ten. My parents are creative professionals hailing from central Scotland and northern England, the first from each of their families to leave trade professions in food production and the military to pursue further education. I have spent my adult life in Edinburgh and Oxford completing academic study programmes.

As a white British researcher living in Scotland, there are limits to what I can know and understand about the texts discussed, which represent very different geographical backgrounds and cultures to where I am from, as well as from one another. Alison Ravenscroft notes that 'the paradox of standpoint theory' is '[t]he coordinates that one can name are always in the field of one's own making, […] the field that one's own epistemologies describe' (2010, 213). We cannot identify our own blindspots. My work will be necessarily incomplete, subjective, and reliant on the work of others. I have indicated in citations and footnotes where such teaching and contributions have been instructive. Referring to Sara Ahmed's work on 'the politics of citation' (2013), Zoe Todd warns that structures of whiteness in academia are also

'citational—one must cite white men to get ahead' (2016, 13) to the detriment of Indigenous scholars and writers of colour.[11] While determined to read and cite widely, I have also sought to avoid extractive reading practices: treating texts as sources to pull things from to create value for myself from others' work, particularly those of Indigenous authors and scholars (Liboiron 2021). There is always a risk of mistranslation—worse, of epistemic violence—in 'translat[ing] into our own nexus of intelligibility' objects of knowledge (Ravenscroft 2010, 214). This is not a reason to give up reading Indigenous texts, even while it *is* a reason to give up the idea of *possessing* knowledge:

> It is important to keep moving towards Aboriginal culture, art and law, but this is a *movement* towards understanding rather than an *arrival*. This is to argue for knowledge as always provisional, not a thing one possesses but a position. (Ravenscroft 2010, 215, emphasis in original)

I seek to position Indigenous and queer literatures and scholarship as the driving force behind this project, to steer ethical relations to the past and to the myriad nonhuman entities that make up our world. I aim to identify the new, emerging—and perhaps *old*—literary forms most apt for communicating those ends.

There are limits, too, to the kinds of knowledge that may be produced and discussed in a doctoral thesis. There is an expectation that such a project will build a unique, cohesive argument in a linear manner, following a clear trajectory based on the substantiated findings of one scholar whose knowledge contributions are distinguished from others. These assumptions about linearity, trajectory, meaning-making, and bounded subjectivity are topics that this work, in part, aims to trouble.

[11] Thanks to David Farrier and Timothy Baker for challenging me when I have failed to engage with Indigenous thought, epistemologies, and scholarship in this project.

Indigenous scholars including Liboiron, Anne Spice, and la paperson articulate the difficulty of translating decolonial and anti-colonial work into academic research frameworks, which overwhelmingly utilise colonial methods of generating and legitimising knowledge: making claims to objectivity and originality in place of subjective or embodied theorising, collaboration, epistemic humility, and regard for peers and predecessors. Tyson Yunkaporta describes the goal of objectivity in contemporary science and research as 'an impossible and god-like (greater-than) position that floats in empty space and observes the field while not being part of it' (2021, 40). I have tried not to efface myself from this thesis, to instead lay trails of breadcrumbs to my teachers and makers.

While this thesis is primarily situated in and alongside theory from ecocriticism and the environmental humanities, it often interrogates and pushes back against these disciplines, motivated by Indigenous and anti-colonial critiques as well as by the insights derived from its archive of ecogothic fiction. These texts have served as defamiliarising lenses that show up overlooked concerns and subjects. Métis scholar Zoe Todd, for instance, articulates particular frustration that:

> the Ontological Turn—with its breathless 'realisations' that animals, the climate, water, 'atmospheres' and non-human presences like ancestors and spirits are *sentient* and *possess agency*, that 'nature' and 'culture', 'human' and 'animal' may not be so separate after all—is itself perpetuating the exploitation of Indigenous peoples. (2016, 16)

Anne Stewart includes prominent non-Indigenous scholars of new materialism like Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, and Louis Althusser in her criticism that '[e]ven in its most postcolonial moments […] the field remains distinctly silent on its potential indebtedness to Indigenous or non-Eurowestern knowledge traditions' (2022, 22-3). I

engage with these fields and scholars in light of such critiques and attempt to illuminate linkages to Indigenous thought. In thinking about the work of Indigenous authors and scholars and writers of colour in this project, I explore how their creative forms might dually contribute to *and* resist the category of 'ecogothic'. To my mind, the contemporary ecogothic is distinct from the Gothic tradition in part because of its centring of Indigenous peoples and people of colour as the *subjects* of its uncanny environments, not (only) its ghosts, monsters, or objects of racialised terror. This distinction does not mean ecogothic fiction is necessarily removed from Gothic's exoticizing gaze, but that it often mocks, troubles, destabilises, and *makes visible* that exoticizing gaze, diminishing its power as a naturalised or neutral perspective.

Roadmap

This Introduction has sketched the scope and parameters of the thesis and introduced the four defining features of ecogothic that organise its structure: time (oriented toward the past), entanglement (intimacies with human and nonhuman agencies), affect (ambivalent and negative emotional states), and form (palimpsestic, nonlinear, and metanarrative structures).

In Chapter I: Time, the first close-reading chapter, I articulate a theory of 'petroaesthetics' through an analysis of Hanya Yanagihara's first novel *The People in the Trees* (2013). I investigate Yanagihara's deployment of fossil-fuel imagery—particularly her attentiveness to oil, plastic, asphalt, and other petroleum-derived substances—to connect the traumatic experiences of child abuse, colonialism, extractivism, and species extinctions. I explore how Yanagihara manipulates the temporal scales of slow and sudden violence through the narrator's deferred confessions of sexual abuse, paralleled with the delayed effects of ecocide. I locate

this analysis within debates around the Anthropocene and deep time to indicate how fossil fuels inform contemporary modes of writing time. I further situate *The People in the Trees* in critical relation to the novel's Gothic forebears—to which it makes extensive reference—to reflect on the Gothic tradition's complicity in perpetuating ecophobia and racial hierarchies that enable colonial exploitation of Indigenous cultures and land.

In Chapter II: Intimacy, I argue the body horror aesthetics of Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy (2014),[12] derived from the unexpected porosity and proximity of human and nonhuman bodies, present entangled embodiment as a mixed or ambivalent experience of being in the world. Counter to predominant discourses in the environmental humanities, the series raises significant concerns about the decentring of human beings as objects among other objects for the potential violence such a perspective can invite. Considering the series as a whole—rather than focusing on *Annihilation* in isolation as much existing criticism has done—I emphasise the entangled epistemologies of the *Southern Reach* as a means of refracting what VanderMeer calls 'our mid-Collapse condition' (2016): making the challenges of the Anthropocene visible through the subjective, fragmented glimpses of a decentred human perspective. Approaching the series through the lens of ecogothic, I highlight the figure of the doppelgänger and the notion of haunting as representations of how reality has become uncanny, sinister, and unreliable in its ability to deliver truth or meaning. The chapter thus approaches bodily and epistemic entanglements as disorienting and disempowering, complicating more affirmative visions of intimacy and cohabitation.

[12] I analyse the original 2014 trilogy; a fourth instalment in the series is due to be published in late 2024.

In dialogue with K-Ming Chang's 2020 novel *Bestiary*, Chapter III: Affect focuses on the emotional complexity of turning towards the past to encounter histories of both queer pleasure and settler colonial violence. Whereas queer ecology has generally espoused positive narratives about more-than-human entanglement and the desire to connect affirmatively with ancestors, I show how an ecogothic approach—with its affective repertoire of fear, desire, disgust, disorientation, and horror—complicates these narratives, illuminating circumstances where distance and alterity may be necessary for forging ethical relations with others, human and nonhuman, living and dead. I show how Chang utilises the ecogothic to articulate the uncanniness of environments made un/familiar by colonisation, extractivism, and urban development, bringing to light fears of the homogenisation of gender, sexuality, land, culture, and biodiversity under a globalised 'racial capitalism' (Robinson 1983). Finally, I approach the ecogothic as an 'archive of feeling' (Cvetkovich 2003) capable of accessing suppressed histories of war, invasion, and displacement alongside glimmers of queer possibility and anti-colonial resistance.

In the final close-reading chapter, Chapter IV: Form, I turn to Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006) to explore the potential limitations of the ecogothic mode. While the thesis largely evaluates the ecogothic's potential to restore historical and political contexts to discussions of environmental collapse, Wright's novel summons the Gothic as a tool of reactionary settler hysteria weaponised against Indigenous peoples. As a genre of excavation, the Gothic resembles the subterranean mining infrastructure protested by Indigenous water and land defenders—like those depicted in *Carpentaria*—extracting sacred knowledge as well as oil to engineer categories of racial difference. Gothic is one of many forms and genres incorporated into Wright's palimpsestic epic; the novel models a narrative form capable of holding together

heterogeneous accounts of Land attentive to the relations of humans, animals, spirits, and the claypans in the Gulf country. This chapter utilises an expansive understanding of literary form that includes not only aesthetic and sociopolitical arrangements but also nonhuman lifeways, migrations, and interdependencies as colliding infrastructures.

The Conclusion threads together core ideas across these diverse ecogothic novels to summarise and contextualise the contributions the thesis makes as a whole and to discuss the genre's stakes and political implications. The liminal novels I examine here illustrate a number of interwoven ecogothic concerns: the deep historical origins of ecological collapse and the methods for historicising and archiving their traces, the potential for both care and harm generated by interspecies' intimacy, the range of emotive responses produced by non/human entanglement and confrontation of human impacts on the more-than-human world, and finally, the material forms and legibility of environmental damage shaped by various kinds of archive—novels, museums, songs, and bodies.

The first two texts, *The People in the Trees* and the *Southern Reach*, are narrated by settler scientists intent on knowing and mastering foreign ecologies. Their individual missions are set against a backdrop of extractivist enterprises spanning national militaries, intelligence agencies, academic research, and pharmaceutical companies. The second two texts, *Bestiary* and *Carpentaria*, utilise Tayal and Waanyi oral archives to centre Indigenous subjectivities in ecogothic landscapes made uncanny by settler mining, agriculture, and waste—resisting and reinterpreting a genre that has historically encoded anxieties of imperial expansion, racialised others, and reverse colonisation. Ecogothic fiction illuminates how environmental issues are connected by histories of conquest, invasion, settler colonialism, scientific knowledge

production, fossil fuel extractivism, and heteropatriarchal ideologies that cast women and nonhuman beings as market resources. The genre thus harbours potential to restore origins and culpability for concealed harm. In the latter chapters, however, I raise the possibility that the ‘ecogothic’ might not be the right way to approach or collate these texts, owing to the Gothic’s generic histories of complicity in the dehumanisation of non-white people, its monstering of gender and sexual diversity, and its perpetuation of ecophobia. Part of the project of this thesis is to tease out the limitations of an ecogothic mode in seeking to restore historical and political contexts to environmental crises. However, in the spirit of reclaiming difficult and complicated histories, foregrounding ambivalent and uncomfortable affects, and embracing tensions, difference, and alterity, the ecogothic warrants greater attention as both genre and method.

CHAPTER I: TIME

The Violent Time(s) of Hanya Yanagihara's *The People in the Trees*

Introduction: Oily Time

Anthropocene time behaves abnormally, operating at scales human beings are unused to processing: whether the 'slow violence' (Nixon 2011) of exposure to pollution, radiation, or contaminants, or the 'deep time' (McPhee 1980) of nonhuman history, marked by imperceptibly gradual geological changes. These vast temporal scales, ordinarily exceeding the scope of a human lifetime, crystallise in the Anthropocene, the recently defined (and much contested) epoch of 'the human'. With the hyper-charged extraction and consumption of fossil-fuelled empires accelerating changes to the Earth's biomass, carbon and hydrological cycles, and ocean and atmospheric temperatures, time newly thrums with the collective agency of the human species, who 'now wield a geological force' (Chakrabarty 2009, 206). While Karl Marx wrote '[t]he tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living' (1852, n.p.), the Anthropocene lends that generational weight a distinct materiality in the sticky, visceral residues of fossil fuels and petroleum-derived substances. In the Introduction, I traced Tobias Menely's ideas about Anthropocene time and air, where Menely observes the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere forms an 'accretion of the past, a thickening of the air' (2014, 100). The weight of history—marked by the cumulative presence of carbon emissions, plastics,

radiation, and pollution—shapes the material circumstances of those living in the present. In this sense, climate change is 'a very material ghost' (Mansfield 2008, I.6), an environmental hauntology.

The language of ghosts and hauntings, with their attendant affective registers of horror, terror, and guilt, makes the ecogothic novel an appropriate form for thinking with Anthropocene temporalities. As David Farrier writes,

> humans have become that sublime force, the agents of a fearful something that is greater than ourselves. […] Surely the "sublime" is not the right way to characterise our visceral response to these phenomena. The "uncanny" might serve us better. (2016, n.p.)

Hanya Yanagihara's debut novel *The People in the Trees* (2013) renders unruly time a source of horror, stretched and manipulated into numerous uncanny forms, including abnormally extended lifespans, rapid species extinctions, alternate histories, and archival interferences. In this chapter, I argue Yanagihara utilises the ecogothic's extensive vocabulary for temporal experience—including hauntings, the uncanny, the monstrous, and the spectral—to bring together 'the phantom and the forcefully material' (Ginn et al. 2018, 222); in other words, the affective weight of history with the physicality of fossil fuels. As Franklin Ginn et al. remark, 'Haunting is suggestive of both the impress of the fantastic on the real […] and of the potential for traces to haunt the planet's air, sea, soil, and strata for thousands or even millions of years to come' (2018, 221). Ghosts are remnants of suppressed crimes, consequences deferred from their originary violence. It is this form of deferral that I investigate in *The People in the Trees* as a temporal narrative structure that allows Yanagihara to bring into proximity the slow violence of ecocide and the sudden violence of rape. Yanagihara's manipulation of the scales and velocities of harm connects, in Nick Mansfield's words,

‘the savaged body of Nature, and the viciously neglected human other’ (2008, V.24) as victims of the colonial-scientific complex.

The People in the Trees consists of disgraced scientist Norton Perina’s memoirs, edited and annotated by his fawning associate Ronald Kubodera in a paratextual preface, epilogue, and extensive footnotes. Two news reports concerning Perina’s arrest and disappearance also frame the central narrative. The plot concerns Perina’s 1950 expedition to a remote Micronesian island called Ivu’ivu—part of the U’ivu archipelago, named for its largest island—and the consequences of the research trip during the following decades. Perina joins anthropologist Paul Tallent and his research associate Esme Duff to investigate a group of Ivu’ivuans who prolong their lifespans, perhaps indefinitely, by eating the meat of a sacred turtle species called opa’ivu’eke. Those that eat opa’ivu’eke live extraordinarily long and physically healthy lives while their mental capacity diminishes. Perina perceives the excessive vitality of the affected Ivu’ivuans as both monstrous and exploitable; he kills an opa’ivu’eke and smuggles its meat, along with a number of the long-lived Ivu’ivuans, back to the United States for experimentation and publishes the secret to their longevity to great personal enrichment. Perina is later charged with molesting one of the many children he adopts from U’ivu, and—like Vladimir Nabokov’s Humbert Humbert—pens his confession from prison.

While focusing on the role of ecogothic temporalities in *The People in the Trees*, this chapter also examines the relationship between the desire to know and the desire to conquer (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Tuck and Yang 2018). Indeed, this initial close-reading chapter introduces many of the themes and concerns that reverberate through the thesis, including a critical perspective on proximity and entanglement with others (human and otherwise) examined further in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Southern Reach* trilogy;

the ethics and emotions involved in making editorial interventions in archives—complete with palimpsestic 'inscriptions, erasures and reinscriptions' (Dillon 2007, 8)—albeit in more sinister form than does K-Ming Chang in *Bestiary*; and a metafictional interrogation of the Gothic genre as colonial instrument, as Alexis Wright does in *Carpentaria*. Yanagihara's novel is reflexive about its relationship with the Gothic literary tradition. Through extensive intertextuality, Yanagihara implicates the Gothic for its historical role in othering Indigenous peoples and nonhuman beings, its substantiation of a savage–civilised binary, and its complicity in opening Indigenous cultures and territories to extraction. Her metafictional techniques generate the impression of the ecogothic writing back to its antecedents, interrogating the Gothic's history of enabling the excavation of 'natural resources' and knowledge—the latter described by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson as 'an intellectual extraction, a cognitive extraction' (qtd. in Klein 2013). This critical engagement differentiates the contemporary ecogothic novel from its Gothic ancestors by inviting scrutiny of its discursive construction of certain peoples and environments as threatening, profitable, and expendable.

Lying between Asia and the Pacific Ocean, the tropical Pacific Island region is extremely biodiverse. Its tens of thousands of islands contain numerous rare and endangered species, which—due to their relative isolation from other environments—have often evolved independently of relatives on continental landmasses, producing unique endemic variations. Their relative isolation and small size also make island ecosystems vulnerable to overexploitation. Yanagihara's amalgamated Pacific Island setting draws from regional histories of resource extraction, the commodification of Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge, colonial-introduced diseases, and localised extinction events. Her imagined endemic turtle species, the opa'ivu'eke, and

its subsequent ‘discovery’, theft, and extinction mirrors the decline of many Pacific Island species exploited for commercial purposes following colonial contact. For instance, having long been used by Pacific Island peoples for food and health applications, in the late-twentieth century species including the Noni plant, Ngali nut, and mamala tree were controversially patented by North American entrepreneurs for use by pharmaceutical companies and foreign governments (Kariyawasam 2008). The transformation of a once commonly held resource into private intellectual property typically entails its monopolisation, such that it becomes unavailable or prohibitively expensive for those Indigenous communities who traditionally used it (or, as in the case of the opa’ivu’eke, the resource is overexploited to extinction). Vandana Shiva calls this appropriation of Indigenous intellectual material ‘biopiracy’, where ‘an IPR-protected industrial system […] markets commodities that have been developed through local knowledge but are not based on the ethical, epistemological, or ecological structures of that knowledge system’ (2007, 310). Shiva explains how biopiracy creates poverty in Indigenous communities by ‘taking away the last resources, both natural and intellectual, from the poor’ (2007, 312) who were previously able to meet nutritional and medical needs through the material wealth of local ecologies.

The Pacific region has suffered from foreign extraction of not only botanical resources but also human genetic material. Kanchana Kariyawasam (2008) describes the attempted patenting of a cell-line taken from a member of the Hagahai people in Papua New Guinea for diagnostic and vaccination purposes in the United States, and further documents how ‘the unauthorised use of, and access to, genetic resources […] have become common problems in the region’ (84-5). Reflecting this extensive regional history of biopiracy, *The People in the Trees* shows both the biodiversity of

Ivu'ivu and the Ivu'ivuans' collective medical knowledge exploited and eventually displaced by global commercial interests. As will be examined later in this chapter in my discussion of Gothic genre, this extractive relationship is sustained in part by an imperial cultural imaginary that depicts the Pacific Islands as simultaneously sites of paradise and primitivism. In her study of Pacific literature, Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey observes how 'island space [has] functioned as a laboratory' (2007, 8) for colonial projects, whether in experiments with plantation monocultures, slavery, the introduction of invasive species, or nuclear weapons testing. The unique archipelagic features of Micronesia—its proliferation of endemic flora and fauna, its cultural diversity, and its distance from metropolitan centres—are thus appropriated for imperial experimentation. By utilising an alternate history and fictionalised Micronesian setting, Yanagihara illuminates ongoing continuities between biopiracy in the twentieth century and contemporary neocolonial relationships.

Petroaesthetics

As a consequence of Perina's publicising the Ivu'ivuans' longevity to global audiences, Ivu'ivu becomes a target for scientific research, military operations, and pharmaceutical companies, who capture every opa'ivu'eke on the island as well as 'every animal, every plant, every fungus, that could be harvested' (Yanagihara 2018, 284). U'ivu is flooded with missionaries and its inhabitants are beset with homelessness, substance abuse issues, and depression: forced into the state of poverty that Shiva (2007) characterises as typical of regions that have experienced biopiracy. With the influx of colonial influence on the archipelago, U'ivu becomes reliant on fossil fuels for transport to and between the islands and on imported methods of cooking food and fuelling homes. Though *The People in the Trees* does not directly

confront fossil fuel extraction—the incomers seek to isolate and extract the properties of the opa'ivu'eke conducive to eternal youth instead—the association of colonialism with fossil fuels and petroleum-derived materials remains a persistent subtext. Perina describes an artificial lake on Ivu'ivu created and abandoned by the (real) American pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly and Company:

> once were great fields of vegetables and groves of trees, destroyed long ago when Lilly bought rights to the land to begin a turtle breeding farm. Now the lake it had created was a brackish swamp, its water as black and thick as petroleum, the earth around it foul and greasy with poison, the air ahum with the ever-present tornadoes of flies drawn to the smell of death. (Yanagihara 2018, 294)

Petroleum becomes a symbol for the colonial project, extracting all that is lively and valuable and replacing it with poison. Yanagihara's description of the human-made lake as being 'ahum' with flies evokes another ecogothic text concerned with mass extinction: Cormac McCarthy's 2006 novel *The Road*, the ending of which reads, 'In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery' (306-7). McCarthy's narrator ruminates on an early world brimming with potential, its life and mysteries long lost by the time of the novel's present. Perina, too, grapples with 'a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again' (McCarthy [2006] 2010, 307)—but the air in Ivu'ivu is ahum not with mystery, as in McCarthy's early days of the Earth, but with flies feeding on animal corpses.

It is through oil imagery that Yanagihara connects the slow violence of extractivism with the sudden violence of rape. Victor is the most outspoken of Perina's adopted children and exhibits the most clearly traumatised behaviour, having been trafficked to the United States while malnourished and severely unwell at the estimated

age of between four and seven years old. The novel implies Victor was knowingly sold into sexual slavery; the man who sells Victor beseeches Perina, ‘He will do anything you want! Anything! You can do anything with him!’ (Yanagihara 2018, 296) in exchange for whatever Perina will give him (which, it transpires, is a penknife and a handful of pistachios). As a young adolescent, Victor refuses the name Perina has given him and calls himself ‘Vi’ for its U’ivuan sound, challenging Perina’s claims to both paternal authority and colonial possession. To Perina, Vi’s behaviour demonstrates his ‘fundamental—and […] intentional—savagery’ (304): his inability to become fully assimilated as an imperial subject. Perina uses sexual violence to discipline Vi and quash his attempted self-determination. After he rapes Vi, Perina describes the boy’s disaffected state in terms of oil: ‘He would look at me with those flat eyes, but where once had been challenge and obstinance now there was nothing, just a dull black like a shallow puddle of oily water’ (340). The imagery of oil welds seemingly incongruent forms of colonial devastation together, from the extinction of nonhuman animal life to child trafficking and rape. Vi’s flat affect in the wake of sexual abuse further manifests as a kind of temporal dislocation. Perina regards him as behaving in accordance with a different set of temporal rules: ‘[Vi] became a set of social reflexes, many of them misapplied just enough to make him sometimes seem very strange, a person for whom time was measured on a different scale’ (340). Sexual violence produces a life lived out of joint with the world of ordinary social relations. Through the language of oil, Yanagihara associates this effect with the dispersed damages of the Anthropocene, in which human activity on a collective scale falls alarmingly out of sync with the velocities of geological time.

The catastrophic and sudden trauma of rape, however, is withheld for most of the novel, allowing for sustained attention to the kinds of ‘slow deaths’ that Jasbir K.

Puar—riffing on Lauren Berlant's concept—identifies in cases of suicide, anorexia, bulimia, and in the endurance of multiple sexual assaults (2011, 157). In Berlant's definition, 'slow death describes populations *marked out for wearing out*' (2007, 761, original emphasis). From birth, Vi is dispossessed and dehumanised as the man's 'only possession, his only thing to sell or trade' (297), and thus rendered inordinately vulnerable to Perina's abduction and abuse. His life is a consequence of the socio-political conditions on U'ivu that Perina helped to instigate: circumstances of settler colonialism, extractivism, the proliferation of waste and disease, and the breakdown of traditional U'ivuan family relations. As Magdalena Zolkos notes in her reading of the novel, these seemingly disparate forms of trauma are interwoven, for '[i]t is the colonial destruction and dispossession of the people of U'ivu that produce Victor's social vulnerability, first as an abused orphan, next as a recipient of Perina's humanitarian sentiments, and finally as an object of physical, psychological and sexual violence' (2020, 157). In response, Vi's social interactions become 'very strange' (Yanagihara 2018, 340) in their arrhythmic delivery. Berlant describes '[i]mpassivity and other relations of alienation, coolness, detachment, or distraction, especially in subordinated populations, [as] affective forms of engagement with the environment of slow death' (2007, 779). These ambient affects of resignation, numbness, and flatness are attuned to the *ongoingness* of Vi's abuse; rather than the sudden, explosive passions of terror or anger (Ngai 2007, 27) that might accompany a discrete event, these affects are borne of the extended duration of being worn out.

As a nameless and commodified Indigenous child, Vi already bears the mark of slow death, which *The People in the Trees* renders as a visible trace. When Perina takes Vi from U'ivu—bundling him into a (jet-fuelled) helicopter—he describes the child as 'glazed with oil and faintly slick to the touch' (Yanagihara 2018, 297), imprinted with

fossil fuels in ways that presage the multiple forms of violence inflicted upon Vi during his lifetime. Stephanie LeMenager notes a similar association of 'petrophilia' (2012, 72) and paedophilia present in Nabokov's novel *Lolita* (1955), which is a frequent intertextual reference in *The People in the Trees*.[13] LeMenager reads *Lolita* as a road novel, observing how 'Lolita repairs to a gas station toilet to address her hurts after her first "strenuous" sex with Humbert, and ever after the gas station signifies that she is a child who has been abducted and yearns to escape' (2012, 72). While twentieth-century oil culture has generated 'a persistent association of driving with being alive' (LeMenager 2012, 70), the petroaesthetics of *Lolita* and *The People in the Trees* draw critical attention to those subjects forced to move about in fossil-fuel networks against their will. Petroleum materially enables the abduction and rape of these children; as an aesthetic object, it signifies a 'curious moral mobility' (Lionel Trilling qtd. in LeMenager 2012, 71), combining the fetishisation of youth with the fetishisation of oil to produce a perverse image of American freedom.

As a result of these co-constitutive forms of harm, Vi is repeatedly assigned the status of animal or object. Even among the other adopted children, he is considered remarkable for his abject physical state, the '*thoroughness* of [his] infections' (Yanagihara 2018, 305, original emphasis). In an ecogothic version of trans-corporeality (Alaimo 2010), Vi's body is described as being 'home to thousands of visitors' (Yanagihara 2018, 304): a reference to the bacteria, viruses, and 'colonies of glistening, plump lice' (299) that use him as a host, foreshadowing Perina's forced entry of Vi's body in repeat visits to his bedroom. This troubling depiction of a porous

[13] The association of paedophilia with petroleum also appears in *Praiseworthy* (2023), Alexis Wright's satirical climate novel. Protagonist Cause Man Steel hears the word 'paedophile' on the radio and assumes it 'had something to do with petrol' (2023, 230). He warns his young son—who has become obsessed with stories about Aboriginal paedophiles aired on Australian news media—not to become a petrol sniffer.

body home to numerous others challenges the positive associations typically ascribed to 'entanglement' or 'enmeshment' with nonhuman entities in environmental humanities discourses—an idea that will be explored more fully in the following two chapters. Perina's delayed confession to rape and Kubodera's deferral of the narrative's depiction of that catastrophic violence direct attention to these prolonged biopolitical (or 'necropolitical')[14] processes of slow death in the plundering of U'ivu that primes Vi to become a target for Perina's abuse.

The description of Vi's eyes as 'puddles of oily water' foments the novel's broader concerns with the rippling impacts of extractivism and the exploitation of both human and nonhuman subjects, drawn across the scales of the personal and spectacular as well as the slow and globally dispersed. In this chapter, I argue oil flows and puddles more extensively shape the form of *The People in the Trees* through a 'petroaesthetic',[15] whereby the narrative overflows and spirals out of control: pooling in paratextual footnotes where it contaminates all that it touches. Mel Y. Chen describes how oil appears uncannily 'alive' during a spill; but once contained, it is not exactly 'dead' (2012, 227) either. Oil spills proliferate, expanding aggressively without life and often ending the lives of many kinds of being in the process. And yet, as LeMenager notes, oil 'was, once, live matter and [it] acts with a force suggestive of a form of life (2014, 7). Yanagihara's petroaesthetics capture such a state of animate death, the uncanny force of the once-alive, to illustrate the imbrication of colonialism with sexual exploitation, extractivism, and extinction.

---

[14] After Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019).

[15] I use petro-aesthetics here, distinct from Amitav Ghosh's (1992) term 'petrofiction', which he uses to describe fiction that is about oil. Yanagihara's novel is less *about* oil than it is shaped by the aesthetic of oil flows and spills. LeMenager explores the idea of 'petroleum aesthetics' in *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (2014), a work she describes as 'a short cultural history of, essentially, destructive attachment, bad love' (11). Given that *The People in the Trees* ends with Perina professing his love to Victor after he rapes him, LeMenager's characterisation of modern attachments to oil as 'bad love' floats in a curious constellation of negative attachments, fossil fuels, and colonial exploitation.

Overflows of History

Awareness of humanity's position as a geological force poses a significant challenge to the novelist: how to represent the vast and shifting timescales of environmental change when these timescales defy the conventions of the novel form. In Nixon's words, the 'challenge is representational: how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects' (2011, 3). Such a project demands a revaluation of traditional narrative methods for constructing and archiving history, as climate change 'threatens us from a position radically outside the making and unmaking of meaningful historical time' (Mansfield 2008, II.9). Throughout this thesis, I aim to show that where meaning cannot be borne by a text, unusual textual forms and narratological innovations are produced to cope with the excess. Yet, as Berlant reminds us, responses to crises can often be reactionary or 'fabulously unimaginative'—a return to 'whatever offers relief in established clarity' (2018, 157). This is the realm of 'genre flailing', Berlant's term for 'a mode of crisis management that arises after an object, or object world, becomes disturbed in a way that intrudes on one's confidence about how to move in it' (2018, 157). Genre flailing occurs in a moment of heightened emotion as an attempt to reassert control and to slow the tide of rapid change. We see genre flailing illustrated repeatedly in *The People in the Trees* (and the *Southern Reach* trilogy) when characters take samples, make lists, and record details in an attempted 'return to normal science or common sense' (Berlant 2018, 157)—a retreat from the irrational towards epistemic familiarity. However, these flail moments belong to Perina as the narrator of his journal entries, and to Kubodera as editor, as they seek to regain control of a narrative that hurtles them toward escalating legal consequences. The novel itself produces far more

innovative and interesting textual responses to crises of historicism and ecological breakdown.

Yanagihara employs an alternate history and geography in *The People in the Trees* that centres the fictional Micronesian archipelago of U'ivu. Her use of a fictional location allows her to analogise and compress into an abbreviated timeline multiple places with complex histories of colonialism and ecological devastation, including Angra dos Reis in Brazil, Hawaii, and New Guinea.[16] *The People in the Trees* models an 'external' or exploitative colonialism whereby 'fragments of Indigenous worlds, animals, plants and human beings' are extracted to 'build the wealth, the privilege, or feed the appetites of – the colonizers' (Tuck and Yang 2012, 4). The conditions for immortality, contained within the Ivu'ivuans' intellectual traditions and relations with the opa'ivu'eke, are extracted for the benefit of American corporations with the intention of increasing the vitality of Western populations (and, implicitly, suppressing the vitality of the colonised). U'ivu is later settled by missionaries who supplant the Indigenous land relations, languages, customs, and kinship structures in acts of 'profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence' (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5), asserting sovereignty over the land as seized domestic space. In her reading of the novel, Eleanor Byrne persuasively argues that Yanagihara's manipulation of temporal scales:

> bring[s] the colonial history of the genocide of Kanaka Maoli in Hawai'i together with the postwar development of the US military-industrial-scientific complex […] to find a creative aesthetic that can adequately

[16] Yanagihara claims 'the costs of colonization; the brutality that accompanies the West's exploratory hunger—were directly inspired by Hawaii', but 'I found inspiration for [U'ivu's] physical characteristics in Angra dos Reis' (2013, n.p.). The novel is loosely based on the life of Daniel Carleton Gajdusek, who undertook his research in New Guinea.

> address the deep time-frame of precolonial contact and current exploitation. (2017, 968)[17]

By condensing these disparate phases of colonial influence into a discrete period of exploitation spanning the mid-to-late twentieth century, Yanagihara accelerates the slow violence of extractivism and extinction to a pace comprehensible to the time of the novel, laying bare its causal relations.

This acceleration aesthetic simultaneously echoes the heightened velocity of environmental destruction in the Anthropocene. The date of Perina's first expedition to Ivu'ivu, 1950, is also the date favoured by the Anthropocene Working Group to mark the beginning of the Anthropocene epoch (Witze 2023), coinciding with the Great Acceleration: the mid-twentieth-century surge in human population growth, economic growth, urban development, fossil-fuel use, plastic and chemical production, and appearance of radioactive materials commonly agreed to represent a change in the 'magnitude and rate of the human imprint' on the planet (Steffen et al. 2015, 82).[18] The novel's intersection with the Anthropocene epoch raises questions about human agency and responsibility for global environmental harm. While *The People in the Trees* presents an array of collective actors as culpable for the hastened destruction of U'ivu's ecologies and the collapse of its Indigenous cultures, including neo-imperialist nations and transnational corporations, the damage these entities cause ultimately spirals out from decisions and actions taken by Perina in his quest for fame and recognition. By focusing on Perina's influence, the novel conjoins personal and

---

[17] Similarly approaching *The People in the Trees* as 'postcolonial ecoGothic metafiction', Eleanor Byrne focuses on how the novel's 'encounters between colonizer and colonized […] collapse, reverse or unhinge forms of knowing, structures of self-narration and narratives of progress' (2017, 265). Building on Byrne's insights, I focus this chapter on ecogothic temporalities, conjured by Yanagihara through an oil aesthetic.

[18] 1950 has been proposed as the start date for the Anthropocene on account of sediment layers of ash from burning fossil fuels and radioactive plutonium from nuclear bomb testing found in Crawford Lake in Canada, which together form a 'golden spike' of human activity indicative of a new geological epoch (Witze 2023).

environmental histories—even as its narrator tries desperately to suppress and deny those connections and to evade individual culpability for anthropogenic ecological disasters. Whereas Jesse Oak Taylor argues, 'The work of the novel becomes not to account for individual subjects but to materialize the climates of history' (2016, 15), *The People in the Trees* imagines the contemporary novel capable of achieving both. While much ecocriticism has sought to identify new literary forms that move away from assertions of (particularly individual) human agency—denounced as anthropocentric, hubristic, and enthralled to neoliberalism—some scholars have expressed unease 'about dispersing and qualifying our notion of human agency at the very moment we need to make an unprecedented demand upon that agency' (Kerridge 2014, 367). *The People in the Trees* illustrates the problematic consequences of qualifying or denying personal agency through the figure of its repellent unreliable narrator, whose confession is itself a further act of evasion.

While Yanagihara makes use of a fictional setting, *The People in the Trees* is haunted by the real life of American scientist Daniel Carleton Gajdusek, a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Medicine who later pleaded guilty to sexually abusing one of his many adopted children.[19] Gajdusek's journals, both published and private, were used as evidence of his criminality. Yanagihara makes use of this form in *The People in the Trees*, adding a further layer to the notion of the 'guilty novel' mentioned in the Introduction. Gajdusek's research identified the spread of kuru, a rare and fatal neurodegenerative disorder, as originating in the ritualistic practice of funerary cannibalism by the South Fore people of Papua New Guinea. In Yanagihara's novel, the afflicted Ivu'ivuans develop their condition after eating opa'ivu'eke, not deceased

[19] Gajdusek was a respected colleague of Yanagihara's father, a research doctor for the National Institutes of Health in the early 1980s.

relatives, but the spectre of cannibalism persists in the marginal space of editor Kubodera's footnotes. Kubodera cites an interview with Perina where he claims to have witnessed something indescribable in the Ivu'ivu village:

> Suspended over [the fire] was a creature whose identity I couldn't quite discern—it was clearly some sort of mammal, for you could see, still edged along its crown, little bits of black threads that snapped like glass in the heat. But its head was too large to be a dog's, and its limbs too long to be a hog's. As I stared at it, I began to fancy that it might be a primate of some sort, although I had not until then seen any monkeys as substantial as the creature was, and I was scared to follow my line of thinking for fear of reaching the inevitable conclusion. (Yanagihara 2018, 148)

Perina's observation of some indistinct creature roasting on the fire serves to heighten the Gothic horror of the novel by evoking stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as cannibals; but the effect also works by bringing Yanagihara's fiction into uncomfortable proximity with Gajdusek's real discovery, since the conclusion that Perina dares not utter is derived from the reader's reality. There is an uncanniness to the story, which is at once real and invented: a horror familiar and yet repressed by the text.

The scene also provides an early example of Perina's tendency to exclude uncomfortable information from his account: to reach a limit to what he can describe even as his narrative obsessively circles forbidden topics. In another such example, Perina claims to have been 'bewitched' (197) and 'held captive' (198) by a ten-year-old Ivu'ivuan boy—presumably much smaller and physically weaker than Perina—one night in the jungle. When he seems about to describe forcing himself upon the child, his journal entry abruptly ends and jumps ahead to another time and place. Bede Scott

describes the scene as representing ‘a threat to the legibility’ of the text, such that ‘the discourse actively represses these pathological feelings and instead becomes “disaffected”—safely insulated from its own psychic and libidinal reality’ (2020, 104). Perina divests himself of agency through his narrative construction of events; once the narrative reaches the point of incriminating disclosure, it omits, defers, or denies that unspeakable history. Yanagihara’s long, tangential sentences further contribute to this sense of the indescribable. As in the passage quoted above concerning the creature roasting on the fire, the novel’s syntax defers the delivery of meaning until the last possible moment, and even then, that meaning is often too much for the text to bear—merely alluded to or actively withheld, such that the most significant revelations of the novel lurk at its peripheries. The narrative style of *The People in the Trees* chimes with Jack Halberstam’s assessment of the Gothic mode, in which ‘part of the experience of horror comes from the realization that meaning itself runs riot’ (1995, 2). The paratext absorbs the gory details that Perina’s journal entries attempt (unsuccessfully) to erase, creating a subterranean shadowtext pooled in the novel’s lower margins.

The permeable boundary Yanagihara creates between the main narrative and the Gothic paratext—which is sometimes simultaneously a boundary between alternate and actual timelines—is significantly breached when Perina complains about the ‘dreamers’ being forcibly removed from his Stanford laboratory some decades after the first expedition.[20] He recalls, ‘by 1975—after Willowbrook, after Tuskegee, after the birth of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of

[20] ‘Dreamers’ is the name Perina gives to Ivu’ivuans who have eaten opa’ivu’eke and exhibit symptoms of extraordinarily long life and physical health combined with cognitive decline. He ignores the U’ivu term, *mo’o kua’au*, which Tallent translates to mean ‘“without throat,” although *kua’au* can also mean “friends” or “love.” So, without friends. Without love’ (Yanagihara 2018, 183). The afflicted Ivu’ivuans are excluded by their former community out of fear that their condition is contagious; they are named for their loss of kinship ties and isolation. By contrast, Perina names them for what he perceives as their absence of consciousness or recognisable humanity, while simultaneously evoking the ‘Dreamtime’, the catch-all term for Aboriginal Australian cosmologies used by colonial anthropologists.

Biomedical and Behavioral Research—I had lost them for good' (Yanagihara 2018, 285). Perina's treatment of the dreamers is brought into direct proximity with historical cases of medical harm to human subjects: the Willowbrook State School scandal, in which intellectually disabled children were infected with hepatitis A, and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study on poor Black men in Alabama. The dreamers are aligned with historical research subjects deemed infectable and disposable. Though Perina recognises the dreamers' deterioration, he refuses to see himself as responsible, narrating their bondage in passive terms: 'theirs was the shuffle of people leaving the factory after a long day of numbing work, or slouching down the aisle toward their prison cell' (130). Although the dreamers are eventually taken away from Perina, their cognitive decline rapidly worsens in the United States; the narrative implies procedural protection is no substitute for cultural and ecological belonging.

Returning to the notion of an intrusive Gothic paratext, Perina's brief reference to Willowbrook and Tuskegee provokes a significant narratorial interruption from editor Kubodera, who explains the historical context for these cases in a long footnote. Kubodera's description is so extensive that it takes over the main body of the text for more than two pages, pushing Perina's narrative entirely out of view. This is the only moment in the novel when the footnotes usurp Perina's narration—until this point, readers could choose to ignore them. The intervention is significant because it allows Yanagihara to demonstrate the irruptive presence of traumatic histories at a textual level: experiences of medical abuse, neglect, pain, and unnecessary death suffered by vulnerable subjects refuse containment and visually interrupt the narrative present. The intrusion of the paratext implies history is a trauma that cannot (and perhaps should not) be moved on from. But more than that, history actually fails to become past, as Kubodera confirms 'all of them [the dreamers] are still living' (286) at the time

of writing, sequestered to mysterious research laboratories. In this passage, Yanagihara activates the Gothic horror of the mad scientist treating the 'body-as-thing', 'to be utilized without particular care or sensitivity' (Weinstock 2023, 72). The dreamers suffer the effects of a dehumanising clinical gaze that is exacerbated by colonial perceptions of indigeneity and disability as already less-than-human. Their bodies are plasticised, viewed as available for mutilation and broken into fragments: 'their arms sprouting tangles of IVs, their legs harvested for scrapings of skin, of muscle, of bone' (Yanagihara 2018, 285). In their extreme longevity, the dreamers are forced to suffer and to be extracted from without end as a seemingly limitless source for anti-aging science and anthropological curiosity. The novel brings the imagined past relentlessly into the present as history overflows.

While there is an ethical dimension to bearing witness to obscured harm, Kubodera's unusually long footnotes serve an additional, more sinister purpose as an evasion tactic designed to delay Perina's incriminating descriptions of child trafficking and rape. The footnotes are a distraction, 'substituting endless details for the ones omitted, a smoke screen of inessential fact' (Byrne 2017, 972). If the paratext previously functioned as a kind of pipeline or even a sewer—supporting the central narrative and absorbing its abjected material while remaining relatively invisible—this moment is a rupture in the novel's paratextual infrastructure. The sudden profusion of footnotes resembles an oil spill, alarming in its sudden animacy and hitherto unknown capacity to obfuscate Perina's narrative. As the footnotes proliferate and visually contaminate the central text, they blot out its most compromising details with Kubodera's toxic influence.

The page-spanning footnotes precede Kubodera's most significant editorial intervention, which is to remove the journal entry in which Perina confesses to raping

Vi. Where the journal entry should appear in chronological sequence, Kubodera gives the brief footnote: ‘There is a section following this that I have, as an editor, elected to excise’ (339). The most damning evidence against Perina is withheld. The entry is appended to the end of the manuscript as a postscript instead, where Kubodera dismisses it as ‘a curious little footnote’ and ‘a fragment’ (353). Of the incriminating pages, he urges ‘it is not necessary to read them. Our story could end here, and it would be, I hope, as satisfying a conclusion for you as it is for the two of us’ (353). The intervention marks Kubodera’s most explicit collusion in Perina’s abuses of power, though the footnotes already indicate his complicity in Perina’s dehumanising treatment of vulnerable subjects; he calls the dreamers ‘creatures’ rather than ‘people’ and asserts that to touch them, ‘one had the feeling one was touching something made of clay and hair, not something human at all’ (287). Kubodera’s ‘hope’ that the narrative will be ‘satisfying’ to ‘you’ also implicates the reader, who is called upon to examine their response: perhaps to notice the rhetorical persuasion on display, or to interrogate the expected pleasure of reading Gothic texts in which human beings are so debased.

Between Perina’s carefully manipulated version of events and Kubodera’s editorial interventions, Yanagihara indicates a deep concern with narrative control as a form of colonial power. Kubodera’s footnotes attempt to buttress Perina’s influence by substantiating his claims with references to peer-reviewed articles, books, and scientific studies, while obscuring his legal and moral offences. These academic knowledge infrastructures further contribute to the structures of violence and dominance that dispossess the abducted dreamers, the trafficked Indigenous children, the opa’ivu’eke and other native species. Walter Mignolo argues,

> “Science” (knowledge and wisdom) cannot be detached from language; languages are not just “cultural phenomena” […] they are also the

> location where knowledge is inscribed. And, since languages are not something human beings have but rather something of what human beings are, coloniality of power and of knowledge engendered the coloniality of being. (qtd. in Maldonado-Torres 2007, 42)

Perina's journal entries rely upon colonial knowledge systems and power structures: their very language contributes to the construction of the Ivu'ivuans as resources for scientific enquiry. As Byrne observes, *The People in the Trees* 'voic[es] a perpetrator whose account of his crimes discursively reproduces much of the violence to which he confesses' (2017, 970). The novel often resembles Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) with its imperial quest to a remote location whose ecologies and Indigenous peoples are deemed expendable for the colonial project; yet where Conrad's anonymous frame narrator offers some distance from Marlow's telling, creating space for critique and revelation, Kubodera actively colludes in Perina's version of events. Kubodera's editorial work is designed to excuse Perina's behaviour and exonerate his character; although, as I argue later in the chapter, the pair's narrative authority is not complete, and the novel often works to expose and problematise the coloniality of knowledge.

Like the colonial states they uphold and represent, Perina and Kubodera's conjoined accounts are sprawling and expansionist, taking up ever more textual space to exert their narrative authority. Perina's confession to crimes committed against the people and ecology of Ivu'ivu comes towards the end of the novel and spans multiple pages of lists documenting the scale of change:

> The sloths, the hogs, the spiders, the vuakas, the toucans, the parrots, the hunonos, the manamas, the kanavas, the weird lizardlike things, the fuzzy gourds, the palm leaves, the seedpods—shall I tell you how the

> island was stripped of everything, whole forests razed, whole fields of mushrooms and orchids and ferns picked like fat red strawberries and shiny green lettuces and loaded onto the helicopters that were now able to land directly on the island because so many trees had been felled[?] (284)

The lists archive specific species lost—a mixture of familiar and invented creatures that allude to real histories of extinction—while in their accumulation, they attest to the total eradication of nonhuman life and biodiversity on Ivu'ivu. These records of destruction seem to express a protracted mourning, but there is also a self-aggrandising element to Perina's extensive descriptions of a 'pristine' nature whose loss he has himself instigated. The lists effectively index the reach of Perina's impact: how thoroughly he has—if indirectly, through the actions of others—annihilated objects of his fear, resentment, and disgust, and thus made himself significant to an ecology and people that made him feel small.

The novel's narrative pattern of denial and deferment, whereby the violence of an act is only felt or confirmed to have happened much later in the text, lends itself to inscribing the slow violence of environmental degradation. In Nixon's definition, slow violence is 'incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales' (2011, 2). A species may be hunted beyond the point that it can reproduce itself yet not actually become extinct until decades later. First U'ivu and then Ivu'ivu experience their collapse:

> so slowly that no one noticed for many years, things began to go wrong. The people of U'ivu felled many trees and did not replant. They allowed people who did not belong on the island—ho'oalas, or white people—to live among them. The ho'oalas brought with them great beasts made of

> iron that churned up the soft soil […] and great nets with which they scooped vast quantities of seafood from the ocean, more than could ever be consumed. They made waste, mountains of it. (Yanagihara 2018, 91-2)

By placing these variable rates and targets of violence alongside one another—the fast violence of rape and the slow violence of ecocide—Yanagihara scrutinises the visibility of violence: how only certain kinds of harm experienced by certain populations are acknowledged. Though Perina is complicit in the exploitation of U'ivu's Indigenous populations and instigates the extinction of the opa'ivu'eke and many other endemic species, there is no process for prosecuting or even for grieving the loss of these cultures and myriad nonhuman lives (Mortimer-Sandilands 2010).[21]

Indeed, what initially appears to be a remorseful confession is abruptly recast when Perina states: 'even knowing what would become of Ivu'ivu and all its people—I would probably do so again. Well, that is not wholly true: I *would* do so again. I would not even have to consider it for a moment' (274). He does not mourn for particular more-than-human relationships, the loss of biodiversity, or the disrupted lifeways of the U'ivuans; if he mourns for anything, it is the loss of his own capacity for discovery—for novelty, which is really a desire for consumption without end. Perina's merciless attitude spurs him to 'visit[] my share of remote and backwards civilizations' (163) and repeat his practices of colonial extraction across the world. To borrow Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands' description of nature tourism, Perina's orientation toward Indigenous territories effectively 'celebrate[s] their demise by consuming them (and then moving on to something else)' (2010, 342). Perina substitutes one lost object of

[21] Judith Butler articulates the concept of 'a grievable life' in relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004).

desire for the next. In her analysis of the novel, Zolkos likens the motif of immortality to ‘the coloniser’s desire for uncurbed self-expansion through the incorporation of the colonised’ (2020, 157)—an effect further echoed in Perina’s adoption of U’ivuan children, whom he incorporates into the colonial project by turning them into United States citizens.[22] As the U’ivuans’ communal parenting structure breaks down, Perina adopts many of the abandoned children that roam the island in an ostensibly humanitarian gesture—though the rate and scale at which he accumulates them is disquieting even to Perina, who notices ‘something fevered and grotesque, alarming even, about the rate at which I adopted these children’ (292). The rate of adoption exceeds social norms, betraying Perina’s unrestrained appetite.

Kubodera’s defence of Perina goes beyond financial incentive (though one of the news reports claims ‘Perina reportedly transferred most of his assets to Dr. Kubodera, who was a scientist at Perina’s lab for many years’ [349]). Kubodera idolises Perina and implies they share a romantic relationship, though Perina never mentions Kubodera in his journal entries. Kubodera’s infatuation resembles Perina’s own one-sided obsession with Tallent, a projection of sexual desire and hero worship. Kubodera flees with Perina after the latter’s prison sentence, and the pair go into hiding, at which time Kubodera begins to exhibit an extreme appetite, eating ‘until the sun rose, after which I was violently ill. This gluttony unfortunately repeated itself several more times before I realized that my cravings were not for food but for something far away and unattainable’ (352). Like Perina’s accumulation of children, Kubodera’s binge eating is a symptom of a desire he is unable to precisely identify or

[22] There is an implication that Perina instils within his adopted children the imperial desire for unimpeded consumption: ‘they were, after all, healthy American children with healthy American appetites, appetites that I had created and encouraged—but still, the sight of their enthusiastic consumption (and all they seemed to do, in the end, was consume and consume) invoked in me something close to anger’ (Yanagihara 2018, 313).

define; and, like Perina's many denials of personal agency, Kubodera similarly describes his 'gluttony' as something that happens to him, an outside force. He purges his stomach like his editorial work attempts to purge incriminating information from Perina's narrative. The pathological compulsion to consume and accumulate to the point of sickness, displayed by both narrators, is paralleled in the textual overflows of their narrative styles, and in the sprawl of the imperial nation state, which seeks ever more land and vitality to fuel its self-destructive growth.

Imperial Masculinity

Where coloniality is built into the temporal and paratextual structures of *The People in the Trees*, it also infuses the novel's references to the Gothic tradition, which Yanagihara shows to be invested in practices of othering and extracting from Indigenous peoples and territories. Time first comes 'out of joint' when the expedition team—consisting of Perina, Tallent, and Duff—arrives on Ivu'ivu. The dense jungle canopy makes it difficult to distinguish night from day, and the humidity causes Perina's watch to stop working, as 'moisture had crept in through its joints and laced the face over in cobwebby patterns' (Yanagihara 2018, 96). Immediately time assumes a Gothic quality, transformed into an ominous presence whose 'tentacles' (213) ensnare the researchers from afar:

> the definition of time we had to obey was the one determined in the part of the world where people consulted clocks and made and kept appointments, in which time was measured in increments smaller than seasons. It was unsettling to remember that that world existed still, and that as foreign as it was, it was that world that still commanded us, that made our decisions. (213)

In this abdication of responsibility, Perina claims to be a mere operative of the imperial centre, controlled by the world of capitalist clock time. Perina makes many such 'moves to innocence' (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3) in the novel, excusing his actions on Ivu'ivu by claiming to have been 'barely more than a child myself at the time' (Yanagihara 2018, 171), despite being an adult of twenty-five years during the first expedition. Developing Janet Mawhinney's (1998) concept, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang define 'moves to innocence' as tropes that 'attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity' (2012, 3). Indeed, the entire narrative of *The People in the Trees* can be viewed as a joint effort by Perina and Kubodera to restore Perina's reputation, to reconcile his guilt and complicity in the devastation of U'ivu, and to ensure the archipelago remains open to plundering for the material and intellectual benefit of the West.

Perina's decision to join the first expedition to Ivu'ivu is rooted in ideals of imperial masculinity; he dreams of pursuing 'adventure, and with the pure hope of exploration' (2018, 274), dreams frequently associated with desires for mastery, domination, and control. As a child, Perina entertains a fantasy in which 'I was the pioneer and the hero, ruthless and resourceful' (32), imagining his family members weak and dependent upon him. His boyhood amusements involve violence and cruelty: burning ants, catching snakes, torturing bullfrogs, and mocking his disabled mother. In his professional life, too, Perina catalogues by killing; he begins his research career by experimenting on mice, dogs, and chimpanzees, often ending their lives in the process, an experience he both enjoys and views as essential to the production of scientific knowledge. Classifying and controlling specimens—initially nonhuman animals, but later human subjects as well—imposes a sense of clinical order and predictability onto the unknown. As Kelly Hurley remarks in *The Gothic Body*, '[a]n

excessive drive towards classification […] may be seen as an extreme version of this revulsion […] against the forces of disorder' (2009, 27).

Perina is not the only person motivated by 'an excessive drive towards classification'; his scientific pursuits are situated within a web of erroneous and immoral research. His laboratory supervisor seeks to prove a flawed theory of cancer for which Perina vainly dispatches countless mice, monkeys, and dogs. Even knowing the theory to be inaccurate, Perina describes it as 'pleasing […] neat, logical, and satisfyingly plausible' (48). The theory's *appearance* of orderly thought and rationality is prized over its ultimate validity or lack thereof. The dark side of alluringly 'neat' theories is again unfolded in the novel's Gothic paratext. In a footnote, Kubodera claims that as a child living in an orphanage for Native boys, Tallent was the subject of a phrenology experiment designed to prove 'that the Indians had been biologically ordained to lose their lands to the Europeans […] by measuring their skulls' (88). In the novel's repeated allusions to groundless and immoral experiments, the Western scientific approach to knowledge production is shown to be underpinned by the urge to classify and to order those classifications into hierarchies, contributing to genocidal practices through the substantiation of eugenics and the abjection of nonhuman animals. These histories of race science haunt the expedition to Ivu'ivu as the research team lays the groundwork for Indigenous dispossession through similar methods of data collection.

The novel's title, *The People in the Trees*, appears in the body of the text as the name of Tallent's popular anthropological study of the Ivu'ivuans, implying that the subject of Yanagihara's novel is not the dreamers themselves so much as the practical and discursive methods of colonial anthropology. This is partly where Yanagihara's arrangement of the novel breaks down Perina and Kubodera's narrative authority and

constructs a critique of the coloniality of knowledge. Though Tallent is presented as a more empathetic researcher than Perina—claiming to 'know what it's like to be studied' (88), he learns the local language, believes the U'ivuans' Creation history, and forbids Perina to steal an opa'ivu'eke—Tallent nevertheless exhibits a paternalistic attitude toward the archipelago's Indigenous peoples. Tallent claims the U'ivuans 'have no written language' (91) though they are shown to inscribe symbols and hieroglyphs; like Perina, he is only able to perceive that which confirms his preconceptions. Like in VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* series, where research journals proliferate without ever coming close to solving the mystery of Area X, anthropological modes of collecting evidence are repeatedly undermined as hubristic and misguided. For instance, Duff spends hours 'filling entire notebooks with minute descriptions of the most mundane of activities', including 'a six-page narrative of observing one woman's shit, down to a many-paragraphs-long detailing of the shit itself: its consistency, color, odor, tone, texture' (160). The scene lampoons ethnographic enquiry as a mode of knowledge production that creates endless waste material—the journals are, quite literally, full of shit. By recording in such exhaustive detail insignificant events and activities, the anthropologists' records contribute to an excess of information that threatens the possibility of meaningful knowledge production or connection with those whose subjectivity is reduced to that of research specimens.

Bede Scott similarly identifies an assimilation drive in Perina's narrative: 'a desire to make sense of the strange and disorienting world he has entered and a desire to assimilate the prodigies he encounters there into the scientific "order of things"' (2020, 100). But attempts at classification inevitably prove faulty and incomplete, thwarted by the agency of other beings, which Perina perceives as unnatural and even supernatural. Indeed, matter which refuses known and mapped categories is, in Dawn

Keetley's words, 'the very definition of the monstrous' (2016, 8). Upon arriving in Ivu'ivu, the density of plant life challenges Perina's ability to move and navigate, diminishing his sense of importance: 'I was unnerved at how quickly the jungle had swallowed us, at how insignificant our presence was' (84). His descriptions of the Ivu'ivu jungle are relentlessly carnivorous:

> [the trees were] so incessantly thirsty I thought of them as stands of throats, greedily swallowing every drop they could […] this deep in the forest the plants were more ancient and native, and I knew none of them. This ought to have been exciting, but it was not; the total absence of familiarity can make a place seem alien and unconquerable. (98)

The combination of agency and appetite exhibited by nonhuman entities induces a state of panic. Val Plumwood identifies the logic of human exceptionalism that motivates horror at the prospect of being consumed: '[p]redation on humans is monstrous, exceptionalised and subject to extreme retaliation' (2008, 324). But Perina's fear of becoming prey is only part of his agitation; he resents the jungle's 'hunger to consume every surface' (82), since the flora's proliferation makes it a rival for territory that Perina himself seeks to conquer. As Keetley observes, 'vegetal life becomes monstrous in its propensity to grow, to flourish, to overcome (literally) what stands in its path' (2016, 14).[23] Perina ascribes to the jungle a pathological desire for expansion reminiscent of Kubodera's binge eating or of Perina's own uncontrolled accumulation of adoptive children. Cognisant of losing a war for territory and control, Perina feels none of the expected allure of adventure and exploration from his

[23] VanderMeer's series explores the next phase of this threat posed by plant proliferation: the colonisation of human bodies (Keetley 2016, 15).

childhood imaginings, only disorientation at the foreignness of his surroundings and his inability to exert power over them.

Like in VanderMeer's Area X, entities on Ivu'ivu are rarely what they appear: categories of plant, animal, person, predator, prey, friend, and food slide into one another, further eroding Perina's capacity to impose order through classification. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, 'the monster is the harbinger of category crisis […] disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration' (1996, 6). Misrecognition occurs frequently in the Ivu'ivu jungle: a creature that looks like an armadillo is revealed as a 'monstrous beetle' (259), while a 'great swathe of blood' becomes the 'raw, exposed organ' of a tree, before Perina identifies it as 'a teem of butterflies, their crimson wings spattered with a pallid gold' (106). While Perina laments, 'can nothing in this jungle behave as it ought?' (106), what he means is, can nothing behave as he expects given his familiarity with North American flora and fauna. For Perina, category-defying beings can only 'point […] toward the existence of enchantment' (106), the presence of the supernatural. Primed to encounter unknown entities as menacing, Perina's imagination offers gory interpretations for phenomena he cannot immediately decipher. His only strategy for recuperating power is to inflict violence; he repeatedly peels the shells from lizard eggs, killing the foetal creatures inside, ostensibly to document their appearance. Perina's desire to know and classify outweighs any inclination to conserve other life.

Perina's perception of the jungle is further coded as feminine: 'there was the matter of the jungle's profligacy, which I began to resent, as if it were an overdressed woman parading her entire cache of sparkly jewels before me' (99). He begrudges the ecology's perceived decadence, its showiness and unobtainability, which reminds him

of female bodies. Perina expresses a similar disgust for Duff when he learns she is menstruating: ‘I was unable to look at her without thinking of oozing liquids, as thick and heavy as honey but rank and spoiled, seeping from her every hidden orifice’ (101). Such ‘oozing liquids’ as blood, saliva, vaginal secretions, slime, and mould are hallmarks of Gothic texts, and Perina narrates these substances in the register of horror and disgust. Ecophobia, misogyny, and sexual jealousy come together in the language of excess: in contrast with ‘the trim discipline’ of Tallent’s masculine body, Perina seethes at ‘the messy excessiveness of [Duff’s] body’ (196), which threatens to undermine his fantasy of ‘bodily purity and the maintenance of order’ (Zolkos 2020, 156). If ‘slime testifies to the inability of human classificatory systems to contain and master matter’ (Hurley 2009, 36), the perceived ooziness of both the jungle and Esme’s body defies Perina’s attempts to master others through careful taxonomy. Yet Perina’s lingering attention to Duff’s body and its ‘hidden’ secretions simultaneously hints at repressed *desire*. To return to my opening discussion of petroaesthetics, it is the sticky residue of oil that marks Vi out as a target for Perina’s inappropriate attention. Alongside menstrual blood, we might add oil to the list of ceaselessly oozing liquids Perina cannot get out of his mind.

Sexuality is a persistent scourge to Perina’s desired neat and orderly world. He describes his bottled-up attraction to Tallent as a longing that ‘had grown out of my control: I thought of it as a gigantic mushroom, puffy and misshapen and tumorous, ploofing out into strange and fantastic formations’ (251). Sexual desire takes the shape of proliferating fungi, part of the organic, agential world Perina has come to fear and detest. As is characteristic of Gothic fiction, repression does not fully contain unruly feelings—it only distorts them. When Tallent disappears, Perina wonders ‘if [Tallent] had remained in our world, how I might be different, how I might ultimately have found

satisfaction other than in the ways I eventually did' (282), effectively shifting the blame for Perina's paedophilic impulses onto Tallent and his failure to requite Perina's feelings. Unlike Perina's twin brother Owen, who has a series of consensual relationships with adult men, Perina's same-sex desires emerge on Ivu'ivu as a kind of colonial homoeroticism inextricably tied to the situation of discovery, his exploitative power dynamic with Indigenous peoples, and the various forms of violence Perina perpetrates on the island. Since Tallent was once himself an orphaned Indigenous boy like those Perina takes advantage of, it is doubtful that any relationship between the pair would have been free of Perina's exoticizing and paternalizing dominance. Perina's sexual desire is ultimately bound up in his rapacity and desire to conquer.

Gothic Metafiction

Perina's attitude toward the jungle can be understood as 'ecophobic': 'an irrational fear […] of the agency (real or imagined) of nature' (Estok 2013, 74). Simon Estok coins 'ecophobia' to denote a spectrum of negative emotional responses to nonhuman entities, including disgust, fear, contempt, and indifference. Perina incites the destruction of plants and animals, even entire species, on account of the fear and revulsion he feels toward their agency. These affective responses are deeply inflected by his imperial assumptions about the island's inferiority and alien otherness. Ecophobia can also be a reaction to guilt and anxiety about the violence humans have inflicted on the environment (Estok 2019, 41), generating 'a culture obsessed with and fearful of a natural world both monstrous and monstrously wronged' (Keetley and Sivils 2017, 11). Ecophobia encompasses humanity's fear and disgust for its own irretractable imprint on the nonhuman, as well as reflecting anxieties that those afflicted will seek vengeance. For Estok, 'the ecoGothic is at core ecophobic' (2019,

39) since '[t]he imagining of nature as a menacing threat is central to ecoGothic texts' (41). What Estok conspicuously neglects, however, is an analysis of the genre's metafictional qualities, which invite critical distance from the ecophobic perspectives expressed by its characters. For Halberstam (1995), the Gothic is ultimately self-referential: a genre that speaks back to its own formation and legacy. Rather than the ecogothic necessarily being ecophobic, I argue the genre draws attention to the destructive consequences of ecophobia. If, following Cohen's suggestion, we understand the monster figure to be 'an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place' (1996, 4), the monster of *The People in the Trees* is undoubtedly Perina himself, both in spite and because of his rhetorical attempts to make monsters of Ivu'ivu and its inhabitants.

Although Perina claims to have 'never been interested in fictions' (Yanagihara 2018, 203), his account of U'ivu is rife with allusions to literary figures and to tropes from fantasy and adventure literatures.[24] The jungle is 'sodden and creeping and thick with secrets, like something in a fairy tale' (101), while the U'ivuan guides are introduced 'as if in some castaway movie' (83) on the shore. Perina repeats 'as if in a movie' (83), stressing how his perception is shaped by European and Hollywood cinema. DeLoughrey notes how 'the island-adventure genre was central to the indoctrination of British boys into the emerging ideologies of muscular Christianity, British nationalism, and empire' (2007, 13). In his interactions with others, Perina persistently navigates by fictional references, even hiring his nanny 'on the basis of her looks alone: she was dense and sturdy and florid, a Dickensian scullery maid' (291). These direct references to Perina's media consumption operate in tandem with

[24] Of the latter: 'Suddenly my existence here seemed surreal, and the quest—even the word *quest* was something out of fictions and fantasies, in which an object, magical and imbued with improbable powers, is sought by a group of feckless heroes—we were to undertake seemed tinny and cheap. And yet—' (Yanagihara 2018, 94).

Yanagihara's numerous intertextual influences, which conjure works including H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1887), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) through the novel's frame narrative, epistolary form, unreliable narrator, fictitious editor, and Gothic tropes.[25]

It is the Gothic that insidiously informs and gradually unhinges Perina's grasp of reality. The journey through the jungle to reach the Ivu'ivuans' village sees Perina become increasingly paranoid and anxious, for '[i]n the darkness loomed monsters and ghosts, and in what I could not see I saw everything I had ever feared' (207). An archive of Gothic fiction breeds in Perina hysterical responses to ecologies not devoted to serving human interests by associating them with the supernatural and primitive. Perina imagines Tallent to be 'a wandering storyteller whom I had encountered in a dark piney medieval forest, not a humid jungle, and I had given him a coin and a slab of black bread to bewitch me, for a moment to transport me from this world' (89). By transposing the haunted pine forest of European Gothic onto the tropical jungle, Perina overlays Ivu'ivu with a teleological narrative that locates it in an imagined medieval past of superstition, sorcery, and malnutrition, thereby situating Indigenous land within an earlier stage of civilisational development. He nevertheless recognises the transportive quality of storytelling and its attendant allure; Perina is attracted to Tallent and envisions bargaining with him for its desirable 'bewitch[ing]' effect. Fear and desire combine in Perina's narration, fuelled by an archive of Gothic texts and his own spiralling imagination.

This Gothic frame of reference preforms Perina's apprehension of Micronesian cultures such that he cannot meaningfully distinguish between the people he meets

[25] *The People in the Trees* is also similar to Teju Cole's 2011 novel *Open City* in that both novels' narrators work very hard to avoid confronting the fact that they have raped someone. Julius' eloquent ruminations and artful narration are designed to obscure (both his and the reader's) knowledge of his crime.

and the stereotypical portrayals he is primed to encounter. Of the king of U'ivu, Perina reflects, 'the wooden palace, the king with thirty children, the wild boar killing—they all seemed somehow familiar, like something I had once read in, say, a Kipling story about some faraway, allegorical land' (69). Perina experiences the islands as allegorical places significant only for the effect they have on his own psyche, as if 'planted there to remind me of my own presence, my own realness' (264)—a 'realness' implicitly contrasted against the Other's artifice. Perina mocks the ceremonial dress of Indigenous cultures, 'as if they had all outfitted their societies from some inner-jungle-department store that catered exclusively to primitive peoples' (163), betraying his inability to appreciate cultural differences he is supposed to be an expert in studying, and later professes a belief 'that certain ethnic groups are predisposed to certain types of behavior' (168), alerting the reader to the racist, pseudo-scientific beliefs informing Perina's narration. In Mark Rifkin's terms, Perina brings to Ivu'ivu an epistemology of 'settler time': 'a prism through which any evidence of [Indigenous] survival will be interpreted as either vestigial (and thus on the way to imminent extinction) or hopelessly contaminated' (2017, 5). Such a temporal orientation means Perina approaches indigeneity as 'inherently anachronistic' (Rifkin 2017, 5), a belief that fuels his sense of entitlement to possess and ultimately destroy Ivu'ivu's ecology as part of the promised unfolding of Euro-American science, development, and progress across the globe.

Part of the process of othering indigeneity thus happens discursively through Perina's reliance on a Gothic narrative mode. During the researchers' first encounter with Eve, the oldest of the afflicted Ivu'ivuans, Perina describes her as emerging into the clearing by climbing head-first down a tree in a scene reminiscent of Stoker's Count Dracula descending his castle walls:

> when it began to emerge, [Perina] mistook it for a sloth, not a human; unlike a human, who would have shimmied down feet first, this creature led with its arms, which encircled the tree in a tight grip, the rest of its body following limply and uselessly […] it continued to slither down, snakelike. (110-1)

Perina grasps wildly for an appropriate signifier for Eve: human, un-human, she, it, sloth, snake, creature. The dreamers seem to defy categorisation, appearing at once young and old, healthy and unhealthy, human and nonhuman: ‘a strange hybrid, their bodies those of sturdy children, their faces those of someone much older: a crone, a wizard, a sorcerer’ (127). Perina describes the dreamers as bordering on the magical and monstrous: an attribution that declares their humanity indeterminate. Tuck and Yang write that for settlers to seize Indigenous land, ‘Indigenous peoples must be erased, must be made into ghosts’ (2012, 6). Not only does Perina frame the dreamers’ prospective immortality as supernatural: what really seems to terrify him is their refusal to accede to the vanishing Native myth, undermining claims made upon the island and its future governance by Euroamerican invaders.

The irony of Perina’s labelling of the afflicted Ivu’ivuans as ‘the dreamers’—'for their somnambulists’ drool, their dopey half-glaze of clarity, as if they were slogging through a thick sediment of sleep’ (Yanagihara 2018, 138)—is that his own rationality and narrative reliability are frequently called into question. Perina’s journal entries document his sense of ‘com[ing] undone’ (94), with reflections such as ‘I was left wondering for a minute whether I had hallucinated the entire thing’ (168). Confrontation with what Perina perceives to be ‘irrational’ knowledge ruptures his perception of reality, an experience described in geological terms as when ‘the plates of the world shift beneath one and life is forever altered’ (137). This challenge to his colonial ‘order

of things' is repeatedly couched in ecological metaphor as the agency of the earth suddenly becomes all too tangible. When Perina learns Tallent believes the U'ivu Creation history, the knowledge divides his understanding:

> I found myself suddenly imagining a long, fat, chalked line stretching across a flat burned earth. To one side was what I had known, a neat-bricked city of windowless structures, the stuff and facts I knew to be true […] And on the other side was Tallent's world, the shape of which I could not see, for it was obscured by a fog, one that thinned and thickened in unpredictable movements, so that I could discern, occasionally, glimpses of what lay behind it: nothing more than colors and movements, no real shapes; but there was something irresistible there. (94)

The knowledge Perina tries desperately to suppress—that the dreamers have lived for hundreds of years and may be immortal, thus validating the U'ivuan Creation history—appears to him as a kind of atmospheric presence: a 'fog' of ecogothic weather at odds with the orderly 'neat-bricked city' of 'stuff and facts'. This fog indicates 'an order of reality within the novel that does not obey the rules of post-Enlightenment Euro-American empiricism or historicism' (Rifkin 2017, 144). Perina desires this knowledge even as he strives to keep it at bay, for it would prove his 'discovery was real' at the cost of 'upend[ing]' those 'certainties and practicalities' (Yanagihara 2018, 212) that guide his worldview. Jesse Oak Taylor revives the metaphor of the '"atmosphere" of a novel […] as a kind of shorthand for that which cannot be explicitly articulated' (2016, 6), a mood or tone that exceeds its technical qualities. Fog represents the sudden visibility of something usually felt but not perceived; as Menely writes, '[i]t is not that mist obscures vision but that in doing so it makes apprehensible that otherwise invisible atmosphere' (2014, 99). The 'fog' of Yanagihara's ecogothic is, for Perina, the

tantalising promise of Indigenous knowledge he can exploit for his own gain—what he feels to be true and yet represses, for to acknowledge it would be to admit 'the impossible was possible after all' (Yanagihara 2018, 212). It is this knowledge he is simultaneously afraid of and attracted to, as he is to Tallent, and to Ivu'ivu.

In depicting the Ivu'ivu jungle as monstrous, excessive, and predatory—features emphasised through a hysterical Gothic mode—Perina transforms the ecology into a sacrifice zone with extreme consequences for the Ivu'ivuans and native creatures. Naomi Klein defines 'sacrifice zones' as:

> places that, to their extractors, somehow don't count and therefore can be poisoned, drained, or otherwise destroyed, for the supposed greater good of economic progress. This toxic idea has always been intimately tied to imperialism, with disposable peripheries being harnessed to feed a glittering center, and it is bound up too with notions of racial superiority, because in order to have sacrifice zones, you need to have people and cultures who count so little that they are considered deserving of sacrifice. (2014, 176-7)[26]

The homogenising effect of colonial terraforming on local landscapes is experienced as deeply uncanny: that is, the processes of extractivism undertaken as part of colonial enterprise—the elimination of native flora and fauna, importation of non-native species, mining for oil and minerals, imposition of Euroamerican agricultural techniques, and introduction of fossil-fuel based materials such as plastic and asphalt—make once-diverse environments across the globe eerily similar, which produces sensations of dislocation and disorientation while encountering

[26] I cite Klein for her instructive connection of sacrifice zones to imperialism, but Ryan Juskus (2023) has written a critical genealogy of the term that traces its origins to livestock management in the 1970s and its subsequent use by Indigenous resistance and environmental justice groups.

environments that are nevertheless familiar. It is even unnerving to Perina, the very person who instigated such a fundamental transformation. Returning to Ivu'ivu some decades after the first expedition, Perina records his experience of this uncanny homogenisation:

> on the north side of the island […] the jungle had been so eradicated that you often felt like you were in Montana. Here was a different kind of awfulness: no alcohol, no begging, no fires, but U'ivuans working as messengers, and farmhands, and housemaids, and always smiling, smiling, smiling. (294)

Perina is disturbed by that which is most familiar to him when it is encountered out of place: the sudden appearance of a Montana-like landscape and an (artificial) display of emotions he has become unable to feel. It is not simply the devastation of the local ecologies Perina feels is wrong but the importation of the English language and the expectation that one will always be 'smiling' associated with the emotional labour of US service workers.

This is not Perina's initial experience of Ivu'ivu. At first, he is overwhelmed by the jungle and its endless greenery. In retaliation, he pictures urban landscapes in which all nonhuman life has been eradicated: 'visions of deserts, of cities, of hard surfaces: of glass and concrete and chips of mica glinting from asphalted streets' (99). These materials are devoid of the unruly animacy that Perina finds so threatening in the jungle. Only when these petroleum visions are realised does Perina resent what he has helped to create: 'a great acreage of emptiness: no grass, no little white flowers, just dirt so flat and clean it looked swept. I could feel something shift deep inside me: the first stirrings of dread' (276). By assimilating the unknown into the carefully mapped and categorised, Perina loses his capacity for wonder, joy, and enchantment (Scott

2020). The process of knowing and conquering becomes simultaneously one of diminishing: ‘where I had once seen it [the jungle] as something vital and teeming with busyness, with lives, it now seemed to me dead, a vast graveyard of trees, empty of anything imaginable’ (Yanagihara 2018, 206-7). In place of the ecogothic jungle’s ‘mingled delights and horrors’ (217), discovery and colonisation lead to ecological devastation and disaffectedness. Perina’s desire to impose a neat and orderly urban landscape of glass, plastic, asphalt, and concrete, once actualised, generates a pathological state of numbness, passivity, and the absence of passion or interest—in short, a kind of living death. To return to the oil imagery Yanagihara uses to communicate colonial devastation in Vi’s ‘flat eyes’, described as ‘a shallow puddle of oily water’, the effect of proliferating fossil fuels, spread through colonial contact and extraction, is a flattening of vitality and affect.

Marginal Resistance

A seemingly unwilled effect of the oil-like overflows of language in *The People in the Trees* is that Perina and Kubodera eventually say *too much* and inadvertently give voice to alternative viewpoints. Despite their combined attempts to revise Perina’s biography, to efface from its pages those crimes too terrible to confront, eventually those concealed histories do re-emerge—if hidden in footnotes or deferred to postscripts. Though largely sycophantic and used to justify Perina’s actions, Kubodera’s footnotes also contain important glimmers of resistance to Perina’s telling, such as providing details of Duff and Tallent’s published accounts of the expedition, which conflict with Perina’s reports. An initiation ceremony Perina describes, for example, in which a young boy is gangraped by the men of the Ivu’ivu village, does not appear in Duff’s account of the expedition. Perina takes ‘her omission [to be] the

worst sort of intellectual hypocrisy: when documenting a culture, one cannot simply leave out details one finds distasteful or shocking or that do not fit into the tidy narrative one has constructed' (170-1). While presented as a critique of romanticising Indigenous cultures, Duff's omission also casts further doubt on Perina's narrative by raising the possibility that Perina invented the ceremony to justify his own abusive behaviours, for it is the ceremony which Perina claims 'made me rethink certain assumptions I'd always had about childhood, and sex in general, and how there was no single correct attitude to either […] that all ethics or morals are culturally relative' (171).

The footnotes additionally provide fleeting details of a militant resistance group called 'HAWIKA (Hawaiians Avenging White Imperialism, Killing in Anger)' (286), who attempt to rescue the dreamers from a retirement facility in the United States and return them to Ivu'ivu. Kubodera even admits to once having agreed with HAWIKA's aims, venting his frustration that Perina 'should have found some better way to take care of [the dreamers], even that he should have found some way to return them to Ivu'ivu' (288). Such events occur outside the main body of the narrative, presented as marginal or trivial details, but their inclusion introduces hairline fractures into Perina and Kubodera's narrative authority. Though the novel does not provide access to them as perspective characters, Perina's adopted children also resist his narrative by offering alternative views about his character, which Perina relays ironically: 'they had long considered me a colonialist, a eugenicist, and an enemy of native cultures (the terms *Hitlerian*, *white man's privilege*, and *racial holocaust* usually made an appearance)' (320, emphasis in original). Their most successful means of holding Perina to account, however, is through legal conviction; Vi's decision to report Perina

for rape is supported by the vast majority of the other children and by Perina's twin brother, Owen (though the other boys Perina assaults are not represented).

The devastation of U'ivu and Ivu'ivu's Indigenous cultures and the extinction of Ivu'ivu's endemic nonhuman animals are crimes that remain illegible to the court. Lacking legal recognition or a reliable human narrator, the opa'ivu'eke adopts the role of bearing witness to ecocide. At the moment a turtle is about to be ceremonially slaughtered, it turns its gaze to Perina:

> when [the opa'ivu'eke] opened his eyes, he seemed to look in my direction, as if trying to communicate some message meant solely for me. […] his eyes never leaving mine, and I felt myself leaning toward him. But just as I was doing so, I heard the chief […] bring his spear […] down swiftly in front of him, and then the opa'ivu'eke's head was bouncing into my lap, its black eyes still staring at me, its blood weeping onto my shorts. (176)

Yanagihara avoids the explicit passing of judgement that would necessitate anthropomorphising the turtle, so its 'unspoken acknowledgement is a means (albeit perhaps the *only* means) by which unhuman presences can be beheld in a way that does not diminish or circumvent their alterity' (Newson-Errey 2021, 385). In *Writing Animals*, Baker argues, '[w]hether central or peripheral, the appearance of nonhuman animals in fiction challenges the stability of linguistic representation, and the implied anthropocentrism of the novel form' (2019, 7-8). A subject whose gaze is ethically—if not legally or politically—weighty, the opa'ivu'eke disrupts the anthropocentricity of Perina's narration by 'looking back' (Haraway 2007, 19). If language is the site where the coloniality of being is inscribed, inflecting every layer of narration, then 'the nonhuman animal hovers at the fringes of the narrative, representing everything that

language cannot encompass' (Baker 2019, 4). Perina attempts to erase this destabilising effect: at the moment of death, he once again describes the opa'ivu'eke as 'it' rather than 'him', transforming the corpse back into an object of Perina's scientific gaze. Shannon Lambert designates this effect as '[t]he flickering of presence and absence' (2021, 83) of nonhuman animals in *The People in the Trees*, the instability of vitality and personhood ascribed by Perina's alternately affective and clinical descriptions. As reminders of those subjectivities rendered expendable by the colonial project, the frequent appearance of animals in the novel—the beetles, ants, and snakes of Perina's boyhood, the laboratory mice, monkeys, and dogs, and the boars, vuakas, lizards, and turtles of Ivu'ivu—troubles Perina and Kubodera's anthropocentric perspectives. And yet, while amplifying the presence of nonhuman animals, *The People in the Trees* underscores their lack of power or agency to prevent anthropogenic extinctions since almost all of these animals are depicted in death. As Nicole Seymour writes on the question of nonhuman agency, 'while it might be important, for various reasons, to recognize that micro-organisms live on our skin and in our stomachs, micro-organisms cannot vote on climate change legislation' (2020, 198) any more than the opa'ivu'eke can prevent its own ritualistic slaughter.

The People in the Trees illuminates those individuals usually cast from public memory as ungrievable subjects by focusing on the disabled and elderly, Indigenous peoples, and nonhuman animals. While Perina's narrative and Kubodera's editorial work inscribe a coloniality of knowledge and power that attempts to deny or forget incriminating histories, the novel itself draws attention to those forms of slow violence and slow death that make survival precarious and even deliberately foreclosed.

Conclusions

Taking *The People in the Trees* as a case study, this chapter has sought to illustrate the contemporary ecogothic's distinctive relationship to time. At its most incisive, the ecogothic identifies the origins of catastrophic human–ecological relations today in settler colonial practices of extractivism, which Yanagihara depicts as intimately tied to Western scientific knowledge production and its insistence on classification and hierarchy. As major concepts in the environmental humanities have illustrated, the timescales of environmental history are often too vast and gradual for the scope of a novel, and even for the individual mind to comprehend. By compressing the histories of colonialism and ecocide of multiple postcolonial nations into the U'ivu archipelago in the mid-to-late twentieth century, Yanagihara accelerates the slow and accretive effects of environmental degradation to a pace both conducive to the drama of the novel form and illustrative of the increased velocity of anthropogenic changes. In doing so, she illuminates the activities of particular actors as directly responsible for the dispersed harms of colonial violence, extractivism, and ecocide that constitute the origins of an Anthropocene Earth. The eeriness of this heightened velocity is suited to an ecogothic telling, where time behaves in unexpected and uncanny ways, charged with a sinister human agency. However, the temporal horror that Perina identifies as belonging to the extraordinarily old, perhaps immortal, Ivu'ivuans distracts from the disturbing temporal distortions Perina himself instigates or is complicit in, such as his pathological attraction to young children, hasty rate of adoptions, and the rapid species extinctions on U'ivu.

Of course, Perina does everything in his power to disavow agency. *The People in the Trees* makes critical use of a colonial historicising apparatus to reframe Euroamerican domination as innocent, accidental, and inevitable. As editor, Kubodera

colludes with Perina to obscure knowledge of wrongdoing, deliberately delaying and distracting from Perina's crimes. Yet while the journal entries try to purge knowledge of extinctions, cannibalism, and paedophilia, in true Gothic fashion these taboos refuse to stay buried, seeping out into a paratext that haunts the main narrative. It is this formal structure of deferral that connects the sudden violence of Perina's rape, his confession withheld until the postscript, with the delayed effects of colonial contact: the slow collapse of U'ivu and Ivu'ivu's Indigenous cultures as they are assimilated by missionaries and researchers, the removal of native animals that slowly amounts to extinction, and the deforestation and habitat destruction that constitute ecocide. Yanagihara draws attention to the distributed and accumulative forms of colonial and ecological violence perpetuated in the Anthropocene, whose temporal manifestations enable individuals and corporations alike to elude responsibility. By narratively separating cause and effect, Kubodera seeks to rehabilitate Perina's reputation and to deny the significance of these world-destroying acts. While Perina is prosecuted for his rape of Vi—for a short sentence—these other crimes go unacknowledged, unmourned, and unpunished. And yet, by placing Vi's rape at the end of the novel, *The People in the Trees* offers one final haunting as its violent histories once again interrupt the narrative present.

The critical tension the novel fosters with its narrator and fictional editor illustrates a shift in the ecogothic's engagement with race and coloniality, for no longer is the reader expected to trust the narrator's characterisation of monstrosity. Perina's ecophobia is frequently expressed through intertextual allusions to a Gothic canon that conjures Indigenous peoples and nonhumans as eerie, uncanny, frightening, and irrational. As a result of consuming this media—from fairytales to Gothic novels to Hollywood castaway films—Perina encounters Ivu'ivu through the lens of monstrosity,

a perception that contributes to the 'thingification' (Zolkos 2020) of Ivu'ivu's inhabitants and their subsequent exploitation. Yet *The People in the Trees* is not only concerned with the dangers of fictional representations of otherness. When the novel alludes to real figures like Gajdusek or the victims of Willowbrook and Tuskegee, the text produces uncanny reminders that many readers' own histories are tainted with this same violence, which exceeds the ostensive fictionality of the encountered narrative.

Through the harm inflicted on multiple vulnerable subjects—Indigenous children, the disabled, nonhuman animals—Yanagihara's novel raises the notion that distance is required for some ethical relations to exist. The closer Perina is embedded in Ivu'ivu, the more devastation he causes. Even when he tries to atone for his actions by adopting the abandoned children, he perpetrates greater violence against them. It is the archipelago's remoteness that protects its alterity; once that remoteness is breached through colonial invasion, enabled by fossil-fuelled transport, alterity is violated and the colonial desire to assimilate, to conquer by knowing, prevails. In the emerging petroculture of Ivu'ivu, we can begin to perceive the dangers of becoming entangled within a global racial capitalism: those 'entities, practice, and ways of being that are *foreclosed* when other entangled realities are materialized' (Giraud 2019, 2, emphasis in original). Following Giraud's instructive scholarship, an idea I return to throughout this thesis is that there are circumstances in which porosity, proximity, and entanglement cannot be experienced as positive or desirable, and that ecogothic's affective repertoire helps to expose these undesirable relations—to show up their violence in scenes of fear, guilt, and visceral disgust. The following chapter on Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* (2014) series continues to explore challenging depictions of entanglement with both human and more-than-human others.

CHAPTER II: INTIMACY

The Terror, The Terroir: The Entanglements of Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach*

Introduction

The novels of Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy, published in rapid succession in 2014, centre on a stretch of Floridian coastline engulfed by a mysterious force known as Area X.[27] Area X first appears as a 'pristine wilderness' (VanderMeer 2014a 95) seemingly untouched by anthropogenic toxins or pollutants yet home to an array of disturbing non/human hybrids, mutations, and doppelgängers. The titular Southern Reach is a federal agency tasked with investigating Area X that sends teams of scientists beyond its border to gather information. The first instalment, *Annihilation*, follows the twelfth expedition into Area X and is narrated by the team's misanthropic biologist; *Authority* shadows Control, the new director of the Southern Reach, as he investigates the twelfth expedition's return; and *Acceptance* utilises five different narrative perspectives within and outside Area X over a thirty-year period. Unable to decipher or navigate the phenomenon, VanderMeer's human narrators encounter a disorienting world with multiple viable explanations: Area X is the site of an anthropogenic ecological disaster, a collective hallucination instigated as part of a secret government experiment, and/or a wormhole to an obliterated alien planet whose

[27] This chapter focuses on the original *Southern Reach* trilogy published in 2014; at time of writing VanderMeer is working on a fourth instalment likely to be released in 2024.

displaced native organism has latched onto Earth. By the trilogy's end, the mystery of Area X remains unresolved; it is a crisis with no single referent, simultaneously ecological, socio-political, temporal, and epistemological.

In the decade following its publication, the *Southern Reach* has been treated as perhaps *the* defining work of New Weird literature and placed in dialogue with ecocriticism, animal studies, science fiction studies, and object-oriented ontology. The New Weird is a literary genre blending horror, science fiction, and fantasy distinguished by its overriding concern with the strangeness and unknowability of reality. Emerging in the 1990s and continuing into the twenty-first century, the New Weird borrows from and interrogates features of the traditional or 'Old Weird' (1880–1940) most famously associated with H. P. Lovecraft and a reactionary politics. VanderMeer's work as both author and editor, including for anthologies *The New Weird* (2008) and *The Weird* (2010) coedited with his wife Ann VanderMeer, situate him firmly within the genre. In H. P. Lovecraft's view, the 'weird tale' was distinguished from the traditional Gothic by 'a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space' ([1927] 2021, 9-10). However, I contend twenty-first-century ecogothic grapples with such a defeat of the seemingly 'fixed laws of Nature' as they manifest in the destabilised carbon cycle, unpredictable weather patterns, and mass species extinctions. The climate and ecological crises make reality *weird*, such that there is no secure baseline for ordinary experience nor promise of return to an equilibrium, which Lovecraft envisioned the Weird as departing from. Distinctions between 'ecogothic' and 'New Weird' are therefore not clear cut; I take up VanderMeer's interest in the nature of reality to exemplify my definition of ecogothic entanglement.

VanderMeer's work has received perhaps the most scholarly attention of all the texts analysed in this thesis, partly due to the author's active engagement with environmental philosophers like Timothy Morton (Hageman et al. 2016; VanderMeer 2016). Scholars have proposed generative approaches to the *Southern Reach* centring ecosickness (Sperling 2016), contamination (Magnone 2017), interspecies ethics (Prendergast 2017), challenges to anthropocentric narration (Baker 2019), and representations of nonhuman communication (Strombeck 2020). Such readings are often connected to VanderMeer's own stated sources of inspiration, which include the disorientating effects of anaesthesia after dental surgery, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010, and St Marks National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. With regards to St Marks, Area X often resembles the liminal ecosystem of southern Florida currently known as the Everglades: a subtropical wetland where coastline abuts fen peatland, mire, marsh, mangroves, and forested uplands. VanderMeer's series draws inspiration from both the unique ecology of the Everglades and its histories of invasion, colonisation, and war. The region was originally inhabited by the Indigenous Calusa people until the arrival of Spanish colonisers in 1513, who brought diseases that severely depleted the Calusa population and forced southern migrations of Seminole and Miccosukee peoples, for whom the Everglades remain a contemporary site of Indigenous sovereignty (Cattelino 2015, 236). The draining of the Everglades' wetlands to approximately half their original size transformed much of its ecology into agricultural and urban space, including plantations of cash crops like sugarcane worked by predominantly Black, Latino, and Cuban migrant workers. The framing of Area X as fundamentally hostile to human life in VanderMeer's novels echoes the perspectives of nineteenth and early-twentieth-century European settlers who saw the Everglades as 'a seemingly impenetrable swamp to be conquered and drained'

(Cattelino 2015, 235)—creating, as I aim to show later, a warped temporality in the series in which histories of violent displacement and ecological imperialism repeat in haunting cycles.

These histories are further intersected by the Gulf Coast's central position in contemporary US oil and gas production. The *Southern Reach* novels respond specifically to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010, widely regarded as the worst oil spill in history. The spill devastated bird and marine life in the Gulf, polluting habitats and killing, injuring, and stranding animals with severe impacts for endangered species, including pelicans and other seabirds, dolphins (depicted in the series with disturbingly human eyes), sea turtles, invertebrates, and coral. These influences have primed critical analyses to focus on the trilogy's representations of the body—its health, infection, porosity, and toxicity—and the degraded environment. The two concerns seemingly combine in Area X: a hostile ecology that slowly contaminates and alters human bodies while simultaneously *de*contaminating the environment of human traces. The majority of critical scholarship produced about the *Southern Reach* trilogy to date has advanced an ecocritical reading based on the events of *Annihilation* and a single interpretation of Area X as a rapidly evolving or mutating ecology made indifferent or hostile to humans and anthropogenic materials. It is my position in this chapter, however, that to study *Annihilation* in isolation places too much emphasis on its one, self-professedly unreliable narrator in a series of many; it disregards the multiple interpretations for Area X raised in the two sequels, which move toward an anthropogenic or extra-terrestrial origin rather than a 'Gaia's revenge' narrative; and it forces closure and singularity where, as I aim to show, plurality is of central importance to both the form and thematic concerns of the *Southern Reach*.

The argument of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, I argue that VanderMeer's horror aesthetics mean bodily entanglements—the unexpected porosity and proximity of human and nonhuman entities of the kind espoused by new materialists—cannot be embraced as purely positive, but only as a mixed or ambivalent experience that produces feelings of bewilderment, horror, paranoia, disassociation, and passivity.[28] The series raises significant concerns about the decentring of human beings as objects among other objects for the potential violence such a perspective can invite. It is only in the third instalment, *Acceptance*, that mutually sustaining relations with nonhuman life are modelled, and these are dependent on the preservation of some degree of distance and alterity. Wariness of intimacy as potentially damaging to the coherence and autonomy of the self is central to my definition of the contemporary ecogothic novel; as we witnessed in *The People in the Trees*, becoming entangled with other beings can have catastrophic consequences not only for individuals but for entire cultures, species, and ecosystems. Of course, the *Southern Reach* is a multi-generic text that borrows 'aspects of the spy-novel, the crime thriller, the melodrama, the ghost story and the gothic, not to mention science fiction, plant horror and the cosmic or even cataclysmic horror genre' (Bruhn and Hart 2020, 2). While acknowledging the varied generic traditions the *Southern Reach* speaks to, my emphasis on the series' ecogothic elements—its body horror, doppelgängers, and hauntings—significantly reveals 'not the exuberant surprise of vibrant matter, but the terror associated with the defamiliarization of the world and the breakdown of conventional explanatory paradigms' (Weinstock 2023, 10). The *Southern Reach*

[28] Interestingly Steven Swarbrick and Jean-Thomas Tremblay's forthcoming book *Negative Life: The Cinema of Extinction* (August 2024) claims to explore 'the horror of entanglement' through discussion of the film adaptation of *Annihilation* (2018) among other cinematic ecohorror titles.

exemplifies my understanding of the ecogothic perspective, in which an entangled world is a disorientating and often disempowering place to be.

Secondly, and related to this sense of suspended reality, I argue that reading the series as a whole is necessary for perceiving the entangled epistemologies of what VanderMeer has called our 'mid-Collapse condition' (2016, n.p.). Rather than privileging one volume or interpretation over others, I overlay the ecological, human, and alien explanations for Area X articulated across the series to demonstrate how VanderMeer's fictional quandary evokes the vast and disorientating entanglements of today's socio-political and environmental crises. VanderMeer has claimed that the value of Anthropocene fiction 'lies not in its facts or its adherence to ideas about science, but in conveying the totality of this mid-Collapse condition' (2016, n.p.). I argue the fragmented and palimpsestic form of the trilogy—its multiple timelines, narrative perspectives, and explanations for what Area X is and where it came from—*refracts* this sense of inhabiting a 'mid-Collapse condition', making such a state perceptible in terms other than an imagined position of objective remove. Avoiding such a god's-eye view is generally understood in the humanities to be a necessary strategy for undermining the hubristic attitude that produced the Anthropocene. As Stacy Alaimo asserts,

> The anthropocene is no time for transcendent, definitive mappings, transparent knowledge systems, or confident epistemologies. Surely all those things got us into this predicament to begin with, where presumed mastery over an externalized "nature" is all too triumphant, and yet also rebounds in unexpected, and usually unwanted ways. (2016, 3)

VanderMeer's trilogy performs an unsolvable investigation, revealing a posthumanist tendency in its sense that, while humans may be responsible for ecological crises,

they will not necessarily be the ones to solve them. The kinds of knowledge presented in the *Southern Reach* are accordingly subjective, affective, and embodied—partial glimpses of the hyperobject from within. While describing a different literary form, David Farrier argues that poetry 'can compress vast acreages of meaning into a small compass or perform the kind of bold linkages that it would take reams of academic argument to plot' (2019, 5), an insight that resonates here. The *Southern Reach* establishes linkages between biodiversity loss, chemical waste, settler colonialism, mass extinction, the breakdown of trust in social institutions, conspiracy theories, state terrorism, surveillance technologies, and a polarised political landscape. In doing so, the series gestures towards the overwhelming *totality* of the state of mid-Collapse.

Unlike the other chapters in this thesis, this chapter centres a trilogy—collectively amounting to some nine-hundred pages—in place of a single novel. While my decision to analyse the *Southern Reach* partly derives from its fragmented and partial knowledge systems, which together insinuate the totality of today's challenges, its inclusion also continues this project's interest in liminal or *not-quite*-novels. The trilogy constitutes a constellation of entangled texts. Given the unusual size of the *Southern Reach* relative to the other primary texts, parts of this chapter are necessarily dedicated to plot summary, by which I hope to situate (rather than simply frustrate) readers. The chapter begins with an analysis of porous, entangled bodies: I read the *Southern Reach*'s ecogothic mode as a kind of dark inversion or doppelgänger of the new materialisms and object-oriented ontology, in which anxieties about the decentring of human beings and the flattening of relations between entities are manifested through body horror aesthetics. I then turn to the series' sequels to show how the other interpretations for Area X fret at anthropogenic violence exerted through the totalising networks of global capitalism, military occupation, and government

surveillance in *Authority*, and through settler colonial eliminationism in *Acceptance*. I argue these entangled epistemologies are represented through a series of entangled texts—journals, logs, letters, receipts, notes, video tapes—that combine in a palimpsestic form that makes legible, in glimpses and fragments, our mid-Collapse condition. The *Southern Reach* illustrates how a (post)human subjectivity might read and write in the midst of becoming undone.

Entangled Bodies

The *Southern Reach* series takes seriously Jesse Oak Taylor's suggestion that the task of climate fiction is to 'invert[] the assumed relationship in which fictional narrative is produced by nominally-human agents rather than the environment, or setting, with which those agents interact' (2018, 115). More than any individual character, the setting, entity, or environment that is Area X constitutes the series' main narrative force. Once exposed to Area X, expedition members lose their memory or capacity for language, while others become sick with aggressive cancers or deeply paranoid, taking their own lives or those of their team. The protagonist of *Annihilation*, known only as 'the biologist', narrates her own ambiguous transformation in Area X through a series of journal entries. Early on, the twelfth expedition discovers an underground tunnel (which the biologist mentally refers to as a 'tower' in an early instance of the novel's Gothic doubling, the tower an inversion of the nearby lighthouse). Inside the tower/tunnel is a script emblazoned on the walls, its glowing letters formed of 'a type of fungi or other eukaryotic organism' (VanderMeer 2014a, 24). Mysteriously, the words are written in English: '*Where lies the strangling fruit that came from the hand of the sinner…*' (46, italics in original). The writing possesses a dark, quasi-Biblical cadence and wields a powerfully seductive force, such that the biologist has to 'fight

the compulsion to keep reading, to […] keep descending until I had read all there was to read' (24). Enchanted, she unwittingly breathes in spores released by the organism/s. The spores initially manifest in her body as cold symptoms, a 'contamination' (25) or 'infection' (58), but as they develop, they heighten the biologist's senses and her feeling of being grounded in place. The 'brightness', as she calls it, 'connected me to the earth, the water, the trees, the air, as I opened up and kept on opening' (160).

The biologist's description of 'the brightness' resonates with new materialist accounts of more-than-human entanglement, including Alaimo's 'posthumanist or counter-humanist sense of the self as opening out unto the larger material world and being penetrated by all sorts of substances and material agencies' (2016, 4). For Alaimo, this sense of 'trans-corporeal' posthumanism is necessary for forging ethical relations with nonhuman others, itself a prerequisite to living sustainably. Posthumanism 'means recognizing oneself as a biological entity, challenging traditional humanist ideas of the sovereign self' (LeMenager 2017, 229). Rather than a bounded, sovereign self that imposes its ordering will upon an inert environment, the human is (re)constituted by myriad nonhuman others: 'the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such' that, in Donna Haraway's terms, make up our 'entangled, coshaping species of the earth' (2007, 3, 5). Alaimo further suggests, '[t]o occupy exposure as insurgent vulnerability is to perform material rather than abstract alliances' (2016, 5). In other words, to be exposed in the way the biologist is exposed to the tower's spores is to be forced to inhabit one's political solidarities with nonhuman others through the body—not only as theoretical principle but as lived reality.

Annihilation's depiction of porous bodily entanglement with more-than-human others is often relayed through scenes of body horror. Body horror is related to, yet

distinct from, other horror aesthetics such as gore and splatter in that it is defined by ‘anxieties surrounding transformation, mutation, and contagion’ and situations of ‘indeterminacy and estrangement from one’s own body’ (Aldana Reyes 2014, 54). It is horror that is produced by one’s body becoming strange to oneself rather than by spectacular dismemberment, jump scares, or gratuitous bloodshed. Characters describe ‘the brightness’ in terms of both their heightened receptivity to, and contagion by, Area X as they mutate into something more-than- or other-than- human. Hybrids formed from previous expeditions populate the landscape: a dolphin with a human eye, plants shaped like human hands, a dead fox composed of modified human cells, and a ‘moaning creature’ (VanderMeer 2014a, 34) that gives the appearance of a human crossed with a giant hog, regarded as an early failed creation of Area X. That these transformations are only partially successful brings them into the realm of the uncanny, the indeterminately human. Unlike Alaimo’s positive vision of willing non/human alliances enabled by porous bodies—summoning Bruno Latour’s (2005) ‘object-oriented democracy’ where power is distributed across networks of ‘actants’—becoming posthuman in the *Southern Reach* is a physically invasive and disturbing process. Like a snake or crab, the moaning creature sheds its skin to reveal a new form beneath; the biologist discovers its disembodied human face left behind in the mud like a ‘discarded shell’ (VanderMeer 2014a, 140). The nonhuman ‘other’ emerges *through* the human self until that self is no longer recognisable.

Most ominous of all Area X’s mutations is the Crawler, a slime-trailing organism (or collection of organisms) with the face of Saul, the lighthouse keeper and ex-preacher whose scrambled sermons seemingly provide content for the words written on the tower walls. While the writing is often difficult to parse—a claim perhaps overstated in scholarly criticism that treats the writing as nonsensical or without

meaning—one passage in particular suggests that for a person to comprehend the alterity of Area X, they must be transformed by it, made *like* or *of* Area X: '*the shadows of the abyss are like the petals of a monstrous flower that shall blossom within the skull and expand the mind beyond what any man can bear*' (61, italics in original). The procedure of giving up the presumed sovereignty and autonomy of human subjecthood is presented as akin to developing a 'second skin' of distributed pain (VanderMeer 2014a, 181), pressing the human subject beyond the limits of bodily endurance. And yet, when the Crawler fuses with Saul—his mind and body rendered 'as porous as volcanic rock' (VanderMeer 2014c, 57)—the experience produces a complicated interplay of emotions: 'the endurance of an unending pain and sorrow, yes, but shining through as well a kind of grim satisfaction and *ecstasy*' (2014a, 186). One's humanity may be destroyed in the process of becoming—excruciatingly—posthuman, but the shedding of human embodiment can also be a release. As Xavier Aldana Reyes argues, body horror is 'an exploration, not of the nihilistic conception of the body as the limit of existence, but of the innovative possibilities to be found in its explosion' (2014, 56). In its posthuman transmutations, the 'explosion' of ordinary human embodiment both terrifies and tantalises.

Area X and the Crawler represent a shift in conceptions of monstrosity. For Roger Luckhurst, 'the signature of weird fiction and horror film is not the vampire or the zombie, those minimal allegorical displacements of the human, but the tentacle, that limb-tongue suggestive of absolute alterity' (2017, 1054). The monsters of ecogothic fiction similarly embody utterly alien intelligences—not only in tentacles, but also in fungi, slime, mould, carnivorous plants, swarming insects, crustaceans, spores, and plagues—entities for which identifying desire or motive appears impossible, irrelevant even. Thinking of the failed expeditions that preceded her own, the biologist

reflects, '[n]o one had yet plumbed the depths of *intent* or *purpose* in a way that had obstructed that intent or purpose. Everyone had died or been killed, returned changed or returned unchanged, but Area X had continued on as it always had' (VanderMeer 2014a, 158, emphasis in original). The biologist's question of '*intent* or *purpose*' stresses the unknowable will of Area X as an autonomous being while reiterating the expedition's mission to understand, control, and ultimately obstruct that autonomy. Rather than halting Area X's expansion, however, the expeditions inadvertently accelerate it; Area X produces doppelgängers of the eleventh and twelfth expedition members, who return home across the border as emissaries to broaden Area X's reach in an act of parasitic manipulation by a cunning nonhuman intelligence. The expanding border represents 'the potential horror of an animated, biologically diverse, and non-anthropocentric world' that would 'compromise human autonomy and value' (Prendergast 2017, 348). Like Cohen's reflection, cited in the previous chapter, that the monster embodies a kind of zeitgeist for contemporary anxieties, Area X's nonhuman intelligence provokes an array of concerns about the dethroning of human supremacy and subsequent threats of domination, replacement, or consumption by the nonhuman.

For VanderMeer, the defamiliarisations of Weird fiction enable a more 'visceral' understanding of the Anthropocene that is 'felt in and under the skin' (2016, n.p.). The biologist's initial understanding of the brightness as a 'contamination' evokes VanderMeer's description of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, which he names as an inspiration for the series. VanderMeer recalls the spill as 'a dark, horrible spiral through my mind […] After the oil spill, the spiral continued because I knew that at the microscopic level the oil was still infiltrating and contaminating the environment' (2015b, n.p.). Like in *The People in the Trees*, VanderMeer's vision of oil as a spiralling,

contaminating force remains subtext in the *Southern Reach*, transmuted into Area X and its uncanny alterations of familiar bodies and ecologies. Describing media coverage of the same oil spill, Mel Y. Chen identifies how:

> [Oil's] animacy, spectacular to the degree that it dramatized the uncontrollable shifting or transformation of matter at scales that dwarf and overwhelm human bodies, resembled other 'natural disasters' like tornadoes […] and even monster and horror movies […] whose horrific elements operate similarly as a threat of uncontrollable scale. (2012, 226)

The ecogothic horror of the *Southern Reach* emerges from its narrators' sudden apprehension of matter as animate, lively, wilful, and proliferating at an 'uncontrollable scale'. While nonhuman entities exhibit an alarming animacy, the series' human characters find their own agency obstructed, even hijacked by 'external agencies that easily become internal' (Bateman 2023, 44). For Weinstock, this subject/object role-reversal is fundamental to the Gothic's production of fear and horror: 'the Gothic calls into question conventional distinctions between animate and inanimate […] in place of autonomous human actors, the Gothic redefines human beings as Latourean actants within constantly shifting networks of relationships' (2023, 2-3). The ecogothic inflection of VanderMeer's trilogy effectively delineates limits to the desirability of porous exchange. As Control reflects in the sequel, 'what most people wanted [was] to be *close to* but not *part of*' (2014b, 81, emphasis in original) the nonhuman other.

VanderMeer's novels offer a dark reimagining of trans-corporeal entanglement as bodily co-optation. A 'flat ontology' (Byrant 2011) asserts that there is nothing special about the human body; it is 'an object in the midst of other objects' (Fanon [1952] 2008, 82). However, as Weinstock argues in *Gothic Things* (2023), if the human

body is not deemed precious in some way, it can be treated as objects are treated—poked and prodded, interrogated, tortured, dismembered, even killed. The ecogothic reveals an anxiety about the flattening hierarchies between humans, animals, and other nonhuman entities: not that nonhumans will be elevated, but the potential loss of sensitivity and compassion for human subjects. This loss is especially dangerous for non-white, disabled, and genderqueer people because, as will be explored further in the next chapter, the human body's plasticity—its expected capacity to adapt or to absorb pain—is already projected disproportionately onto people who are not white, able-bodied, and cisgendered. Dehumanisation or thingification are typically racialised processes (Jackson 2020); indeed, the Fanon quote above refers to the author's experience of racism in the United States as a violent dehumanisation. The 'terrible invasiveness' (VanderMeer 2014a, 181) of the Crawler's analysis tellingly resembles Norton Perina's callous treatment of the Ivu'ivuans as specimens to be 'scanned and sampled' (2014a, 186) on account of their indigeneity and disability. The violation of human autonomy thus remains a legitimate threat and source of fear in VanderMeer's series (Prendergast 2017, 349). By depicting these fears through body horror, VanderMeer engages readers' 'vulnerability and shared experience of projected pain through vicarious feelings' (Aldana Reyes 2014, 2), activating an empathy at risk of being lost.

For a theorist like Estok, this reluctance to embrace the entanglement of human and nonhuman bodies as beings of equal status might constitute evidence of the ecogothic's fundamental 'ecophobia': its fear and disgust for nonhuman agency. For analyses that stop with *Annihilation*, the overwhelming horror of a compromised subjectivity typically dominates. Amidst the terrors of Area X, however, characters in the *Southern Reach* constantly notice the presence of nonhuman life in ways that

indicate its inherent value: Saul's chapters begin with logs of creatures witnessed on his walks—their migrations, predations, and interactions with other species—while the biologist spends quiet hours observing the complex ecosystems of sacrifice zones and seemingly mundane places like abandoned lots. Principles of kinship and mutual care between species are particularly evident in *Acceptance*. In a recovered letter, the biologist describes establishing a significant relationship with an owl she believes to be her lost husband in altered form. She recounts living together with the owl in Area X for thirty years, hunting for and protecting one another in a relationship 'based on the most basic principles of friendship and survival' (VanderMeer 2014c, 172). When the owl is killed by foxes, the biologist's last written words attest to the profundity of the loss: 'What am I to say? That I do not miss him?' (181).

This symbiotic—even romantic—relationship is striking in the series' array of invasive interactions as a chosen relation between two reasonably bounded and autonomous selves (though not entirely, given the biologist's suspicion that both herself and the owl are hybrid creatures mutated by Area X). The respect and trust fostered between the two beings are founded on distance as much as they are by proximity: the owl maintains a separate position in the upper spire of the lighthouse while the biologist sleeps below; she speaks to him, but he does not speak back; he hisses when she gets too close. The series implies non/human entanglement *can* produce positive symbiotic relations, but that these relations require space for autonomy and alterity to be maintained. Too late, the biologist realises the strained relationship she had with her husband before he disappeared could have been improved had she struck such a balance of vulnerability and independence: 'I could have met him partway and retained my sovereignty' (2014a, 167). Her experience of

negotiating nonhuman relations and maintaining her autonomy within Area X teaches her about healthy relations between humans.

In her grief at the owl's death, the biologist finally allows herself to succumb to the brightness. She appears in *Acceptance* in assimilated form, transformed by Area X into a 'leviathan', a 'mountain' (VanderMeer 2014c, 195) studded with numerous eyes, capable of living on land and at sea. In *An Unconstructable Earth* (2019), Frédéric Neyrat criticises Latour's actor-network-theory, the '*ultimate* objective' of which, he claims, 'is not about letting the multiplicity of actants be but about *producing the One*' (102)—the political-ecological collective that would place all beings on the same level. Neyrat argues instead for an 'ecology of separation', where 'separation articulates and recognizes differences' (distinct from 'splitting', which refuses recognition of the other and so is 'the denial or rejection of relation') (2019, 149). We might view the biologist and the owl's relationship as one of separation in its maintenance of differences, whereas after the brightness takes over, the biologist comes to resemble the 'collectivity of One': an entity that cannot be argued or negotiated with and whose 'democracy' is dependent on the elimination of difference, friction, and conflict. Such images help to illuminate the political implications of an entangled existence, particularly one with a powerful assimilation drive. The threat of being absorbed by 'the One', a condition in which the individual's will and agency are subsumed by that of a greater force, is the overriding fear of the second *Southern Reach* instalment, *Authority*.

Entangled Identities

The Southern Reach agency represents a different kind of threat to personal autonomy through the sinister workings of military occupation, surveillance, and mind control. In

Authority, John Rodriguez, codename Control,[29] becomes the replacement director of the Southern Reach following the death of the previous director and psychologist from the twelfth expedition, Gloria. The sequel maintains some of the disturbing mutations of *Annihilation*—a mobile phone with a will of its own, a carnivorous plant that cannot be killed—suggesting '[t]he uncanny has infiltrated the real, and in some sense that boundary is forever compromised' (VanderMeer 2016, n.p.). For the most part, however, *Authority* resembles espionage conspiracy fiction, where preoccupation with 'intelligence' refers not (only) to the nonhuman mind of Area X but to the covert data gathering of secret government departments. When sweeping the previous director's—now his—office, Control discovers twenty-two surveillance devices, which he arranges in chronological order into 'an unnatural history museum of bugs—different kinds from different eras, progressively smaller and harder to unearth' (VanderMeer 2014b, 43). The scene evokes the beetle-collecting of Norton Perina's boyhood in *The People in the Trees*, but whereas Perina kills and analyses nonhuman specimens to gain knowledge about them, these technological 'bugs' turn scrutiny back onto the human subject as the object of analysis.

Authority hinges on the politics of the Southern Reach agency and its shadowy parent institution, Central. The sequel also emphasises an alternative explanation for Area X: that its unusual lifeforms and warped temporality, as well as the sicknesses and paranoia suffered by the expeditions, are the result of a mass experiment engineered by Central. Many of the bizarre visions, amnesia, and temporal confusion experienced by the expeditions resemble effects of the kinds of drugs the real-world Central Intelligence Agency has used on (often non-consenting) subjects in the past

[29] Control is the name of one of the intelligence officers in John le Carré's spy fiction, based on the codename 'C' used by the head of MI6.

in experiments like MK-Ultra, which combined psychoactive drug administration with hypnosis (Kinzer 2020). The notion of Area X being a ‘mass hallucination’ (VanderMeer 2014a, 7) is introduced flippantly by the biologist when her team is confronted with the seemingly impossible tower/tunnel structure. The biologist later recalls reports from the first expedition in which members described ‘feelings of euphoria and extremes of sexual desire’, and the sense of being ‘freer than ever before and more constrained’ (2014a, 95), similar to accounts of those under the influence of hallucinogens. The expedition teams are made to relinquish their names, ostensibly to protect their identities from being accessed by Area X, but Control suspects it serves ‘the starker purpose of instilling loyalty and to make conditioning and hypnosis more effective’ (2014b, 113)—deindividuating them by reducing them to their occupations. Most alarmingly, *Annihilation*’s title is revealed to refer not only to the encroachment of Area X and its potential eradication of humanity but also to the hypnotic cues used on expedition members, specifically the ‘activation word’ to ‘induce immediate suicide’ (2014a, 135). Other hints in the text suggest Area X and the Southern Reach are testing grounds for mind control: for instance, the spores that cause the biologist’s transformation smell of ‘rotting honey’ (2014a, 24), a scent that pervades the Southern Reach building (2014b, 20) where Control discovers he, too, has been hypnotised by his handler (reanimating the spores’ fungal association with psychedelics). While he eventually frees himself from Central’s influence, thereafter Control can never be certain his ‘hopes and desires and impulses were all definitely his *own* hopes, desires, impulses’ (2014b, 238).

With *Authority*, VanderMeer depicts human society at its most militaristic and bureaucratic, where security services represent a threat to autonomy just as insidious and terrifying, if not more so than, ecological disasters. When Area X first appears, it

is treated as an active threat to national security and its jurisdiction is taken over by the military, who patrol the border, attempt to identify entry points with missiles, and deter citizens from gaining information about the site. The militarisation of land brings to mind Ben De Bruyn's connection of global warming and global war: 'climate change does not only involve destabilizing shifts in scale and a renewed attention to pollution, species extinction, and energy transition but also the militarized management of unruly environments' (2018, 45). In a dark alliance between scientific inquiry, intelligence services, and the military-industrial complex, unruly 'Nature' becomes an enemy to be surveilled, interrogated, and subdued by force.

The Southern Reach agents, too, are visually associated with militarised law enforcement and even the Ku Klux Klan. Corralling hundreds of white rabbits into the Area X border in an experimental attempt to 'overload' it (VanderMeer 2014b, 55), the agents appear as 'anonymous white-clad riot police' (56). The image of the white rabbit as an ambassador to a distorted, parallel world is reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) (later echoed in the Wachowskis' *The Matrix* [1999]), just as the prominent fungal imagery evokes the magic mushroom Alice consumes to change size.[30] Yet in its insistent focus on the cruelty and corruption of human institutions, *Authority* undermines the idea that nonhuman entities can be made to *mean* anything. Unlike Alice's anthropomorphised guide to Wonderland, the rabbits in the Southern Reach 'rebel so utterly against being herded that they turned on the herders and fought […] [until] the white of the shields stained red' (VanderMeer 2014b, 57). Far from leading the Southern Reach agents to a revelatory understanding of what Area X is or does, the rabbits forcefully refuse human coercion. As with the gaze

[30] In *The Matrix*, humans are used as an energy source by a society of intelligent machines and kept passively content by living simulated lives in a virtual reality.

of the sacrificed opa'ivu'eke in *The People in the Trees*, the rabbits confound anthropomorphic systems of meaning while exposing the violence of attempted inscriptions.

If Area X is the collective hallucination of minds addled by Central's psychedelic substances and psychological interference, questions of control and agency resurface, but in *Authority* the threat is posed by other humans under the guise of scientific experimentation. VanderMeer claims his intention with the novel was 'to put the fear of God into people about the way that their most treasured institutions and government agencies actually operate when nobody's looking (or even when they are)' (2014d, n.p.). *Authority* distils concerns about the power of security services to curtail human rights and freedoms. What is known as the 'twelfth expedition' is actually the thirty-eighth, a fact obscured so as not to deter future volunteers or make the agency look incompetent. Expeditions are given misleading information about the likely fatal nature of their missions and those who do return are detained for indefinite periods; Control notes, '[t]heir legal status was in that gray area often arbitrarily defined by the threat to national security' (VanderMeer 2014b, 25). Once again, the series highlights the dangers of having one's status as an autonomous being called into question. Despite Control's stated distaste for Central's manipulative practices, he continues to detain and interrogate returnees, including a figure who, calling herself Ghost Bird, claims to be the biologist's double.

The double or doppelgänger is a duplicated self or likeness. An image with a significant Gothic lineage, the double is typically deployed to contain the transgressive desires of the original subject. In the split subjectivities of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of*

Dorian Gray (1891), doppelgängers channel an alternative morality (or amorality) and are depicted as liars, thieves, and murderers. In the *Southern Reach* series, it is human transgression at the species scale that seemingly generates doppelgängers. Having crossed the border into Area X, any human who enters the tower is analysed and duplicated by the Crawler, their double returned across the border as a 'counter-spy' (VanderMeer 2015a, n.p.). Given the multiple interpretations offered by the series, the doppelgängers may not actually exist: characters only ever witness their own doubles in interactions unverified by other perspective characters, and Ghost Bird, the only narrator-double, could be a distinct personality formed by the biologist as a result of the extensive experiments she is subjected to during her conditioning for the expedition. The paranoid fear that one has unknowingly become a double-agent for the enemy aligns with the Gothic tradition of doubles used to represent repressed knowledge and madness.

Whether produced by Area X's monstrous mutations or the Southern Reach's psychological interferences, the doppelgänger is nevertheless an apt representation of a humanity that has become illegible to itself. Naomi Klein recently used the image in *Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World* (2023) as a mechanism for exploring the breakdown in a sense of shared social reality in the twenty-first century, where one person can be living in a state of climate emergency and another immersed in climate denial. Klein makes the societal scaling of the doppelgänger symbol explicit: 'When reality starts doubling, refracting off itself, it often means that something important is being ignored or denied—a part of ourselves and our world we do not want to see' (2023, 9). Doubling as metaphor has recently gained traction in the environmental humanities. In Barbara Herrnstein Smith's framing, awareness of climate change and the prevalence of denialism force us to comprehend 'the existence of multiple,

sometimes radically divergent, operative realities' (2018, 106). Our 'mid-Collapse condition' produces uncanny versions of reality that resist being reduced to one single cause or explanation, splintering the social body. In *Dark Ecology* (2016), Timothy Morton likens the contemporary subject in the grips of climate anxiety to the noir detective: 'like in noir fiction: I'm the detective *and* the criminal! I'm a person. I'm also part of an entity that is now *a geophysical force on a planetary scale*' (9, emphasis in original). The human subject is divided between the 'detective' that seeks to uncover environmental harm to restore justice and the 'criminal' self that has, however unwittingly, perpetrated that harm. In this framing, doppelgängers represent a form of human agency we may not wish to possess or identify with—not only a fragmented self, but a fragmented species' identity. As Deborah Bird Rose writes:

> The Anthropocene is something of a mirror, and the image it is giving of human agency is grotesque — an agency that outstrips its capacity to manage itself, that wrecks, pillages, loots and destroys, that has very little idea what it is doing, and that carries with it, in contradiction to all reason, an expectation of immunity. (2014, 209-10)

The mirror figure of the Anthropocene is humanity's doppelgänger: a reflection of the self that has become strange and threatening, mindlessly self-destructive to the point of self-annihilation.[31] Most of the doubles in VanderMeer's series attempt to murder their original, and vice versa; only Ghost Bird and the biologist, those most practiced in becoming absorbed by their environs, tentatively accept each other's presences. More often, grappling with networks of totality—whether those pertaining to global

[31] In Alex Garland's 2018 film adaptation of *Annihilation*, the biologist's murderous doppelgänger literally takes the form of a humanoid mirror.

capitalism or the myriad nonhuman actants that penetrate and constitute the human body—overwhelms the individual subject to the point of disassociation.

Like Morton, Sianne Ngai suggests an understanding of 'global capitalism's social totality' may be glimpsed through the paranoid affect of the noir detective, who 'belatedly find[s] that they are small subjects caught in larger systems extending beyond their comprehension and control' (2007, 299). In its totalising networks, divided realities, and paranoid affect, *Authority* registers what LeMenager calls 'the everyday Anthropocene', a literary mode that 'evoke[s] neoliberalism as both a feeling-state and its underlying socioecological conditions, characterized by enduring crises that never quite come to a head' (2017, 224). Control's navigation of workplace bureaucracy on the edge of a slowly unfolding catastrophe resembles the condition of the individual in the Anthropocene, urged to perform productivity-as-normal as the conditions necessary for life are steadily eroded. As Control becomes increasingly bewildered by the entanglements of Central, Area X, and the Southern Reach, *Authority* picks up 'the politically charged problem of obstructed agency' (Ngai 2007, 32). Despite his status as director, Control describes feeling as if he has joined 'an exclusive club […] where people agreed to things that they did not actually agree with, believing that they were of one purpose and intent' (VanderMeer 2014b, 142-3). Control's loss of personal agency to a subsuming whole is politically defusing; the novel depicts the disempowerment of individuals through bewildering webs of bureaucracy. In a rare analysis of VanderMeer's corpus as spy fiction, Jeffrey Clapp asserts the Southern Reach novels 'consistently index the sense of helplessness that twenty-first century citizen-subjects feel in the face of unaccountable entities like multinational corporations, security agencies, and states' (2021, 416). Instead of gaining privileged access to the secret knowledge that first enticed him to join the intelligence service,

Control becomes disorientated and mistrustful, wondering if his colleagues and even his mother and grandfather—both more accomplished agents—are plotting against him.

Luc Boltanski observes that espionage fiction effectively dramatises 'anxiety about *the reality of reality*' (2014, 15 emphasis in original), when the institutions that appear to uphold a stable and coherent reality—that orchestrate power and dictate morality—are, if only momentarily, revealed as a façade constructed for the benefit of shadowy, corrupt actors. In that moment of revelation, Boltanski writes, 'reality is escaping the state's efforts to know it and stabilize it' (2014, 18). While most espionage novels conclude with the state's inevitable reassertion of control, there is no return to stability in the Anthropocene, nor in VanderMeer's trilogy. The taken-for-granted reality of climate stability is dissolved, and the institutions of power that upheld that reality—governments, corporations, international bodies—are exposed as complicit in its destruction. VanderMeer's sequel continues to depict the horror of losing 'control' and having one's sovereignty undermined, but it focuses on power discrepancies and manipulations between human beings. Instead of being pleasurably embedded in porous networks of non/human intimacies, *Authority* attends to human-dominated networks of surveillance, policing, and coercion, such that any 'attempt to define the boundaries of the self – for example, by attending to one's "privacy" – appears ever more obtuse and irrelevant' (Clapp 2021, 418). Porosity is entwined with vulnerability and exposure; without stable boundaries, one's sense of self may be splintered, duplicated, and pressed into the performance of others' bidding. VanderMeer reveals this sinister side of entanglement through a Gothic tradition of self-annihilating doubles updated for a paranoid Anthropocene noir in which collective human agency has become elusive and suspect.

Entangled Temporalities

A third explanation for Area X dominates the trilogy's final instalment, *Acceptance*. Whitby, one of the Southern Reach scientists, claims: 'Area X has been created by an organism left behind by a civilization so advanced and so ancient and so alien to us and our own intent and our own thought processes that it has long since left us behind' (VanderMeer 2014c, 209). His hypothesis—later taken up by Ghost Bird—suggests Area X is a wormhole to an alien planet once home to more sophisticated and intelligent lifeforms than exist on Earth but since destroyed by asteroids. The last surviving lifeform attached itself to Earth and became, or lives inside, Area X, camouflaging itself to appear as pristine wilderness. As an interdimensional creature whose intelligence and power exceed human comprehension, Area X takes on a Lovecraftian cosmic horror. This interpretation underscores Area X's similarities to Area 51, the United States Air Force base in Nevada that became the focal point for UFO conspiracy theories.[32] It also subverts the popular science-fiction trope in which humanity colonises other planets to harvest raw materials in pursuit of interplanetary domination; in the *Southern Reach*, Earth is colonised and terraformed to suit the needs and desires of an intelligent extra-terrestrial organism that eradicates all traces of human activity. In this reading, Area X is borne of a planetary apocalypse and an alien lifeform's attempt to replicate the ecological Eden of its home. *Acceptance* thus resembles other climate fiction that utilises the narrative structure of repeating worlds, such as David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007), which feature scenes of humanity's self-destruction via colonial-capitalist

[32] Fredric Jameson famously described conspiracy theories as 'a degraded attempt […] to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system' (1984, 80).

expansion and extraction echoed through time. These novels demonstrate the consequences of humanity's attempts to master ecologies: namely scarcity, genocide, and mass extinction. The *Southern Reach*, by contrast, depicts that domination exerted back on human beings, more like H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1897) or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897): Gothic invasion literatures that distil fears of reverse colonisation (see Arata 1990).

Before the mysterious Event that produced Area X and established its borders, the location was a 'forgotten coast' (VanderMeer 2014c, 62). Glimpses of the proto-Area X site reveal populations on the fringes of society—people hiding from the government, undocumented migrants—who are not readily afforded state recognition or legal protection. The biologist euphemistically connects the coast's marginality to its earlier histories of genocide and land clearing:

> People had still lived there, on what amounted to a wildlife refuge, but not many, and they tended to be the tight-lipped descendants of fisherfolk. Their disappearance might have seemed to some a simple intensifying of a process begun generations before. (VanderMeer 2014a, 94)

Andrew Strombeck argues that the appearance of Area X on this stretch of land exemplifies an 'infamous' trope of Weird literature: 'the use of marginal – and sometimes "degenerate" – humans as an interface between the organised, rational world and the vastness of the inhuman world' (2020, 1377). The inhabitants might alternatively be viewed in terms of their vulnerability and exposure—not only to Area X and the Southern Reach as convenient subjects for experimentation, but also to scarcity and pollution. The proto-Area X is used as 'an illegal drop site for barrels of chemical waste' (VanderMeer 2014c, 62) and is implied to have been subjected to

what Traci Brynne Voyles calls ‘wastelanding’: a settler-colonial mindset that treats Native land as ‘already belonging to the settler’ and simultaneously as ‘undesirable, unproductive, or unappealing: in short, as wasteland’ (2015, 7). Wastelanding empowers settlers to steal Indigenous land with the express purpose of destroying it via processes of extraction and pollution. The land’s status as ‘Native’ renders it ‘marginal, worthless, and pollutable’ (Voyles 2015, 9).

In its elimination of traces of prior human occupancy, Area X’s assimilatory expansion has deep parallels to Native American genocide. While the series deals only tangentially with Florida’s original inhabitants, the colonisation of bodies, minds, and land is a pervasive theme.[33] In one poignant moment, the child Gloria—later the psychologist/director—insists to Saul it *does* matter that her family has prior claim to the coastline: ‘You know my ancestors lived here […] they lived right here, where the lighthouse is’ (2014c, 20). Control imagines the history of the coast in terms of geological strata:

> there had been an indigenous settlement here, along the river […] the remains of that, too, lay beneath the facade of the liquor store. […] Surrounded by the crushed remains of so many creatures, loamed into the soil, pushed down by the foundations of the buildings. […] one possible future of that space, the liquor store crumbling under an onslaught of vines and weather damage, becoming akin to the sunken, moss-covered hills near Area X. (2014b, 240)

[33] Anxieties about settler colonialism also underpin VanderMeer’s earlier work, *City of Saints and Madmen* (2001), where human beings occupy the city of Ambergris, which was built and inhabited by ‘gray caps’, a humanoid mushroom people. For Carl Sederholm, the presence of the gray caps, who the humans aggressively drive underground, ‘serves as an ongoing reminder that even the most thriving civilisations are founded on attempts to repress other cultures’ (2021, 168).

What happened to the coast's Indigenous population looms in the series' subtext as a largely unspoken atrocity, a suppressed Gothic horror; but dwelling on the remains of the submerged settlement leads Control to imagine a posthuman future in which his own society is overcome by vines and moss and ultimately supplanted by Area X. Acknowledging the coast's history of invasion and genocide stirs fear of that violence being revisited upon the settler population. Like Control, the places and creatures within Area X that the biologist finds most disturbing are those that indicate an overcome and compromised humanity, such as the moaning creature, the abandoned villages, and overgrown vehicles:

> Long ago, towns had existed here, and we encountered eerie signs of human habitation: rotting cabins with sunken, red-tinged roofs, rusted wagon-wheel spokes half-buried in the dirt, and the barely seen outlines of what used to be enclosures for livestock, now mere ornament for layers of pine-needle loam. (2014a, 5)

The ruins of human civilisation are buried under the loam in a visual depiction of the miniscule human beneath the vast expanses of deep time. These images of destruction seem to abnegate human agency by offering proleptic glimpses of a posthuman future. Stef Craps calls this technique 'anticipated memory' (2017, 479), a popular trope in speculative fiction whereby writers adopt 'a posthumous stance from which we can look back on our impending extinction' (486). And yet, this is also a vision of the past, echoing Florida's history of settler invasion and Indigenous dispossession and genocide.

In Area X, time functions differently—or 'weirdly', following Morton's observation that 'weird' derives from 'the Old Norse *urth*, meaning twisted, *in a loop*' (2016, 5)—repeating the original trauma of colonial contact. Like in *The People in the Trees*,

VanderMeer utilises an acceleration aesthetic within Area X to emphasise the horror of a familiar ecology undergoing rapid, uncanny changes. Through these 'Weird' elements, the *Southern Reach* registers 'the absurdity of experiencing an emergency situation that was taking so long to develop' (VanderMeer 2014a, 17). Not only do the years pass more quickly in Area X, accelerating the decay and assimilation that remove human influence from the land, but time also operates nonlinearly, collapsing past, present, and future. At the moment of Area X's formation, Saul enters the lighthouse and sees the piles of journals that will be written by expedition members in the decades to come:

> what looked like notebooks that now rose from the watch room, a great behemoth, a disheveled library of shadow and reflection that leaped into and out of focus—ghosts and figments, curling and questing, there but not quite there, a record that he did not understand because it did not yet exist. (2014c, 305)

Area X distorts a straightforwardly linear telling with its decidedly 'weird' and spectral temporality, its uncanny visitors from both the past and future whose presences point to a concealed and unresolved violence. In an essay, VanderMeer writes that 'hauntings and similar manifestations become emissaries or transition points between the human sense of time and the geological sense of time' (2016, n.p.).[34] Area X is figured in the text as '[a] kind of ghost […] light as fog, almost invisible except for a flickering quality' (2014b, 35).[35] Its haunting presence makes visible the slow changes of geological time by providing a stark contrast to the dominant logic of extractivism.

---

[34] VanderMeer points to climate change as one such haunting.

[35] Fog makes that which is usually invisible (i.e. the weather) visible while making everything else invisible. Yanagihara also uses fog to conjure an ecogothic atmosphere in *The People in the Trees*, where Perina imagines it represents some hidden, 'irrational' yet desirable knowledge.

Just as ghosts make visible that which has been concealed, in the Anthropocene what was once invisible and seemingly immaterial—whether radiation, pollution, spores, or the atmosphere itself—becomes tangible, material, and volatile. When the biologist first enters Area X, she reflects on the air quality:

> The air was so clean, so fresh, while the world back beyond the border was what it had always been during the modern era: dirty, tired, imperfect, winding down, at war with itself. Back there, I had always felt as if my work amounted to a futile attempt to save us from who we are. (2014a, 30)

Outside Area X, the air has been contaminated or changed by human beings; inside Area X, air is the vehicle by which human beings become contaminated and altered by spores. Alluding to the climate crisis, the biologist asserts that the air of the modern era with its 'omnipresent gasoline fumes, […] presaged our destruction' (VanderMeer 2014a, 155). Menely observes the way 'we speak of an "air" or "atmosphere" as a distinctive ambience, a mood or tone' (2014, 93). For the biologist, the modern air—clogged and degraded by industrial pollution—conveys a sense of doom, carrying with it material evidence of humanity's self-annihilation. She believes her work to conserve nonhuman ecologies is 'futile'—but in Area X, such ecologies flourish. The ecogothic's haunting histories are those of ecological collapse, which are, more often than not, simultaneously histories of colonial invasion and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. *Acceptance* presents Area X as the haunting return of those histories inflicted upon the settler population as the land is terraformed to suit the needs of a new invading force.

Entangled Texts

The *Southern Reach* novels perform an investigation with no solution—at least none its human narrators can uncover. The twelfth expedition's exploratory mission is to document, taxonomise, and rationalise Area X, to assign it comprehensible meaning, but they find themselves unable to interpret the phenomena they encounter. Their maps omit significant topographical structures, their biological samples offer impossible results, and written accounts of the area proliferate without aiding understanding. These are tools of epistemic colonisation, of mapping, charting, and ordering nonhuman entities—'natural resources'—to delineate territory, hierarchy, and ownership. For the expeditions to have successfully identified an origin and 'solution' to Area X would mean the triumph of scientific hubris and military might, a repeated history of colonial conquest on Floridian soil. Yet from the writing in the tower endlessly repeated by the Crawler to the piling up of expedition journals in the lighthouse and the theories produced by Southern Reach agents, the compulsion to write, record, and diagnose Area X fails to produce definitive answers. The sense of frenzied excess that characterises both Gothic and Weird literatures (Sederholm 2021, 165) manifests in the *Southern Reach* as a palimpsest of entangled texts where words proliferate but fail to *illuminate* the complexity of a non-anthropocentric world.

The psychologist from the twelfth expedition, Gloria (or 'Cynthia' as director of the Southern Reach before Control) creates piles of notes about Area X in a frenzied investigation, taking confidential documents home and compulsively 'annotating, amending, adding data and fragments' (VanderMeer 2014b, 286). After Gloria's disappearance, Control is tasked with sorting through 'the sedimentary layers' of her desk, which he thinks of as 'compost piles' made up of 'leaves, […] napkins, receipts, even sometimes toilet paper, creating a thick mulch' (2014b, 174, 152), probing the

boundaries of what constitutes textual material.[36] Yet Control fails to interpret the message. Sorting her desk, he 'placed the oak leaf on the unknown pile, as in "unknown value"' (2014b, 155), the plant life so removed from the norms of ordinary human communication that Control cannot begin to assess its significance. He wonders '[w]hat susurrations or utterances might verbalize all unexpected from a cross section of tree moss or cypress bark' (2014b, 126) if only he could decipher them. For Dawn Keetley, plants are ubiquitous ecogothic monsters 'because they *are* the absolute "other," because they exist on and beyond the outer reaches of our knowledge' (2016, 8). The thought that plants might be secretly communicating (with each other and us) exceeds Control's epistemological framework. Such encounters with the nonhuman frequently bring VanderMeer's human characters 'to the point of epistemological and ontological rupture' (Sederholm 2019, 162-3). Control's thought processes are contorted into ungainly linguistic forms ('what susurrations or utterances might verbalize all unexpected') as he grasps toward the unthinkable.

While environmental humanities discourses have favoured sites of connection and similarity between the human and nonhuman, I view ecogothic fiction as using entanglement to highlight continued frictions and violence between species, emphasising 'the disconnection between the animal and the human; between the world as we perceive it and the vast possibilities of other worlds which we do not and cannot even begin to conceive' (Heholt and Edmundson 2020, 9). The *Southern Reach* novels consistently chart the limitations of human language for achieving interspecies communication. Frustrated with the anthropocentric view of intelligence, Ghost Bird wonders if the transformations caused by Area X might constitute:

[36] The reference to toilet paper echoes Esme Duff's long anthropological records of defecation in *The People in the Trees*, reinforcing the sceptical sense of language as waste(d).

> An odd form of communication? If so, the message had not been received, would probably never be received […] because human beings couldn't even put themselves in the mind of a cormorant or an owl or a whale or a bumblebee. (2014c, 189-90)

She indicates belief in a hidden knowledge made inaccessible by humanity's unwillingness to decipher or respond to nonhuman communication. Ghost Bird even suspects she might herself 'be a message incarnate, a signal in the flesh' (2014c, 37).

The biologist similarly describes being torn between what she 'feel[s]' innately to be true—that nonhuman animals have the capacity for intelligent perception—and her 'scientific objectivity':

> [a pair of otters] glanced up and I had a strange sensation that they could see me watching them. It was a feeling I often had when out in the wilderness: that things were not quite what they seemed, and I had to fight against the sensation because it could overwhelm my scientific objectivity. (2014a, 30)

By placing these two forms of knowledge in a binary, the biologist implies scientific enquiry necessitates a feigned ignorance of animal intelligence to substantiate belief in human superiority. Convinced that sample cells taken from organisms in Area X camouflage themselves when she looks at them, the biologist decides 'the very act of observation changed everything' (2014a, 159). Objective scientific observation proves impossible. VanderMeer suggests there is no vantage point from which humans can neutrally and unobtrusively observe 'Nature' because they are always implicated within it. It is not only the biologist's 'act of observation' that 'change[s] everything' but that of the nonhuman who gazes back.

But even if VanderMeer's human characters cannot decipher fleshly communications, the series' nonhuman characters *can*. Area X learns to 'read' human beings; as the biologist realises, 'I was words [the Crawler] could understand' (2014a, 182). The Crawler's writing on the wall seduces and demands to be read, even as it thwarts and misleads; the more the biologist reads the Crawler's writing, the more she feels Area X 'infiltrating my mind in unexpected ways, finding fertile ground' (2014a, 24). The biologist is not only 'contaminated' by the spores but by the Crawler's words, which leach into her vocabulary and shape her narration. Her descriptions take on a sense of sacred awe in repeated gestures to the 'beatific', 'leviathans' (*Annihilation* 93), and 'huge aquatic reptiles' (2014a, 5)—a defamiliarising language evocative of both Saul's sermons and the hypnotic cues used by Southern Reach agents. Language is the medium for accessing other minds, planting ideas and desires where they did not exist before, or for extracting knowledge.

The *Southern Reach*'s anxiety about the limitations of language often slips into its opposite: anxiety about the potency of words. Like Norton Perina in *The People in the Trees*, characters eventually incriminate themselves by saying too much. The reader also 'reads' the biologist as a character constituted by words on a page, and the *Southern Reach* is comprised of numerous found manuscripts in the form of journal entries, letters, and logs, which reveal much about their fictitious authors as well as the ostensibly ineffable Area X. Since the biologist's narration is already 'contaminated' by her exposure to the Crawler's writing, the series poses a metatextual threat: that reading the novels might also 'infect' the reader with the same bewitching language. This eerie effect is amplified in Gloria's sections of *Acceptance*. Narrated in the second person, Gloria's interrogation by the brightness appears addressed to the reader:

‘there’s still an interrogation going on. / One that will repeat until *you* have given up every answer’ (2014c, 8, emphasis added).

The interrogation dynamic established in Gloria’s sections of *Acceptance* echoes the prison interviews Control conducts with Ghost Bird. In the *Southern Reach*, the interrogator frequently becomes the interrogated. Early in the twelfth expedition, for instance, the team makes a show of appearing unafraid of the moaning creature:

> We were confident that eventually we would photograph it, document its behaviour, tag it, and assign it a place in the taxonomy of living things. It would become known […] But we stopped calling back when the intensity of its moans heightened in a way that suggested anger, as if it knew we were mocking it. (2014a, 31-2)

The team’s confidence that they can *know* the creature by cataloguing it, and thereby diminish its frightening otherness, is undermined when the creature indicates it understands and resents their intentions. As characters attempt to dominate Area X and learn its secrets, they unwittingly make themselves vulnerable to becoming ‘colonize[d]’ (2014a, 6) by it. As Bev Hogue observes, ‘the explorers become the explored, the possessors the possessed’ (2016, 158). The idea that literary production and scientific enquiry inadvertently ‘feed the monster’ is reiterated throughout the trilogy. The compost piles of the psychologist’s desk mirror the piles of expedition journals in the lighthouse, a doubling that brings together Gothic concerns with excess[37] and decay as the neurotic production of written material is gradually overtaken by the spread of rot and mould in a symbolic loss of human mastery to nonhuman proliferation. For Estok, ‘[d]ecay and rot are important to the ecoGothic because they are agency and excess overgrown and unpredictable’ (2019, 44).

[37] ‘I’m reminded again, the Gothic is at heart a literature of fear, of excess’ (Hillard 2019, 30).

Human attempts to understand Area X through written observation—to excavate and map the unknown—prove self-defeating, for each tirade only creates more compost for Area X's reclamation of organic material. The biologist observes, 'the history of exploring Area X could be said to be turning into Area X' (VanderMeer 2014a, 112). The scene gives the disturbing impression that '[b]y exploring and describing Area X, [the biologist] feeds the monstrous terrain the words it needs to continue growing' (Hogue 2016, 159).

Even as the *Southern Reach* registers the limitations of human language and knowledge systems, it can only express those ideas from within the structures it critiques. From expedition journals to the lighthouse keeper's logs, to letters written between characters and disturbing video footage, the *Southern Reach* is filtered entirely through texts and media forms. There is no objective, extra-textual perspective: only a collage of textual inscriptions. Part of the reason VanderMeer is able to maintain the multiple explanations for Area X is structural; unlike the other texts examined in this thesis, the *Southern Reach* is a series of novels, a matrix of fragments. As Baker notes, the *Southern Reach* is an example of a contemporary text where writers 'use a narrative structure that refuses to resolve or explain the nature of the world they depict' (2019, 149). Rather than becoming demystified, Area X becomes *stranger* the more it is studied, a process reflected at the level of form. Following the single narrative perspectives of *Annihilation* and *Authority*, *Acceptance* splinters into multiple perspectives—Control, Ghost Bird, Saul, Gloria, and the biologist—whose interpretations and timelines do not neatly align. For Baker, '[t]here can be no single truth that encompasses human and nonhuman lives, no single perspective on a post-Anthropocene world: there is only, always, the precarious interrelation of multiple selves' (2019, 176). Awareness of nonhuman intelligence and communication means

a single explanation for the world is no longer tenable. Selmin Kara and Cydney Langill suggest Weird fiction produces 'a particular iteration of the real, perceived in the era of climate change as something porous, difficult to grasp, and resistant to cognitive capture' (2020, 60-1). The trilogy is, appropriately, a palimpsest: its narrators inscribe interpretative deviations upon one another's texts. As Sarah Dillon explains, 'in palimpsestuous reading no layer of the text represents the essential or definitive version of a work' (2007, 48). There is no objective or authoritative version that can be relied upon. The entangled texts of the *Southern Reach* effectively refract 'our mid-Collapse condition', making it perceptible without instating an omniscient god-like perspective.

Thinking of the *Southern Reach* as a palimpsest reiterates my imperative to read the multiple explanations for Area X together. On one hand, the very impulse to theorise Area X, to unlock its mysteries, is mocked by the text as hubristic and fallacious. Whitby produces a cluster of 'theories' that are neither confirmed nor denied, but the very process of attempting to rationalise Area X and produce neat explanations is treated with scepticism because '[g]rand unified theories could backfire' (VanderMeer 2014b, 132). On the other hand, characters can't *not* theorise and attempt to make sense of that which perplexes them. For Ngai, echoing Jameson, the 'disposition to theorize […] finds itself aligned with paranoia, defined here not as mental illness but as a species of fear based on the dysphoric apprehension of a holistic and all-encompassing system' (2007, 299). Confrontation with totality compels these anxious, partial attempts at meaning-making.

One significant notion Whitby introduces is that of *terroir*: 'you would study everything about the history—natural and human—of that stretch of coast' to 'find an answer in that confluence' (2014b, 131). '*Terroir*' contains the spectral echo of 'terror',

maintaining the eerie, contaminating effect produced by Area X; but its alertness to unique combinations of environmental factors more importantly approaches a place-based theory of knowledge, like Glen Sean Coulthard's 'grounded normativity' (2014), wherein understanding derives from the land. Terroir literally refers to the flavour notes in wine, a unique taste produced by the growing conditions of an ecology. The term suggests an *entangled* knowledge, or a knowledge of how entanglement produces a synthesis greater than its individual components. The notion of terroir manifests in the series' repeated gestures to environmental conditions, leafy messages, and illustrations of nonhuman intelligence that exceed textual forms of knowledge production. But it also pervades the co-existing, unresolved interpretations for Area X—as mutant ecology, mind-control experiment, and alien invasion—which approximate the twenty-first-century condition in which reality becomes uncanny and unreliable in its ability to deliver truth or meaning. The terror of *terroir*.

Conclusion: Myriad Unfinished Configurations

Characters in the *Southern Reach* are entangled in bodies, taken to extremes in hybrid creatures and mutants. They are entangled in looping, non-linear temporalities that bring the violence of the past into the present. There is a muddling of affect as characters encounter Area X with wonder, openness, connection, ecstasy, disgust, fear, and horror. And there is an entanglement of knowledge: an array of explanations that fail to deliver definitive meaning. VanderMeer's ecogothic 'defamiliarizations function as analogies for incomprehensible yet lived experience' (Weinstock 2023, 26). Body horror shocks us into recognising the dark and potentially disempowering aspects of entanglement; doppelgängers capture the disorientating experience of comprehending humanity as a self-annihilating geological force; and hauntings remind

us of the violence that shapes the circumstances we inherit. In such complicated webs of entanglement, what remains of personal agency? Can actants influence or strain against the networks they are caught within?

Keetley and Sivils write that at the heart of ecogothic fiction lie:

> questions of determinism (and freedom), especially as these questions play out through a long history and on the far reaches, the limit edges, of what we think we know about the human—and what shapes or "possesses" the human. (2017, 6)

In the *Southern Reach*, humans are possessed by a mutating landscape, by other humans through mind-control and hypnosis, or by something alien and unknowable. And yet, they do exert some degree of agency. At the end of the trilogy, Control faces an agonising encounter with the Crawler to reach the suspected origin of Area X: a light at the bottom of the tower. Control's final act (for he is presumed to die in the process) asserts his status as an agential being, wrenched from the helplessness induced by corporate conspiracy, at the very moment he becomes something else, lifting his 'paws' (2014c 312) to bound into the light.

While the environmental humanities have typically sought to diminish the sovereign figure of the Human, the ecogothic retains an interest in personal agency, even if that agency is negative (in the case of Norton Perina), mysterious or unmappable (in the case of Control). It is unclear exactly what effect Control has on Area X except that the border changes position; he has perhaps accelerated Area X's expansion or its destruction. Returning to where the border had been, Ghost Bird notices the soldiers and checkpoints have gone, and like the journals in the lighthouse, '[t]he white tents of the Southern Reach had turned dark green with mold' (2014c, 330) in a victory of organic matter over militarised infrastructure. Ghost Bird thinks that '[t]he

hegemony of what was real had been altered, or broken, forever', and greets the possibility 'unaccountably happy, grinning even' (2014c, 329-30). She encounters no signs of human life but passes wrens, warblers, marmots, storks, and ibises as indicators of a world reenchanted: 'an ordinary day' (2014c, 331) in which the boundaries of 'ordinary' are quickly and radically reimagined. Ghost Bird thinks 'that although nothing could be reversed […] it could change, and that Control had added or subtracted something from an equation that was too complex for anyone to see the whole of' (2014c, 328). The challenges of the Anthropocene may be too monumental to be straightforwardly conceived of in their totality, but complexity does not render the actions of individuals meaningless. Agents can contribute something to an unimaginable whole. Against the backdrop of a permanently altered global ecology, individual choice and autonomy are valorised—even when their final impact is uncertain.

Competing meanings not only destabilise the authority of any one human narrator or institution; they also undermine the certainty of a final Collapse or Salvation scenario. In the *Southern Reach*'s open spaces and grey areas of meaning, agency can be grasped from inevitability. This state of indeterminacy is not the same as hope; as Prendergast writes of *Annihilation*, 'the horror aesthetics of weird science fiction […] avoid disingenuous optimism' (2017, 336). But VanderMeer's aesthetic of plurality and excess, of unfixed endings and coexisting realities, denies the hope*less*ness of a predetermined fate. VanderMeer's imperative is akin to Haraway's notion of 'staying with the trouble': being present with crises, dwelling not 'between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations' (2016, 1). His work is grounded in the boggy, bewildering webs of the

present as an unfinished process located ‘in and of the fabric of undoing’ (Haraway 2016, 39)—our ‘mid-Collapse condition’.

In a perhaps unexpected resonance, ecogothic’s ambivalent affective spectrum may help us to ‘stay with the trouble’ in the same way that Ngai points to ‘ugly feelings’ that ‘offer[] no therapeutic or purifying release’ (2007, 6). This lack of release or satisfying closure mirrors the shape of VanderMeer’s mid-Collapse condition: the ongoingness of ecological harm. Through negative and ambivalent affects, ecogothic fiction maintains the long rhythms that Song suggests are necessary for maintaining attention to climate change—and, we may extrapolate, other ecological issues such as pollution, biodiversity loss, extinction—since these emotions are ‘defined by a flatness or ongoingness entirely opposed to […] “suddenness”’ (Ngai 2007, 7). The ecogothic contains a ‘willingness to sit with discomfort that doesn’t fit too neatly into narrative plots’ (Song 2022, 67). It favours palimpsestuous complexity over singular certainty, the anxiety of open-endedness over comforting resolution. Evolving out of the previous chapter’s interest in narrative temporality and the slow violence of the Anthropocene, this chapter has examined mixed forms of entanglement in ecogothic fiction. The next chapter turns its attention more thoroughly to the idea of negative and ambivalent affective modes that are perhaps better suited to capturing the slow collapses of the Anthropocene.

CHAPTER III: AFFECT

Gothic Returns to Queer Ecology:

The Affective Archives of K-Ming Chang's *Bestiary*

Introduction: Locating Gothic in Queer Ecology

When Benjamin Bateman describes 'becoming "humiliated," frighteningly and pleasurably, by one's embeddedness in ecological networks no longer perceived as masterable or secondary to human endeavor' (2023, 45), he uses the language of *humiliation* to articulate the feeling of queer environmental belonging. This is 'humiliation' in Timothy Morton's sense of 'being brought low, being brought down to earth' (2013, 17)—the humbling of the Human who can no longer hubristically presume to be the sovereign master of their ecology. The root of this environmentally-inflected sense of humiliation lies in Leo Bersani's pivotal essay 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' (1987),[38] where Bersani theorises bottoming for gay men as the 'radical disintegration and humiliation of the self' (1987, 217) and displacement of the masculine ego. Queer ecology has a broader target in its application of *humiliation*: to decentre the *hu*man ego by drawing attention to how human subjectivity is 'interpenetrat[ed]' by 'external agencies that easily become internal' (Bateman 2023, 44). Queer ecology complicates the notion of a bounded human self in sovereign control of itself and its environment by directing attention to the myriad nonhuman agencies that move within and between

[38] While Bersani rejects the labelling of his work as 'queer theory', his essay is generally considered to be a founding work of the anti-social strain in queer theory.

human bodies: matter we eat, breathe, and soak in through the skin. Whether by anal sex or interpenetration by one's vast and unexpectedly agential ecology, the affective experience of being humiliated—that 'ecstatic suffering' of 'self-shattering' in which 'the opposition between pleasure and pain becomes irrelevant' (Bersani 1987, 217)—conjures an even earlier referent: the Gothic sublime.

The 'sublime in nature' Edmund Burke famously described in 1759 produces 'astonishment […] with some degree of horror' (1990, 53). Apprehending venomous creatures or the vastness of the ocean, 'the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other' (Burke [1759] 1990, 53). The sublime is a 'negative pleasure' amounting to awe at the power of nature, against which one experiences 'the oceanic feeling of self-dissolution' (Mishra 2012, 290). The sensation of 'oceanic self-dissolution' strikingly resembles Bersani's '*jouissance* of exploded limits, as the ecstatic suffering into which the human organism momentarily plunges when it is "pressed" beyond a certain threshold of endurance' (1987, 217). In both instances, the human subject is overwhelmed in an ambivalent experience of pleasure that turns on pain. In this sense, the Gothic is already in some ways *eco*gothic: its history one of articulating powerful affective responses to ecological phenomena, particularly conflicting or ambivalent feelings about the nonhuman's startling agency.

The language of queer ecology thus maintains a distinctly Gothic quality. Its early formulations are populated with 'monstrous' lifeforms (Giffney and Hird 2008, 8), 'melancholy natures' (Mortimer-Sandilands 2010, 333), 'queer predators' (Azzarello 2008, 134), and 'strange strangers' in a 'dark ecology' (Morton 2010, 277). When we trace the origins of this vocabulary, we find much of queer theory shares influences with Gothic fiction. From Jack Halberstam's early work on the Gothic as a technology that produces 'deviant subjectivities' (1995, 4) to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's writing on

Gothic conventions (1986), queer theory shares vocabularies, lineages, and affects with the generic tradition of Gothic. The symbol of the monster—whose body invites a plurality of meanings and differences but is consistently constructed against the normal, healthy, and 'natural' (Halberstam 1995, 5-6)—is part of the shared language of Gothic and queer theory, alongside discourses of haunting, spectrality, the uncanny, the return of the repressed, and the intimate stranger. The collected essays of *Queering the Non/Human* elucidate how queer theory has frequently shared Gothic preoccupations with 'the monstrous, the Other, the abject and the barbarous', as well as ecocritical interests such as 'hybridity and the transgression of species boundaries' (Giffney and Hird 2008, 8). In Gothic fiction, these ideas popularly manifest in the werewolf, witch, demon, vampire, and ghost: monstrous bodies in which the human, nonhuman, and posthuman intersect. Such motifs are frequently mobilised for the representation of queer sexualities (Palmer 2012, 6). Indeed, William Hughes and Andrew Smith assert 'Gothic has, in a sense, always been "queer"' (2009, 1) in its encoding of difference and marginality through sexual expression and textual form.

Trans theory, too, draws from Gothic depictions of monstrous bodies. In her famous essay on transgender rage, Susan Stryker compares her embodiment as a trans woman with that of Frankenstein's monster.[39] Stryker self-consciously reproduces Gothic techniques, including the 'dark, watery images of Romanticism', 'brooding cadences and grandiose postures' (1994, 250) to articulate rage, desire for revenge, and the alienation of the closet. At least a decade before queer ecology gains its name, Stryker utilises affective registers and literary techniques from Gothic fiction to rail against both 'the naturalized heterosexual order' (242) *and* human supremacy.

[39] Paul B. Preciado reiterated this association of the trans body with Frankenstein's monster in an address given to the École de la Cause Freudienne, an academy of psychoanalysts, in Paris, November 2019. See *Can the Monster Speak?* translated by Frank Wynne (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2022), p. 39.

She writes: ‘being called a “creature” suggests the lack or loss of a superior personhood. I find no shame, however, in acknowledging my egalitarian relationship with non-human material Being’ (240). Stryker’s polemic strikingly deploys Gothic imagery to call for trans rights in solidarity with the nonhuman.

Despite these historically shared vocabularies, symbols, and emotional registers, however, the Gothic has receded from queer theory in recent years. With amplified queer visibility and representation in literature, reading ‘against the grain’ à la Sedgwick (1993, 4) for telling absences, periphrasis, and preterition as grammatical indications of a potentially queer/ed meaning has fallen out of fashion. More explicitly queer textual forms—often favouring pride, pleasure, and utopianism as dominant affects—have ascended. But what has been lost in the retreat of Gothic from queer ecology? What insights might we glean from placing these disciplines more directly in conversation once again as queer ecogothic?

In this chapter I want to propose certain compatibilities and generative tensions in how queer ecology and ecogothic approach environmental phenomena. I begin this chapter with the perhaps surprising discussion of anal sex and the sublime for two reasons: 1) to begin to reconnect discourses of queer ecology and Gothic, and 2) to continue my discussion of bodily porosity as an ambivalent site of entanglement with others. This chapter argues queer ecology has an unacknowledged origin and co-conspirator in ecogothic fiction; in forgetting the Gothic, queer ecology has also forgotten Gothic’s warnings and anxieties about a dispersed, compromised, and interpenetrated self. I thereby take up Mair Rigby’s challenge ‘to view the Gothic as enabling queer scholarship, helping theorists to articulate queer reading practices and discuss the construction of sexual nonconformity’ (2009, 54). Going a step further, I propose the ecogothic’s temporal and affective complexity in response to

environmental challenges is a method ripe for reanimation in queer ecological scholarship.

Why *Bestiary*?

K-Ming Chang's 2020 novel *Bestiary* serves as the literary case study for this chapter on account of its striking intersection of Gothic with queer and environmental discourses. While offering a sometimes utopian vision of more-than-human assemblages, *Bestiary*'s ecogothic approach—with its affective repertoire of fear, desire, disgust, disorientation, and horror—also complicates the positive narratives queer ecology espouses about entanglement. Moreover, *Bestiary* significantly engages with an Asian-American literary tradition that establishes alternative relationships to ideas of queer humiliation, plasticity, and animality, which can further illuminate blind-spots in queer ecology—a field that has been criticised for its lack of engagement with race and decolonial theory. In *A View from the Bottom* (2014), Tan Hoang Nguyen argues the ecstatic 'self-shattering' of anal sex that Bersani describes is differently inflected for Asian American gay men, who have been persistently effeminised as both gay and Asian. Nguyen negotiates 'the racial-sexual humiliations inflicted on Asian American subjects' (2014, 23), in which 'humiliation' marks one's exposure to violence, defeat, and abjection, rather than ecological belonging or the opening of relations with others. For Nguyen, a person has to be afforded masculine power in order to choose to give it up—a presumption about being in possession of the agency necessary to make choices about how to use one's body or how one's

body is used by others. *Bestiary* significantly charts the affordances of 'humiliation' as both pleasurable ecological sublimity *and* violent abjection.[40]

To briefly contextualise the novel itself, in medieval Europe, a 'bestiary' was an illuminated book of beasts that documented the religious symbolism of animals, mythical creatures, and hybrid species. Art historian Debra Hassig suggests medieval bestiaries 'view animal behavior in terms of human moral conduct, with a special emphasis on the dangers of female sexuality' (1999, 72). With her contemporary take on the genre, Chang retains the emphasis on female sexuality while rejecting moralising approaches to human (and nonhuman) behaviour. She repurposes the medium as an archive of folktales and family stories about migration and queer desire narrated by three generations of Taiwanese/Taiwanese American women, known simply as Grandmother, Mother, and Daughter. In her adolescence, Daughter grows a tiger tail, develops same-sex desires, and hungers for human flesh. She feels particular affinity with the folktale of Hu Gu Po, a tiger spirit who occupies the body of a human woman and subsists by eating children's toes. Keen to better understand her transformation, Daughter seeks out more cultural stories from the women in her family and discovers a queer lineage and animist epistemology that have endured generations of war, imperial conquest, and displacement.

Centred on a Taiwanese American family, *Bestiary* is invested in themes of migration, diaspora, transgression and expulsion from borders. While its present-day plot takes place in California, the novel is interwoven with stories from Taiwan, China, and Arkansas, where the family first arrives in the United States. Taiwan consists of one main island with many smaller islands in the Pacific Ocean, around one-hundred

[40] I use 'affordances' here after Sedgwick (1993, 18), with Caroline Levine's more recent definition from design theory in mind: 'to describe the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs' (2015, 6).

miles off the southeastern coast of China. Its northern regions are mountainous, and—despite booming human expansion and development, which has depleted Taiwan's once numerous and lucrative camphor trees (Grano 2015, 39)—the majority of the main island is forested. The island has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples for an estimated fifteen-thousand years; it first experienced colonisation with the arrival of Dutch settlers in 1624 and was briefly settled in the north by the Spanish in 1620–40s. Transforming the traditional hunting, fishing, and slash-and-burn agriculture practiced by Taiwan's Indigenous peoples, the Dutch established rice and sugar plantations and recruited tens of thousands of Han Chinese migrant labourers to work them (Wong 2022, 2-3). Initially trading with the Indigenous peoples for hides and venison, first Dutch and later Chinese colonists increasingly encroached into hunting territories and overexploited the island's deer populations. When the Qing dynasty seized control of Taiwan as an imperial province, efforts were made to suppress Indigenous cultures and languages (reflected in the multiple languages and cultural origins for the folktales in *Bestiary*). When Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895, the Japanese escalated their use of military force to suppress and murder Taiwanese indigenous peoples and seize land. In 1945, the defeated Kuomintang (KMT) set up their rule of the Republic of China from Taiwan, asserting all Taiwanese people to be Chinese and establishing Mandarin as the only legal language. The establishment of martial law during the period of White Terror from 1949 to 1987 encoded a one-party system, eroded free speech, and saw widespread use of military force, torture, and political executions.

Against this complex environmental and political history, Chang foregrounds bodies of water as important intermediary spaces where her characters find refuge from empires and nation-states—a refuge often connected to indigenous and queer utopic visions that stand in opposition to imperial, heteropatriarchal, and nationalist

agendas. For characters descended from the indigenous Tayal,[41] this is appropriate; as Yi-shiuan Chen et al. (2018) write, '*Tayal* people identify themselves with the watershed they come from rather than [land] settlement' (386). Their sense of environmental belonging is water-based. As such, bodies of water do not only symbolise an absence of borders in Chang's novel but are important sites of pre-existing relations. *Bestiary* is formally experimental, combining epistolary poems, fictional editorial notes, and extensive wordplay within and between languages. In interviews, Chang has described the novel as 'plotless' (Tseng 2020), snaking and meandering, deliberately riverlike in its shape. Inspired by Tayal oral storytelling forms and animist understandings of water as possessing consciousness and memory, Chang uses an epigraph by the poet Li-Young Lee: 'The name of the river is what it says' (2020, 1). Water imagery and hydro-ecologies feature prominently in the novel to interweave ideas of non/human entanglements, self-articulation, and queer relations. As Melanie Yazzie and Cutcha Risling Baldy note, '"Water is Life" has become almost ubiquitous across decolonization struggles in North America and the Pacific' as 'Indigenous people are (re)activating water as an agent of decolonization' (2018, 1).[42] Chang foregrounds both the influence of nonhuman agencies and the inheritance of stories as cultural repositories capable of shaping modes of thought and being.

I centre the ecogothic's negative and ambivalent affects in this chapter as a means of foregrounding complicated relations to people, place, and history. Firstly, I

[41] Although officially titled the 'Atayal' by the Taiwanese government, 'Tayal' is the preferred endonym. The Tayal live in mountainous areas of central and northern Taiwan and are the country's third-largest indigenous group (Council of Indigenous Peoples, 2021).
[42] For further reading on the notion of water as a contributing actor—rather than static resource—in Tayal culture, see: Yi-shiuan Chen et al., 'Reframing Indigenous water rights in "modern" Taiwan: reflecting on Tayal experience of colonized common property', *International Journal of the Commons*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2018, pp. 378-401.

draw attention to states of relation in which distance and autonomy—protecting the boundaries of the porous self—might be necessary to respecting non/human agencies. Secondly, I show how the contemporary ecogothic novel articulates the uncanniness of environments made un/familiar by colonisation, extractivism, and urban development, bringing to light fears of homogenisation across gender, sexuality, land, culture, and biodiversity under global racial capitalism. Finally, I approach the ecogothic as an 'archive of feeling' (Cvetkovich 2003) capable of accessing suppressed histories of war, invasion, and displacement alongside glimmers of queer possibility and anti-colonial resistance.

Disentangling Relations

Scholars of queer ecology have presupposed relationality is a necessary environmental value: a means of eschewing anthropocentrism by drawing attention to humanity's interdependence with, and co-constitution by, more-than-human others. The prominent position of relationality is evident in the field's touchstone concepts, including Alaimo's *trans-corporeality*, 'in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world' (2010, 2), and Morton's *mesh* of exchange: the 'nontotalizable, open-ended concatenation of interrelations that blur and confound boundaries between species, between the living and the non-living' (2010, 275-6).[43] These concepts, alongside related ideas of porosity, entanglement, and kinship, aim to amplify the agency of nonhuman entities while simultaneously 'decentering the human as a privileged and self-containable site of analysis' (Bateman 2023, 43). Relationality is presumed to be fundamentally positive: an ethical approach to

[43] Morton is referring in part to Sedgwick's description of queer textual form as 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning' (Sedgwick 1993, 8).

entanglement that promotes intimacy and reciprocity between human and more-than-human entities.

Bestiary is a novel of porosity, leakages, and excess. Holes are its primary motif: holes in bodies, land, and texts, which become interfaces for intimacy, exchange, and violence. Holes are the lively geographies through which Chang traces flows of food, fumes, viruses, blood, sweat, saliva, urine, toxins, and waste.[44] In the essay collection *Transecology* (2020), Wibke Straube proposes such things 'usually perceived as dirty, ugly, shameful even, appear as pathways into alternative sensualities—a hint at stories of livability, possibly other forms of living' (62). When Mother eats Daughter's earwax, or Daughter and her classmate Ben wet themselves laughing, the vulnerability and ostensive inappropriateness of their bodily interactions brings them into intimate relation. In Michael Warner's words, 'relation to others […] begins in an acknowledgement of all that is most abject and least reputable in oneself' (2018, 35). The lesson from queer theory is 'get over yourself' (Warner 2018, 35). The accumulation of these scenes renders the abject and profane ordinary and familiar. They provide sources of humour, which, in Karen Tongson's articulation, are crucial 'to the *techne* of survival for queer of color suburban subjects' (2011, 15). Moreover, Chang's repeated descriptions of urination, farting, consumption, belching, transspecies births, and interspecies mating effectively dethrone and de-exceptionalise the human at the species level. Leaving behind attachments to 'dignity' premised on social hierarchies (Warner 2018, 36) opens the way for 'posthuman ecological intimacy' (Straube 2020, 57): the levelling of power relations between human and nonhuman entities, united by hungry, leaky bodies.[45]

---

[44] Chang credits Chinese American writer Jenny Zhang as 'pioneer[ing] poop-related literature in the Asian American diaspora' (qtd. in Chen 2020).

[45] *Bestiary*'s emphasis on gleeful, abject exchange, moreover, stands in opposition to fascist doctrines of hygiene and purity that police the contaminate/d/ing queer body.

There are undoubtedly sections of Chang's novel where porous entanglement with non/human others produces awe, wonder, affection, intimacy, and kinship—the affirmative affective categories that critical theory of the nonhuman turn primes us to encounter. The ecogothic problematises relationality, however, by showing how entanglement can also produce feelings of invasiveness, unwanted dependency, disgust, fear, and shame. *Bestiary* is a prime text for examining this interplay of complicated affective responses inasmuch as its relations are *ambivalent* in Berlant's sense of 'being strongly mixed, drawn in many directions, positively and negatively charged' (2022, 27). While a compromised human subjectivity has become an important idea in queer ecology and the new materialisms for its role in challenging anthropocentrism,[46] *Bestiary* raises legitimate and compelling reasons to want to protect the boundaries of the self. For some characters in the novel, porosity is experienced as vulnerability to invasion and the devastating loss of bodily autonomy; Mother tells Daughter, 'We aren't born anything but holes, throats and anuses and pores: ways of being entered and left' (Chang 2020, 206). The reduction of the human body to a collection of holes exposes it to exploitation, sexual violence, and colonial conquest. In their work on queer kinship, Judith Butler explores the complicated, ambivalent emotions relationality can provoke: 'one can find oneself inhabited by someone who is kin in the way that one is inhabited by a ghost, or one can deeply fear identification with a kin member and manically seek to fend off the prospect of becoming that person' (2022, 39). Butler's description of spectral occupation and doubles effectively Gothicises kinship relations that threaten to become invasive and stifling.

[46] Relationality has a much longer and substantive history in Indigenous intellectual traditions that often goes unacknowledged in new materialist discussions; see Zoe Todd (2016) and Kim TallBear (2017).

Ecogothic fiction can further elucidate 'the friction of copresence' (Berlant 2022, 10) where ambivalent states of relation emerge. *Bestiary*'s three narrators share a mythology, partake in a common syntax, and swap referents like 'daughter' and 'ama' (grandmother) in such a way that their individual identities and family roles periodically collapse into each other. Steven Bruhm describes this as a common feature of Gothic fiction, whereby '[p]sychological subject positions shift and float, rearranging and destabilizing the roles assumed to belong to each person in the domestic arrangement' (2002, 267). In Gothic, a roving identity typically indicates a pathological state. The rearrangement of subject positions among Chang's narrators at times signifies the pain and loss of older generations reasserting itself through the matriline. When Mother beats Daughter with the garden hose, her violence initiates a moment of transference between their matrilineal identities:

> She called me by her own name, beat herself out of me. I knew the words to arrest her hands: When I called her Ama, the Snake stopped flexing its spine. […] *Ama*, I said again. My mother dropped the Snake and said, *That isn't me*. I said, *IknowIknowIknow*. (Chang 2020, 43)

The slipperiness of family identities and the intergenerational transmission of trauma cause Daughter to be beaten for her predecessors' pain. Calling attention to identities that are out of place helps Daughter to interrupt their irruptive legacies by relocating the appropriate body for the traumatic experience and re-establishing boundaries between them.

Chang utilises the unstable family arrangements of the Gothic tradition to draw attention to 'the undesirable nature of certain forms of relation and the need (in certain contexts) to preserve distance, alterity, and separateness' (Giraud 2019, 9-10). *Bestiary* depicts reluctant maternal relations produced by marital and martial rape.

Grandmother defines ‘a daughter as something done to you at night without your permission’ (Chang 2020, 249) and throws her five daughters into the river before turning back to retrieve them, yearning for those she seeks freedom from: ‘I & unstrapped the cloth all four of my babies spearing in after you I I I I’ (113).[47] She punctuates the babies’ falls with ‘I’s as if sacrificing iterations of herself: not a single integrated self but a subjectivity splintered by motherhood. Bruhm writes that Gothic fiction ‘devastates any sense of linear progression that we might use to put together our “personal history”’, since ‘the protagonist of the contemporary Gothic often experiences history as mixed up, reversed, and caught in a simultaneity of past-present-future’ (2002, 266-7). Personal history is not only ‘mixed up’ in terms of chronological sequence, with the past intruding upon the present, but also ‘mixed up’ with the lives of others. Grandmother writes to her eldest daughter, ‘I pulled the river through you like string through a bead into the mouth-hole out the asshole my life threaded through yours’ (Chang 2020, 115). The textual spaces in Grandmother’s letters offer a visual illustration of the gaps and orifices where lives are threaded together. In these moments, *Bestiary*’s novel form begins to break down, occupying a liminal, non-narrative space between poetry and prose. Grandmother’s ambiguous epistolary form simultaneously reflects the ambiguous boundaries of an individual subjectivity merged with other selves. The body is a porous interface hosting multiple entangled agencies, but the feelings produced by that entanglement are often ambivalent. Grandmother writes, ‘What feeds on your body without permission is a parasite children are no exception. The only cure is to survive what lives off you’ (112). By

[47] The unusual spacing that marks Grandmother’s letters in *Bestiary* formally reiterates the novel’s concern with ‘holes’ and with what cannot be translated: the unsaid and unrecorded details of a life.

Gothicising maternal obligations, Chang draws attention to potentially non-consensual and extractive forms of relation that threaten the resilience of those entangled within them.

Bestiary's maternal relationships oscillate between desires for intimacy and independence. When Ben, Daughter's classmate and female love interest, asks her, 'What would you be without this tail[?]', Daughter answers, '*Free*, I said, but I knew it wasn't true. It was my umbilical cord, and I'd never been freer than inside my mother's belly, Ama's blood braiding into me' (246-7). Daughter's competing responses distil the generative tension Chang fosters between a discrete, individualist approach to agency and a more dispersed, symbiotic understanding.[48] In the individualist context of the United States where Daughter is raised, freedom entails liberation from responsibility to and from others: a frontier ethic rooted in histories of colonialism, slavery, and genocide, employed in the service of domesticating or eradicating nonhuman life and dividing conquered hectares into assigned plots. That individualist framework presupposes a bounded human subjectivity fundamentally separate from ecologies and other selves: a 'Cartesian model of imperial subjectivity' (Goeman 2008, 295). Confrontation with one's haunting and invasive relations splinters the Eurowestern fantasy of self-sovereignty and coherence (Berlant 2022). Daughter's image of her tail as an umbilical cord—a physical connection to her historical, familial, and species lineages—opens other interpretations: that the body is host to and dependent upon myriad others, who hold the potential to sustain or curtail our lives.

In 'Composting Feminisms and the Environmental Humanities', Jennifer Hamilton and Astrida Neimanis suggest that in discussions of 'material

[48] Zakiyyah Iman Jackson reminds us 'symbiosis does not actually imply the absence of incommensurability and hierarchy; rather, symbiosis is a theory that considers the different forms interdependent relations can take' (2020, 134).

intercorporeality'—the permeability and porosity of human and more-than-human bodies—'the specifically feminist genealogy of this work has much to teach environmental humanities about unevenly distributed body burdens and the exploitation of care' (2018, 519). They argue the environmental humanities have taken up the discussion of permeable bodies while often dispensing with the gendered connotations of its origins. By focusing on relations between and sustained by women—motherhood, care work, lesbian desire—*Bestiary* illuminates how burdens of dependency are inflected by gender and sexuality. Chang's Asian women characters uphold webs of relation at home and at work, whether raising hens in barns where sawdust damages their lungs, giving pedicures that expose them to fungal infections, serving food in diners, or caring for children, usually for the benefit of wealthier white patrons. These are the '(classed, racialized, colonized) bodies and labors on which white social reproduction is built' (Hamilton and Neimanis 2018, 524). In this context, entanglement is a measure of being ensnared in racialised, heteropatriarchal labour markets; porosity a measure of one's exposure to social and environmental hazards. Living atop landfills, flood zones, and food deserts, Chang's characters are more 'open or porous than others, and detrimentally so' (Seymour 2020, 198).

The COVID-19 pandemic offers an ongoing example of how care relations can depend upon distance and autonomy to prevent the spread of harm between entangled, porous bodies. Kelly L. Bezio describes how the virus exacerbates inequitable socio-political and racial structures by 'forcing others to move about in ways they wouldn't choose and at great personal risk, all so a privileged group can stay still in relative security' (2020, 699). These fraught relations are not only social—acted out between human beings in capitalist labour networks—but also interspecies. Zoonotic diseases further amplify the need to preserve alterity to maintain ethical

relations between species. The vertebrate group most threatened by environmental changes, amphibians, are perhaps the most visceral example of the dangers of getting *too close*. Amphibians absorb water and oxygen through their glandular skin, which can be fatally damaged by the oils, chemicals, sweat, and heat transferred by human touch (Gentz 2007).[49]

In its affective complexity and challenging family relations, ecogothic fiction throws into question queer ecology's ability to translate the experience of non/human entanglement into a feeling that is purely or uncomplicatedly positive: be it utopian longing, activist energy, or progressive political action. As Butler writes, 'we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them' (2004, 24). *Bestiary* highlights instances in which relationality—and the intimacies, porosities, and shared embodiments surrounding that term—can produce ambivalent and even powerfully negative emotional responses: situations of domestic abuse, sexual violence, zoonotic disease, and exposure to environmental hazards through working-class labour, particularly for non-white, queer, and undocumented people. In the following sections, I show how *Bestiary*'s ecogothic timescales connect these unbearable relations in the present to histories of war, invasion, settler colonialism, and displacement, the legacies of which continue to manifest in uneven and extractive power dynamics. The effect of these sliding and irruptive temporal scales is to re-historicise and re-politicise forms of relation—even the closest of kinship bonds.

[49] Amphibians have become a curious cultural icon at the heart of conversations around pollution and gender. See Hannah Boast, 'Theorizing the Gay Frog', *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2022, pp. 661-79, and Giovanna Di Chiro, 'Polluted Politics? Confronting Toxic Discourse, Sex Panic, and Eco-Normativity', *Queering the Non/Human*, edited by Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird. Ashgate, 2008, pp. 199-230.

Monstrous Lineages

If Gothic fiction has long been concerned with buried secrets and troubled family relations, contemporary ecogothic brings to the genre an acute awareness of more-than-human agencies: knowledge that the relations that precede us and the kin that exist within us are not exclusively human. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Sivils observe, '[ecogothic] time is not just familial, social, cultural, and political but *evolutionary* […] it casts its net still further back than does the gothic into the era of prehistory, into our prehuman (and nonhuman) origins' (2017, 10). *Bestiary* engages with more-than-human histories of speciation through the lens of monstrosity as its characters dwell across species lines. In *Queer Ecologies* (2010), Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson claim that discourses of sex and nature are connected by 'a strongly evolutionary narrative that pits the perverse, the polluted and the degenerate against the fit, the healthy, and the natural' (3). Chang engages her evolutionary narrative from the perspectives of characters likely to be counted among the perverse, polluted, and degenerate—at least when contrasted against the 'ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself' (Wynter 2003, 260). Daughter is marked out as different in the context of twenty-first-century California in multiple ways: as a second-generation migrant to the United States with mainland Chinese and indigenous Tayal heritage, suffering from economic deprivation, with queer sexual desires and a tiger tail. Through the lens of monstrous difference, Daughter encapsulates societal fears of the racialised, animal, and queer body (and their attendant 'appetites') combined in the image of the degenerate predator. Daughter cannot be securely identified as belonging to one particular class, ethnicity, sexual identity, or species, and her capacity for transgression

between categories—even of evolving backwards—further stokes horror.[50] As Halberstam notes, 'monsters always combine the markings of a plurality of differences even if certain forms of difference are eclipsed momentarily by others' (1995, 5-6).

The tale of Hu Gu Po, the tiger spirit who lives in a woman's body and feasts on children's toes, reinforces these connections between abject appetites as the monstrous mother who rejects heteronormative models of selfless maternal care to satiate an unconventional taste for flesh. Chang connects these two strands of the narrative—Daughter's transspecies transformation and the story of Hu Gu Po—through the novel's frequent punning of 'tail' and 'tale'. Halberstam identifies puns as a stylistic marker of Gothic fiction: 'puns are everywhere and they are not only self-referential: they tend to refer to the entire Gothic genre' (1995, 178). In *Bestiary*, the tail/tale pun encapsulates the novel's search for origins—familial, cultural, species, and textual. Tales/tails are symbols of history's resurgence through the body as a material repository for stories and a non/human genetic legacy. Puns invite connections between words and concepts, yet in their repetition puns can also generate a destabilising *excess* of meaning. Daughter notes of Ben's pronunciation, '[h]er accent was an axe: *mother* abbreviated to *moth*, *country* to *cunt*' (Chang 2020, 81). *Bestiary*'s wordplay stresses the entanglement of ecologies, nations, and bodies, but it also gestures to the insufficiency of language (particularly English) for describing diasporic experience and queer desire. The names of the three narrators are said to be beyond translation—Daughter calls the United States 'the country where I was without a name' (61)—and the novel often privileges bodily communication over verbal

[50] Robert Azzarello discusses the Gothic in relation to the nineteenth-century 'anxiety surrounding racial impurity and "degenerative decay" produced by the publication and (mis)interpretation of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871)' (2008, 141). See also Stephen Arata (1990) on the anxiety of reverse colonisation, and Kadji Amin (2020) on the historical relationship of trans* plasticity to the construction of racial and species hierarchies.

or textual expression ('Her touch could name me better than language' [76]).[51] *Bestiary*'s stylistic techniques are attuned to the experience of '[i]nhabiting the linguistic fabric of the United States and inheriting cultural imprints of Asia, but [being] fully enclosed by neither tradition' (Kong 2008, 124). In the classroom, linguistic deviance becomes a strategy for Daughter and Ben to develop their intimacy; Daughter claims, '[w]e misspelled all the words in our essays on purpose, baiting our teachers so we'd get a time-out together' (Chang 2020, 80). They refuse to capitalise proper nouns, misremember idioms, and Ben chooses an anglicised boy's name to prevent her true name from being mispronounced, while Daughter keeps hers a secret. These 'deviant' behaviours deny the authority of colonial languages and the schools and churches that propagate them. If the Gothic textual form is one of 'rhetorical extravagance' (Halberstam 1995, 2), then Chang's irreverence for systematic norms, her focus on sensual and abject bodily experience, and her use of camp, parody, and surrealism constitute a mode of queer ecogothic textual expression.

Bringing 'queer' to bear on ecogothic concerns, interrogations of 'natural' evolutionary trajectories play a significant role in the physical and psychological transformations of *Bestiary*. Early on, Daughter espouses a hierarchical, teleological understanding of evolution she learns within the U.S. education system, wherein humans are perceived as more evolved than other species, representative of a higher order or apex of evolution. Consequently, Daughter worries her tiger tail must signify regression or devolution: 'there was no evolutionary line between tigers and people',

[51] Chang's nameless narrators also situate *Bestiary* within a tradition of Asian-American female *bildungsroman* literature; Belinda Kong (2008) identifies this feature in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976) and lê thi diem thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2003). Maxine Hong Kingston has also been identified as an influence on Yanagihara's writing, especially how Yanagihara negotiates tensions between Kanaka Maoli and Asian settler claims to Hawaii (Byrne 2017, 966).

she says, ‘and if there was, it still meant I was moving backward’ (Chang 2020, 90). She voices a traditional Gothic fear of devolution, ‘the terrifying prospect of the animal “within” breaking out’ (Heholt and Edmundson 2020, 4). Marking a distinction between Gothic and ecogothic perspectives, Ben has other ideas about Daughter’s transformation and its implications for evolutionary trajectories: ‘There’s no such thing as forward or backward’, she says, ‘[t]here was no such thing as progress, just accumulation’ (Chang 2020, 90). Ben denies understandings of evolution that rank species in a progressive movement toward a perfectly adapted being. Instead, she stresses an accumulative model in which DNA is gathered and maintained over generations, leaving traces of other beings within the provisional ‘human’ body: ‘we were many species, many bodies’ (89). Ben’s argument evokes recent thinking about evolution in the environmental humanities. In *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (2017), Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt refer to these lingering DNA structures as ‘the spectral presence of evolutionary time’ (64). As they put it:

> Every new species inherits parts of its body plan from earlier organisms […] the trick is not to imagine this inheritance as teleological progress, the climbing of a ladder toward the sun. Instead, we might appreciate the ghostly presence of ancestors inside us, which makes it possible for us to do whatever we do. (Tsing et al. 2017, 64)

Bestiary imagines these intergenerational and interspecies spectral presences might be reactivated. Daughter’s tiger tail is a symbol of her embeddedness in a diverse biosphere of connections to near and distant species through evolutionary time. Her awareness of these latent connections to nonhuman kin is not only ecogothic—it is also a distinctly queer experience of shared embodiment.

The eruption of nonhuman agency arises in tandem with—or perhaps even *activates*[52]—Daughter's budding sexual and romantic feelings for the tomboyish Ben. Daughter's tiger tail emerges spontaneously and initially acts independently of her control, bodying forth queer transspecies eroticisms: 'Beneath my skirt, my tail moved like a compass hand and tautened in [Ben's] direction' (Chang 2020, 73). Under this tigerish influence, Daughter worries/fantasises that she will 'bite off [Ben's] breasts, scoop them clean like grapefruits' (82). Robert Azzarello traces an 'erotics of feeding' in the confluence of queer sexual desire and predatorial instincts. He suggests the ecogothic's preoccupation with non/human hybrids, the disruption of gender roles, and predator/prey dynamics creates 'a sexually charged, taxonomically problematic – queer – nature' (2008, 148, 151) that problematises the divide between categories of the 'natural', 'unnatural', and 'supernatural'. Nature is already queer *and* Gothic, a source of fear and desire. For Halberstam, the introduction of 'wildness'—broadly conceived as nonhuman agency—into queer theory means 'swap[ping] out the image of an interior room representing a secret self'—the closet—'for a wide-open space across which an unknowable self is dispersed' (2020, 10). In this wide-open space of the wild self, eco-eroticism materialises in 'a multiverse of sexual desires' (80). By the novel's end, Daughter embraces her tail for the queer intimacies it generates with past and present relations: 'I reeled the tail up between my legs and held it between our bellies, both of us grinding hard against it […] I could feel [Ben] through my tail, the fur frizzing with our friction, and I knew I couldn't be undaughtered from it' (Chang 2020, 247). Daughter uses her tail to generate sexual pleasure while recognising its symbolic

[52] The idea of the nonhuman as itself a queering influence chimes with Benjamin Bateman's writing on 'the nonhuman and semi-human spurs to and sources of queerness, making homosexual desire […] the outcome of promiscuous entanglements between permeable, impressionable humans and influential environments' (2023, 44), rather than a self-directed, self-emanating (and anthropocentric) desire.

importance to her role as ‘daughter’: a recipient of legacies that are matrilineal, queer, Indigenous, migrant, and evolutionary. Accepting the spectral—and *material*—presence of evolutionary time facilitates a sense of ecological belonging and non/human ancestral kinship. Thinking of evolution as accumulation allows Chang to celebrate transness in defiance of taxonomical categories and hierarchies, and to foster intimacies with non/human relations past and present: an experience of queer ecogothic time.

Queerness thus continues to find expression in monstrosity as part of a Gothic—at times reactionary—tradition, yet Chang does not depict Daughter’s transformation as *un*natural or undesirable. Daughter’s tail is assigned both phallic and botanical connotations. She reflects, ‘the hole in my back birthed a sapling: stiff as my brother’s morning wood’ (Chang 2020, 48). Likened to plant growth and the bodily transformations of (human) male adolescence, Daughter’s transspecies transformation analogises gender transition while being firmly grounded in the ‘natural’ world. Chang describes Daughter’s tail in masculine terms as ‘stubbly as a beard, [her] shadow big as a soldier’s’ (223). In *Strange Natures* (2017), Nicole Seymour coins ‘organic transgenderism’ to conceptualise ‘gender transitioning as a phenomenon that is at least partly natural—that is, innate and spontaneous—rather than primarily cultural, or constructed’ (36), contributing to ongoing efforts in trans ecology ‘to “depathologize” the trans body and transitioning’ (Bedford 2020, 4). This organic framework seeks distance from medical definitions of transness to emphasise instead ‘local, indigenous, and self-driven articulations’ (Seymour 2017, 43). A more capacious and self-driven approach to transitioning can be gleaned in *Bestiary*’s blurring of boundaries between species, gender, ethnicity, and national identity. Daughter never settles definitively into human or tiger, eluding evolutionary classification and the

binaries of non/human, masculine/feminine, predator/prey. Halberstam calls this queering of binaries 'the inevitable *disorder* of things, the ways of being that resist expert knowledge, that fail to resolve into identity forms' (2020, 15). Daughter's transitions are grounded in familial, Indigenous, and innate processes: a reclamation and expansion of the 'natural' through ecogothic's supernatural mediation.

Plastic Bodies, Toxic Ecologies

Bestiary's transspecies transformations often occur in playful, utopian scenarios of adaptation, resilience, and survival. While flooding the school bathroom, Ben asks Daughter, 'If we stayed in here […] and the water kept outgrowing us, what do you think would happen?' Daughter suggests they would drown, but Ben tells her, 'We'd grow gills' (Chang 2020, 90). Later, Daughter's brother jumps from the roof of a skyscraper to escape their abusive father and, rather than plummeting to his death, his body is carried safely by the wind like a kite. This is 'resilience' in the sense of one's 'capacity for changing without disappearing' (Neyrat 2019, 77), when a body shifts into whatever form is demanded by its altering ecology. *Bestiary* promises the continuation of life even if humans must be radically adapted, altered, or subsumed: 'It didn't take generations to change, to adapt to a new predator or environment. Sometimes one body could do it' (Chang 2020, 90). *Bestiary* at times echoes the sentiments of the biologist in VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* series, who views the extinction-by-assimilation future represented by Area X as '[a] death that would not mean being dead' (2014a, 35). Chang's imaginative leaps of possibility similarly encourage thinking about survival in posthuman configurations: relinquishing firm attachments to that discrete, bounded category of 'the Human' in order to envision possibilities for survival in dangerous and degraded environments. And yet, *Bestiary*'s depictions of

transspecies adaptation are haunted by very real and immediate threats of climate-change exacerbated flooding and sea-level rise. Does Chang push the plasticity of the non/human body too far in its expected capacity to adapt to a rapidly changing world?

Kadji Amin interrogates 'the affirmative and even utopian valence' (2020, 51) of transspecies plasticity in new materialist discourses. While recognising trans* plasticity's potential value in undermining human supremacy, Amin argues that collapsing boundaries between humans and nonhumans has historically been a rhetorical device targeted at specific groups to enforce colonial hierarchies by suggesting, for example, that non-white people are evolutionarily closer to animals and that sexual desires outside the heterosexual monogamy are less civilised and therefore less human. For Amin, the assumption that 'transings of human and animal' (2020, 64) can emancipate people from the categories of race and species is ahistorical and overlooks the ways plasticity has been deployed to actively *construct* race and species hierarchies. Amin's wariness of trans* plasticity highlights the potential dangers of renouncing one's 'human' status, particularly for those whose membership and belonging in that 'Human' category is already precarious. As Zakiyyah Iman Jackson notes, '[t]o render one's humanity provisional, where the specter of nullification looms large, is precisely the work that racism does' (2020, 16). To position oneself *as animal* is to risk the often-racialised violence, dispossession, and exploitation that attends dehumanisation— to be treated, in Fanon's terms, as 'an object in the midst of other objects' ([1952] 2008, 82). For Weinstock, the Gothic 'reminds us that some bodies have always been considered more thing-like than others' (2023, 12). Rather than necessarily elevating the nonhuman, porous entanglements can be used to diminish the human body, to subject it to neglect, violence, exploitation, and death.

Chang's Asian migrant characters suffer the impacts of environmental racism in part because they are imagined to be in greater proximity to animality; the 'Human' of liberal humanist conception remains a privileged category to which they are not always granted access. By interrogating teleological evolutionary narratives, *Bestiary* articulates humanity's shared genetic inheritance with nonhumans while resisting eugenicist thinking and race science derived from Darwinist theory. The United States enacted strict laws against immigration in the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries based on 'a logic that separated the "savages" from the "civilized"' (Park 2004, 54). The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 particularly impacted Asian immigration to California, where its legacies are still felt and where much of *Bestiary* takes place. Upon relocating to the United States from Taiwan, Mother recalls, 'we were the only one of our species. […] They looked at us like we were broken-legged animals to shoot, not because they hated us but because they wanted to save us from the hole we'd fallen into' (Chang 2020, 47). The white Arkansas settlers ascribe a lack of agency and personhood to the protagonists, bolstering racial and species hierarchies in their construction of Asian migrants as less-than-human. Their pity and white saviour fantasies are attended by the threat of fatal violence. For Achille Mbembe, 'racism is above all a technology aimed at permitting the exercise of biopower, "that old sovereign right to kill"' (2019, 71 citing Foucault). The family's conceptual entanglement with animals in the minds of the white settler population contributes to their exclusion from other kinds of entangled relations. Exposure to violence and death is built into the material infrastructure of much of the United States, its distribution often dictated by race. Tongson traces how 'imperial policies and [the] principles behind them are reanimated in contemporary American landscapes' (2011, 17) through zoning laws, land-grabbing, gated communities, gentrification, and food deserts.

Without access to a car, the family in *Bestiary* are forced to walk miles to the grocery store to buy food, reminding Mother of livestock on her father's farm: 'My father drove the oxen so hard, they died of being tired. Just fell over in the fields in the middle of plowing a row' (Chang 2020, 47). These allusions to nonhuman suffering create a sense of shared struggle between *Bestiary*'s displaced Asian characters and animals while emphasising the ways that race refracts non/human relations, making affinities between the racialised humans and nonhumans dangerous.

Some bodies are treated as more plastic and resilient—more capable of absorbing harm—than others. Chang foregrounds neglected and toxic ecologies as the often-overlooked places where minoritised groups (with regards to race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship status) are forced to live in close proximity to industry, waste, and pollution. *Bestiary* takes place across landfills, food deserts, and flood zones in poor neighbourhoods in Yilan, Jiangsu, Arkansas, and California—spaces where the workings of imperial conquest and environmental racism are keenly felt. Part of the political commentary Chang makes in *Bestiary* is to critique imperial ideologies that dually uphold heteropatriarchal subjugation of women and the construction of nonhuman persons as natural resources. She does this by *trans-ing* women's bodies and nonhuman entities, emphasising their shared forms of exploitation. The association of the feminine with the nonhuman is particularly evident in Mother's story about 'daughtertrees', a tradition of Jiangsu province in mainland China where she was raised:

> When a daughter was born, every family planted a camphor tree outside their home. […] When the matchmaker walked by your house and saw that the tree had grown to the width of a waist, she knew it was time for

> your daughter to be married away. The daughtertree was cut down, chiseled into trunks to carry her clothes and bedding. (Chang 2020, 31)

The conflation of the promised bride with the camphor in the symbolic body of the daughtertree emphasises their shared plight as beings unable to dictate how their bodies are used or transported. Kim TallBear—following Mel Y. Chen's usage in *Animacies* (2012)—describes a 'hierarchy of animacies' entailing 'the greater and lesser relative degree of entities' sentience, aliveness, (self-)awareness, and agency' that is used to attribute vibrancy 'to some humans over others, and to humans over nonhumans' (2017, 180). Treated as inanimate, the bride and the camphor tree are robbed of their sentience, agency, and vibrancy. The confusion of species' identity in Mother's warning to Daughter, 'Don't ever grow a body worth cutting down' (Chang 2020, 31) transfers the threat of physical violence to the prospective bride, as if she, too, will be chopped down and hollowed out in preparation for marriage. The conflation of the human and nonhuman thus becomes a source of horror in its reduction of the human body to a tradable object.[53] Both woman and tree are denied agential personhood as inert resources for market exchange. The daughtertree story highlights how having one's subjectivity compromised by outside agencies can be grounded in logics of imperialism, extractivism, gender violence, and ecocide as much as by logics of kinship, intimacy, and relationality.

Bestiary depicts land that has been made unfamiliar and unhomely by invasion and settler colonialism. Chang's characters are unmoored from homelands and displaced into wastelands, where forests are uprooted and native species eradicated. Belinda Kong observes how 'Asian-American Gothic has its chiaroscuro, its shades of

[53] The enslavement of African peoples and their forced transit to the United States haunt the notion of humans-become-commodities, though this history and its ongoing legacies are absent from *Bestiary*.

difference, in sketching out the distance between Asia and America, the two sides of the Asian-American hyphen' (2008, 124). But Chang also shows how new landscapes can be made to feel eerily *familiar* by these same processes. Upon relocating from Taiwan to the United States, Mother is surprised to encounter a strikingly similar ecology:

> We saved all that money to fly, and in the end we arrived at the place we left. It rained, rained our sweat. Our blood turned the color of mirrors and mosquitos mated with our skin. I could name every species of tree […] Arkansas was landlocked, the opposite of the island, but the weather here spoke the same sky. […] my sisters and I, we went searching for the other trees. […] But the trees, they went missing. Walked off. There were these holes in the ground where the roots used to be. (45-46)

The familiar environment does not foster a sense of belonging; instead, the extensive deforestation and importation of non-native species homogenises ecologies to uncanny effect. In Freud's rendering, 'the "uncanny" is that class of the terrifying which leads us back to something long known to us' ([1919] 2018, 85), an ambivalent feeling of the unsettlingly familiar. Encountered out of place, the environment of 'home' is transmuted into its threatening double. Chang conjures settler colonialism as an uncanny force that curtails difference across sexuality, gender, culture, and biodiversity, 'forcing a landscape, climate, flora, and fauna into an idealized version of the world modelled on sameness and replication of the [settlers'] homeland' (Davis and Todd 2017, 769). This method of 'colonial terraforming'—also enacted on Ivu'ivu in *The People in the Trees*—'makes the planet habitable for European colonial settlers, settler-adjacents, and domesticated nonhumans—one particular constellation of lifeforms' (Stewart 2022, 16) that excludes the lives and kinship networks of those with

prior claims to the land. The oppressive humidity and rainfall Mother describes contribute to the feeling of being entrapped—not within the traditional Gothic mansion, but within the increasingly globalised atmosphere of 'racial capitalism' (Robinson [1983] 2000).

Bestiary's ecogothic landscape is one of pollution, toxicity, death—and simultaneously one of queer intimacy. Chang registers something sensual, even erotic, in the transcorporeal process of external-becoming-internal earthly agencies. The polluted earth of the landfill explicitly urges Daughter and Ben's union when its holes in the ground become speaking lips: 'When we kissed in front of them, they cinched their lips and listened, opening only to say *yes, yes*' (Chang 2020, 188). Chang's depiction of the landfill resonates with recent thinking in ecosexuality studies that posits the 'sick, damaged landscape not as a depleted sacrifice zone but as a potential erogenous zone that solicits our touch and desire' (De Bruyn 2023, 1493). The land gives affirmative voice to queer desire where human language (especially imperial languages) proves inadequate. By privileging bodily communication, Chang subverts the notion that only humans possess language, or that English represents a superior mode of communication. These encounters are overwhelmingly enabled by hydroecologies, as rivers, creeks, and reservoirs are coded as queer geographies in the novel. Mother recounts seeing 'two girl ghosts kissing in the creek' (Chang 2020, 8), a lingering trace of queer desire in the landscape rendered visible as spectres. Ghosts are a common motif in Gothic used 'to explore lesbian invisibility […] and the difficulty women experience in finding a language to articulate same-sex desire on account of it being pathologized' (Palmer 2012, 9-10). Palmer's recognition of the spectre's appearance as a kind of failing of language is appropriate; Mother observes

of the ghost girls, ‘a god made them want but didn’t give them a word for it’ (Chang 2020, 8).

David Farrier notes how ‘[a]rranging nature in the interests of capital requires a mass simplification: the reduction of all life into the categories of resource or waste’ (2019, 52). Extractive logics flatten complexity; but Farrier suggests contemporary literature can illuminate ‘the dense arrangement of relations in ostensibly simplified environments’ (2019, 62). In Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria*, the focus of the next chapter, rubbish dumps become sites of reclamation, its materials repurposed to serve Indigenous sovereignty. In *Bestiary*, rubbish dumps become cruising sites where Daughter’s brother claims ‘boys went into the trees around the reservoir and dipped their dicks in and out of each other’s mouths. When I asked why, he said, *That’s just how they speak*’ (Chang 2020, 124). In these so-called simplified spaces—the ‘sacrifice zones’ of landfills and wastelands—complex relations and communities form, often those neglected or outlawed by the state. Straube notes the importance of these ‘undisciplined’ spaces, ‘where people create homes that are not part of the city’s regulated territory: refugees’ temporary campsites, homeless people’s tents, cruising areas’ (2020, 63). Writing on the suburbs of Los Angeles, Karen Tongson writes about how these sprawling geographies can become refuges for people made unwelcome in urban centres, including ‘queers, immigrants, “gangstas,” minimum-wagers, Others who find the notion of a “nuclear family” as toxic as it sounds’ (2011, 1). Rather than depict a fantasy Nature that is pure, wild, unpolluted, and unpopulated (Di Chiro 2010, 201), Chang, too, embraces these built suburban spaces as ecologies worthy of recognition. *Bestiary* makes visible the densely entangled non/human relations that exist in toxic environments, refusing to write them off in ways that would bolster the logic of waste/d spaces.

There is a risk, however, that the aestheticisation of waste and polluted spaces contributes to the exclusion of the myriad nonhuman lifeforms unable to thrive in degraded habitats and, furthermore, elides the ways that polluted landscapes negatively impact the health and life expectancy of Black, Indigenous, and poor humans especially (Seymour 2020, 199). In *Bestiary*, the local reservoir is used as a dumping ground for waste and excrement:

> Shit floated on the surface of the reservoir, though we couldn't tell if the turds were human or not. A few uncles tried fishing here, but all they reeled in were condoms bloated like jellyfish, bike chains, plastic bags, lighters. (Chang 2020, 124)

The lists of human-made detritus emphasise the absence of marine life that ought to live in the reservoir, while the comparison of discarded condoms with jellyfish creates an uncanny doubling of inanimate plastic waste and animal life. While some sets of relations are able to thrive in the covert, unsanctioned spaces of sacrifice zones, others are eliminated. Chang's depiction of toxic geographies is a complex interweaving of queer intimacy with the slow violence of pollution and waste, challenging the expected plasticity of her characters' bodies to adapt to environments made increasingly inhospitable by racism, extractivism, and the eradication of nonhuman life.

Landfill Archives: History from Below

Caroline Levine makes the case for 'the affirmative affordances of enclosures', writing that 'human bodies need protective barriers of some kind—if only to keep out malarial mosquitoes and icy winds' (2023, 70). The landfill is a technology of enclosure designed to keep unwanted or toxic waste inside and separate from the surrounding

land. Lined with nonporous materials like clay or plastic, landfills (in theory) prevent waste from leaking out into surrounding earth and waterways. Yet *Bestiary* reveals another, unexpected affordance of the landfill: preservation. *Bestiary*'s depiction of toxic places is also a journey through geological time. In Wright's *Carpentaria*, subterranean descents open channels to the Creation spirit; in *Bestiary*, excavation similarly facilitates access to ancestral time and threatens to detonate the repressed energy of generations past. Both novels centre protagonists whose homes are built on waste sites, foregrounding how Black, Indigenous, Asian, and poor populations are unduly exposed to harms from pollution. However, neither novel frames rubbish as purely waste material. In *Carpentaria*, materials are reused and reinterpreted for building homes and repairing vehicles; in *Bestiary*, the dump is a living creature that eats, breathes, and communicates desires of its own. Chang uses the landfill as a contemporary ecogothic vehicle for the Gothic trope of unearthing buried secrets. The dump becomes a portal to histories thought long disposed of, covered up, and hidden.

The unearthing of familial and cultural secrets is depicted as a literal excavation. Daughter digs holes in her backyard to release toxic gases from the landfill buried below. She believes that without her intervention, the carbon dioxide and methane emitted from previous generations' waste will accumulate in the compressed space beneath her rented family home and cause an explosion. The potentially deadly build-up of greenhouse gases from the landfill offers a microcosmic image of global climate change, with certain groups suffering from direct exposure more than others. Daughter tells her brother the gas is '*The same as our breath*. That's what made it lethal […] When it entered your lungs, it became a blade inside you' (Chang 2020, 40, emphasis in original). The metaphor of the blade compresses air pollution's 'slow violence' (Nixon 2011) into an immediate physical wounding. Mother buys them snorkel masks

to wear outside, ‘as if sipping air through a smaller opening would shrink the scent’ (Chang 2020, 40). The snorkels only highlight the futility of individualist solutions to environmental issues like air pollution and waste disposal; in its porosity, the body cannot help but let in unwanted gases and toxins, to change and be changed by its ecology.

Daughter describes the landfill as an agential force that ‘lived just below us, digesting itself, flexing its belly’ (40). The most prominent of the holes she digs ‘looked more like a window, like the word for mouth: 口’ (51), and it is through this speaking mouth-window that Daughter establishes a means of communicating with the past. Repressed histories rise to the surface with the fumes. In exchange for meat and treasured objects, the 口 hole transmits letters to Daughter from her estranged Grandmother. In this curious relationship of exchange, the sacrifice zone demands sacrifices of its human inhabitants. The landfill is an intermediary to a lost ancestral past. In having Daughter ‘d[i]g down to find what was dying’ (40), Chang conveys both environmental concern about the effects of toxins leaching into the earth and historiographical concern about the erosion of stories told ‘from below’, from the perspective of the invaded.

Daughter pieces together her family history from accounts not formally recognised in the archives of the nation-state, creating what Chang calls ‘speculative history’ (qtd. in Chen 2020). When a doctor asks about her medical history, Mother replies, ‘we have no history, just stories, just a long record of surviving our countries’ (Chang 2020, 123). When people are displaced from homelands, their cultural memories are transmuted into new forms to survive. Grandmother notably,

> doesn’t measure her life in years but in languages: Tayal and Yilan Creole in the indigo fields where she was born […] Japanese during the

> war, Mandarin in the Nationalist-eaten city. Each language was worn outside her body, clasped around her throat like a collar. (5)

Chang indicates the epistemic violence of contorting to fit a new language when one's home is remade by invasion, war, arranged marriage, or the imperatives of international labour markets. The family shares heritage with the indigenous Tayal who survived settler colonial invasions by the Spanish, Dutch, Han Chinese, and Japanese. Wasiq Silan and Mai Camilla Munkeford note that 'only very few Tayal know how to transcribe their hmali' (language) in written form', which was 'partly lost due to harsh assimilation policies during colonial rule' (2022, 355, 356) including the establishment of Mandarin as Taiwan's only legal language. Translated from Tayal to Mandarin to English, the family stories Daughter gathers represent a fragmented cultural legacy. One of her wry editorial footnotes reads, 'yes, this story is being told in Mandarin. See: linguistic imperialism' (Chang 2020, 143).

While attentive to the violence inflicted on the Tayal language and cosmology by successive waves of settler invaders, Chang rebuffs the 'vanishing Native' trope that would frame indigeneity as a relic of the past. The folktales in *Bestiary* serve as poignant reminders of the Tayal's resilience and survival. In her letters, Grandmother recounts seeing:

> soldiers throw prisoners into the river
> the fish for weeks were shaped like boys they say
> the babies here born gilled bladed or
> hammerheaded. (112)

Like the river or spoken word, Grandmother's writing follows free-flowing patterns without interruption from punctuation marks or the hierarchies of capitalisation. Her letters are paced by uneven spacing between words: gaps suggestive of words lost

but also indicative of where breath flows in speech. Grandmother describes the river as a receptacle of memory: a witness to war crimes unrecorded in the nation's settler histories. She implies these traumatic events were written instead into the survivors' genetic memory to produce biological adaptations in their offspring to protect them from drowning. The explanations offered by transspecies adaptations combine a utopian posthumanism with an insistence on continued Tayal presence. Grandmother's narrative perspective resembles what Yazzie and Baldy describe as 'water view': 'a view *from* the river not a view *of* the river' (2018, 2). Her letters are inflected by oral storytelling forms and animist understandings of water as possessing will, agency, and consciousness. Even in translation, Grandmother's letters contain Indigenous narrative aesthetics, challenging the non-Native presumption that, in Mark Rifkin's words, '[t]o be authentic means to preserve forms of tradition that emanate from the past in pristine ways' (2017, 6). For Rifkin, such a 'performance of stasis' (2017, 6) demanded for 'authentic' Indigenous status to be recognised, locates indigeneity in the past, 'edited out of the current moment—or cast as inherently anachronistic' (5).

Like the landfill waste, these buried counter-histories threaten to explosively resurface. Reconnecting with Grandmother's stories of survival becomes a source of latent rebellion for Daughter, who uses her tiger tail to pull her abusive father to his knees and prevent him from beating her brother. She observes, '[i]t wasn't the pain of his knee that kept him from following us: It was my face, my face that was my mother's' (Chang 2020, 97). The Gothicised shifting subject positions between the women narrators becomes an unexpected source of strength. When Daughter rebels against her father, she turns away from patriarchal models of inheritance to embrace the cultural tales of the women in her family, deciding 'Hu Gu Po had kept us from being

hurt' (98). As Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero assert, 'the past is *in* us, our identities being perhaps as temporally unstable as they are in other ways' (1996, xix, emphasis in original). In *Bestiary*, those spectral legacies gush forth in a moment of danger. Daughter sees her tiger transformation as continuing her Tayal ancestors' resistance to settler invasion. She prays,

> *dear ancestors who took up spears toothpicked the dutch like fancy finger food who bombed back the qing dynasty with bags of farts who turned all japanese soldiers into beads with holes in their bellies please open my tail like an umbrella build me for protection not for prey.* (Chang 2020, 54, italics in original)

Daughter locates herself within a lineage of guerrilla anti-colonial defence invested with the potential to sustain her survival. In private prayer, Daughter abandons the standard grammar of her usual narration for a style and syntax that resembles Grandmother's letters and their riverine stream-of-consciousness flow, welcoming the tide of history.

As evidenced in earlier scenes of Daughter's domestic abuse by Mother, however, aligning herself with the matriline does not mean evading or existing outside legacies of violence. Towards the end of the novel, Grandmother reveals that the story of Hu Gu Po, with which Daughter has come to identify, is another relic of invasion:

> there were no tigers on her island and there had never been. The story had been born somewhere else, brought over by men and stuffed into the bellies of women who didn't want it. The women gave birth anyway, to daughters that did not resemble them. (223)

Colonial violence fractures the fantasy of a 'pure' or 'authentic' heritage, forcing Daughter to contend with the uncomfortable knowledge that she also hails from

Chinese soldiers and has become a settler herself in California.[54] If the 'price of having a body is hunger' (Chang 2020, 14), Daughter is poised to perpetrate harm against others, caught in intergenerational cycles of violence. The familial and cultural archive Daughter constructs is one of damaged, precarious traces to which she belongs uneasily. *Bestiary*'s palimpsestic narrative structure braids together disparate strands of history, culture, memory, nation, and identity into a self that is necessarily provisional, relational, and hybridised, shot through with the influences of a past at once precarious and persistent.

As with her depiction of relations between the living, the relations Chang portrays between the living and dead are deeply ambivalent. Daughter seeks for histories of affirmative connection only to discover wells of violence marking a fraught and complex heritage. But *Bestiary* does not seek to rebury those difficult histories and legacies of traumatic experience, or to create the illusion of a pre-contact state. As Silan and Munkeford write, a contemporary anti-colonial stance is 'not simply about returning to a fixed past, but rather about negotiating one's identity and resisting multiple forms of colonialism' (2022, 357). Early on, Mother tells Daughter, 'You think burial is about finalizing what's died. But burial is beginning: To grow anything you must first dig a grave for its seed' (Chang 2020, 6). Chang's landfill archives attempt to re-historicise and re-politicise contemporary narratives of migrant experience, queer desire, and environmental crises by recovering their buried contexts of war, displacement, heteropatriarchy, and settler colonialism. Like waste, the submerged violence of the past remains indefinitely.

---

[54] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang describe Asian immigration to the United States as an example of how 'certain minorities can at times become model and quasi-assimilable' for the purposes of extracting labour, 'yet, in times of crisis, revert to the status of foreign contagions' (2012, 18). They draw attention to what they consider to be the underexamined role of Asian settlers in the United States in seizing Native land, attributed to an overwhelming 'ambivalen[ce] about minority / people of color / colonized Others *as settlers*' (2012, 19, emphasis in original).

The Lusting Queer Archivist

The sense of irruptive time associated with the Gothic, whereby the past haunts or imposes on the present, may also be thought of as a mode of queer temporality. Elizabeth Freeman observes a resonance for queer theory in how 'the gothic traffics in alternate temporalities or a-rhythms' (2010, 97). Where the Gothic often seeks to banish the intrusive past's unruly ghosts, however, an affective historiography strand in queer theory emphasises turning towards, not shrinking from, the experience of haunting (Freccero 2006; Dinshaw 2007; Love 2007; Muñoz 2009; Freeman 2010). Carla Freccero advises a 'willingness to be haunted is an ethical relation to the world, motivated by a concern not only for the past but also for the future' (2006, 75). To welcome being haunted indicates openness to alterity, to living with difference rather than seeking to assimilate or exorcise it.

Daughter is herself a kind of ghostly figure: someone who negates her personal identity and seeks to disappear into history. Daughter is named (or unnamed) for her relationships to others; while she observes, records, and compiles information obsessively, she reveals little about herself. Daughter combs her family stories to recover a queer lineage, assembling the recovered narratives into the meta-archival form readers encounter as *Bestiary*. Her role as archivist shapes the form of the novel even as she attempts to efface herself from it. Despite her relative anonymity, Daughter's emphasis on embodied, sensory, and affective knowledge practices creates a feeling of intimate disclosure. She subscribes to a subjective understanding in which 'the story you believe depends on the body you're in […] whether you have health insurance, what your first language is, and how many snakes you have known' (Chang 2020, 229)—a knowledge marked by place and experience. Her method

resembles Freeman's 'erotohistoriography', which emphasises 'using the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter' (2010, 95-6) between the past and present. For Freeman, activating these affective modes is precisely the historiographical potential of the Gothic as 'a register for encountering the past felt precisely at the boundaries of what could be encompassed by secular, disciplinary, and even "scientific" notions of history' (2010, 98). To this end, the ecogothic is an instrument for accessing 'archives of feeling' (Cvetkovich 2003).

In *Bestiary*, queer desires echo through family histories. In her letters, Grandmother discloses her affair with a riverwoman, a water sprite with whom she claims to have conceived Mother by ingesting one of the riverwoman's scales. The scale replicates inside Grandmother's belly and grows into a baby in a process akin to mitosis, the reproduction of cells (Chang puns on 'daughter cells', the name given to genetically identical cells produced from cell duplication). In contrast with the children born to her soldier husbands, Grandmother depicts this as an act of autonomous conception: 'This daughter was only hers', she says, 'Hers and the river's' (Chang 2020, 235). Chang transmutes forms of non-heterosexual reproduction from other lifeforms—imagining 'their diverse sexualities and pleasures' (Morton 2010, 276)—to create a queer utopian imaginary in which relations exceed the narrow confines of species. Chang's transspecies couplings occur in whimsical, playful folktales that are simultaneously shocking, camp, and queer (Wells 2008, 4). Grandmother recalls a man in Taiwan who 'had a fishpenis and had to live waist-down in water. […] All the other fishermen held their breath to blow him. His fishpenis shot eggs down their throats, and they gave birth out of their mouths a month later' (Chang 2020, 141). Grandmother's memories/fantasies of erotic encounters evoke José Esteban Muñoz's description in *Cruising Utopia* (2009) 'of a good life that both was and never was, that

has been lost and is still to come' (38). For Muñoz, the idealisation and sense of excess in descriptions of queer sexual encounters (particularly anonymous, collective encounters), builds 'a force field of affect and political desire' (2009, 35). *Bestiary* brings nonhuman intimacies and pleasures within the realm of that 'utopian longing' (Muñoz 2009, 35): the sensuality of the river's embrace, the tiger's tail, fisheggs in the throat.[55]

Daughter takes pleasure in conjuring these transgressive sexual unions of the past, seeking 'for a different form of nourishment' (Freeman 2010, 19) than merely romantic melancholy in histories of queer sensuality and erotic affinity. Carolyn Dinshaw highlights the affirmative potential of a 'queer desire for history' that offers 'the possibility of touching across time, collapsing time through affective contact between marginalized people now and then' (2007, 178). Daughter recovers the story of her great-great-grandfather, an exiled Tayal pirate called Old Guang who lives at sea with his lover Ah Zheng. In the story, Ah Zheng helps Old Guang ejaculate into the sea, where their human daughter grows inside the surrogate body of a crab. Though Old Guang and Ah Zheng are separated during a battle, Daughter invents the couple's reunion, choosing 'to believe that Ah Zheng found my grandfather again, delirious with thirst and far from any coast; I still dream about it' (Chang 2020, 150). Her archival approach is explicitly one of 'dreaming' a queer utopian lineage of which she can become part, projecting herself into the past. She confesses: 'I prefer this ending which

[55] Despite the utopian mood of these encounters, they arguably risk reinforcing troubling associations between homosexuality and bestiality. In *Wild Things* (2020), Halberstam traces the long history of equating sex between men with sex between men and animals from the early modern period as 'crimes against nature', reflecting that '[w]hile modern legal action against sodomy eventually uncoupled bestiality from anal sex between men […] within various contemporary accounts of intimacies between humans and animals, this connection reappears like a shadow formation' (15). Bestiality is the Gothic shadowtext that stalks both queer couplings and human intimacies with nonhuman others. Where Halberstam identifies the criminal history of these associations, whereby Nature is used as a weapon to bludgeon queerness, Chang's ecogothic novel instead explores these interconnections with reckless joy.

doesn't end' (151). Daughter's repeated returns to her great-great-grandfather's story as one of pleasurable sensations and unrestricted movement conjures Dinshaw's 'touch across time', fostering connection with a past community living alternative arrangements to those dictated by empire, heteronormativity, and the nation-state. Freedom from borders is valorised in free-flowing transitions between nations and species, emphasised by the novel's recurrent images of water. For Muñoz, such 'ritualized tellings' have 'world-making potentialities' (2009, 35), birthing queer futures from glimpses of an imagined past.

There is a risk, however, that in projecting her longing, Daughter obscures ancestral voices that might otherwise speak through her transcriptions. Daughter's familial histories are simultaneously recovered and obfuscated by her archival interventions as she attempts to repair the darker stories in her ancestors' pasts—their tragedies, losses, absences, and abrupt closures—seemingly to 'recuperate deviant predecessors as [the] prideful protagonists' (Bateman 2023, 10) of her own coming-out story. Heather Love writes of this tendency in queer archival research 'to construct a positive genealogy of gay identity […] [to] make good on their suffering, transforming their shame into pride after the fact' (2007, 32). Daughter describes her archival project as 'midwif[ing] a language' (Chang 2020, 109) as she transcribes, translates, edits, and embellishes the stories, but the editorial notes reveal disputes over her methods. Daughter censors stories she finds inappropriate ('Ama used a slur here—I prefer not to write it' [140]), and makes fanciful additions such as 'once a moon' where 'Ama really said *once a month*, but I thought *moon* would sound more old-timey' (140). Grandmother scolds Daughter for 'tell[ing] the story like a white person' (139), yet even this rebuke of cultural unfaithfulness Daughter makes her own, annotating the exchange in a footnote: 'what Ama really said here was *foreigner*, but I think we know

she really means *white person*, white devil, gwailo, baigui, etc. Substitute your own culturally appropriate term here' (139). Through these metanarrative moments, *Bestiary* plays with the necessarily fraught and partial work of historicism.

These editorial interventions and mis/translations cast doubt on the encountered narrative and the possibility of accessing desired connections to the past beyond the reflected projections, desires, and ego of the archivist. Daughter's mission to rescue long dead ancestors from the void of obscurity may be one of seeking rescue and comfort for herself in dreams of a collective history and imagined transgenerational community (Dinshaw 2007; Love 2007). And yet, the novel's formal structure allows these frictions and disagreements to become visible, drawing attention to the instability of narrative authority. *Bestiary*'s three interwoven narrative strands create a 'palimpsestuous' structure, which, in Sarah Dillon's definition, is 'a simultaneous relation of intimacy and separation' that preserves 'the distinctness of its texts, while at the same time allowing for their essential contamination and interdependence' (2007, 3).[56] The palimpsest necessarily covers over what was previously written; yet its meaning is altered and embellished by that partially remaining prior script. Daughter's invitation to the reader to make their own substitutions in language, to retell the stories in their own terms, indicates an openness to these histories changing through time with future reinscriptions. *Bestiary* allows glimpses of earlier versions of its stories and their ancestral voices to be parsed (if incompletely), and so overcomes that 'urge to identify, and thus stabilize, the meaning of an event' (Freccero 2006, 74). *Bestiary*'s palimpsestic form is textually resistant to

[56] Dillon notes the curious ghost of 'incestuous' echoing through the term 'palimpsestuous': 'the intimacy that is branded as illegitimate since it is between those who are regarded as *too closely related*' (2007, 5, emphasis in original). Texts and relations perceived as too tightly interwoven, which fail to maintain their appropriate distance, become illicit. There is an almost incestuous quality to Daughter's erotic fantasies about her ancestors, across which her own narrative is palimpsestically inscribed.

ideas of purity, rejecting a fixed and faithful past for the shimmering possibilities of Muñoz's 'good life' that both was and never was, lost and still to come.

Queer Ecogothic Futures

There are clear resonances between the temporal and affective scales of queer and ecogothic with their irruptive histories, melancholic yearnings, and more-than-human intimacies rippling through evolutionary time. Yet a lingering problem for their compatibility is the spectre of the future. Seymour critiques the anti-social strain in queer theory (Bersani 1995; Edelman 2004) for its rejection of longevity as essentially heteronormative and conservative, arguing that such a stance leaves no space for the long temporal perspectives required by environmentalism. Seymour laments, 'many queer theorists have reached a point at which they cannot imagine a queer futurity and, by extension, where they cannot imagine environmentalism, much less a queer one' (2017, 8). Is there a way to reconcile the rejection of reproductive futurity—with its associations of neoliberal assimilation and the quashing of revolutionary impulses—with Seymour's argument that queer environmentalism depends upon futurity and longevity? Could that reconciliation be ecogothic, monstrous, and more-than-human?

In *Bestiary*, imperatives for humans to (re)produce are largely circumvented. Daughter favours a view of history as 'still happening' (Chang 2020, 51), a sense of continuity that welcomes spectral ancestors to shape the lives of those in the present. She excavates stories of queer predecessors as inspirations for how to live, locating her utopianism in messy, palimpsestic, translated, and transmuted glimpses of the past. This vision of queer relations extending through time resonates with Teagan Bradway's conception, following Muñoz and Freeman, of 'relations of queerness as unfurling into futurity; they are unfinished, open-ended, and rife with untapped potential

for becoming' (2017, vi). *Bestiary*'s ending is especially significant for parsing a queer ecological futurism. The final scene resembles an apocalyptic flood myth. A flock of black birds obscure the sky as the road Ben and Daughter stand upon is transformed into a river from which a tiger charges:

> We wear the river around our ankles. It rises between our legs, splitting open in birth. A tail breaches the surface, legs wading after it. Out of the
>
> riverroad the tiger runs to us brightwet mouth
>
> wider than night calling *Mother* *mothermothermother*
>
> (Chang 2020, 253–4)

Chang subverts a heteroreproductive ending since the creature that calls Daughter (and her lover) 'mother' is the tiger, the nonhuman predator. *Bestiary*'s interest in the tiger is not only symbolic; Chang reminds us, '[i]n China, tigers were already extinct. There are no more breeding pairs in the wild' (53). The future is not the sacred Child of reproductive futurism, but the queer monster returned from the brink of extinction.

Chang illustrates how contemporary ecogothic fiction might reconcile queer theory's rejection of 'reprofuturity' (Edelman 2004) with the long temporal perspectives required by environmentalism: by extending relational ethics of care through distance and respect for autonomy, and to reproducing life beyond—perhaps at the expense of—the Human. The tiger's return at once evokes life and death, human stewardship and human dissolution, for Chang combines this imagined rebirth of a lost native species with her human characters' implied death and symbolic extinction. Threatened by the running tiger and rising floodwaters, Daughter's self-effacement is epitomised when her narrative is abruptly ended by the nonhuman's approach. Bateman suggests ecocriticism might learn from queer theory how 'to imagine environments in which humans enjoy (and we need to learn the enjoyment to be had in) only marginal

presences' (2023, 32). Dissolving into the collective subjectivity of the rising river water offers one such embrace of marginality, as the 'riverroad' absorbs the tarmac—an image of environmental excess capable of reshaping urban modernity and industrial development. The novel's closing image is one of being pleasurably obliterated by the environment: a self-shattering, queer ecogothic sublime.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made the case for ecogothic fiction as a conceptual tool for thinking generatively and in complex ways about key concerns within queer ecology, including relationality, intimacy, autonomy, agency, monstrosity, toxicity and contamination, repressed and buried secrets, the repetition of the past, futurity and (collective-, species-, ego-) death. *Bestiary* is a 'trans-' novel in the sense that it celebrates in-betweenness: the blurring of boundaries between genders and species, oral and written tellings, poetry and prose, language and heritage, in 'categorical crossings, leakages, and slips of all sorts' (Stryker, Currah and Moore 2008, 11). Chang's stylistic preoccupations with punning, wordplay, and translation combined with the novel's palimpsestic structure generate an excess of meaning that disorientates, destabilises, and creates the uncanny sense of not knowing. The novel's ecogothic excesses see the collapse of boundaries between things, bodies, and identities with often ambivalent emotional fallout. *Bestiary* foregrounds relationality as constituting, and opening beyond, individual human subjectivity; yet Chang draws attention to complicated states of relation in which distance and autonomy constitute valuable parts of respecting the agency of non/human others, especially when burdens of care weigh more grievously upon some than others, and porosity can mean vulnerability to toxins, pollutants, viruses, and waste.

The contemporary ecogothic stages sublimity in nature not through mountain ranges or haunted forests (*Bestiary*'s forests are conspicuously absent 'treeholes' [Chang 2020, 46]), but in the uncanniness of encountering colonialism's homogenisation of ecologies, landscapes, cultures, genders, and sexualities. Chang depicts scenes of nature in decay as the repercussions of imperial ideologies and imperatives of extraction. While we might rightly be concerned about the conflation of homosexuality and bestiality as a weapon historically wielded against LGBTQ+ people by a violently homophobic right-wing, *Bestiary*'s non/human melding serves multiple ends: it contributes to a playful camp aesthetic at once ironically distant and affectively intimate; it de-exceptionalises human sexuality as part of a project to decentre the human as separate and superior; and it envisions a form of relationality and long-term environmental thinking conducive to forging non/human kin relations. Chang undermines the evolutionary teleology used to uphold racial and species hierarchies by reanimating the monster as a symbol of alterity, reinscribing the transitioning self as ultimately, queerly *natural*.

The appearance of the tiger that calls Daughter 'mother' forces her to confront her fear that becoming nonhuman or posthuman is to move backwards in a teleological arrangement of evolutionary history. Moving backwards—indeed, 'feeling backwards' (Love 2007)—becomes integral to how Daughter relates to the world. Daughter's turn toward the past facilitates her queer archival project to encounter ancestors through erotic affinity. The Gothic accesses the archive through sensory, bodily, oral, emotional tracts. Operating at the limits of the novel form, *Bestiary*'s plotless aesthetic presents memory and history as subjective, fragmented, subject to censorship and mistranslation, and thus inherently multiple and hybridised, making lines of historical connection blurry and indistinct—but not extinct. Chang utilises a palimpsestic form

that allows the past to speak, albeit obliquely, projecting utopia out of history. The palimpsest is a kind of formlessness created by the multiplication of forms; it chronicles obscured histories at the same time as it represents the difficulties involved in recovering those histories. *Bestiary*'s archive is constructed from discarded fragments—the garbage and detritus of modernity—that the novel makes it an ethical stance to refuse to (re)bury. Placed in constellation, these fragments speak to the legacies of settler colonialism that continue to constrain and curtail lives. They also offer glimpses of radical arrangements destabilising to the heteronormative settler state: those of stateless pirates, Indigenous sovereignty, guerrilla armed resistance, celebrations of queer erotic bliss, linguistic capaciousness and creativity, and the cherishing of multispecies lives and kinships.

CHAPTER IV: FORM

Exploding Ecogothic:

The Insurgent Forms of Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*

Introduction

In this final chapter, I turn to Alexis Wright's 2006 novel *Carpentaria* to explore relationships between material and narrative forms and to address some possible limitations of the ecogothic genre. While this thesis has largely evaluated the ecogothic as a method for restoring historical and political contexts to environmental concerns, Wright's novel demonstrates both the compatibilities and frictions involved in using the Gothic mode to represent Indigenous experience. *Carpentaria* often draws from a distinctly Gothic repertoire of images and affects to depict settler colonialism as a force that makes land unfamiliar, uncanny, and unlively for its original inhabitants; at the same time, the novel summons the Gothic as a tool of reactionary settler hysteria, weaponised against Indigenous peoples, lifeways, and multispecies kinships to make them appear irrational, monstrous, and obsolete. As a genre of excavation, the Gothic resembles subterranean mining infrastructure protested by Indigenous water and land defenders: extracting sacred knowledge to engineer categories of racial difference and fuel the ever-expanding colonial state. Given these sites of enduring friction, the Gothic is but one of many genres and narrative forms that Wright enlists in her Waanyi saga. As this chapter aims to demonstrate, her reinterpretation of colonial genres and their recontextualisation alongside Indigenous narrative forms and intellectual histories

constitutes an important Indigenous aesthetic, one that stretches the capacities of not only the ecogothic but of the novel form itself.[57]

I approach 'form' capaciously to encompass aesthetic, socio-political, and environmental arrangements. Building upon Caroline Levine's work in *Forms* (2015), in which she argues for reading political forms as and alongside literary forms, with Jodi Byrd, Dean Rader, and Gerald Vizenor's work on Indigenous aesthetics, I argue literary criticism has much to gain by expanding our understanding of form still further to include nonhuman lifeways, migrations, and interdependencies. *Carpentaria* demonstrates the necessity of expanding conceptions of forms that sustain life beyond settler infrastructure to include nonhuman entities,[58] for to omit these reinscribes anthropocentric and anti-Indigenous ways of thinking with and shaping space. It may seem odd to place Levine's work in dialogue with *Carpentaria* when Levine contends there has been an overemphasis in literary criticism on formlessness and liminality (2015, 14); yet in a surprising compatibility, Levine emphasises the role of 'collision' (8) between unexpected forms whose meeting might produce new political strategies or possibilities for disturbing power. I identify moments in Wright's novel when the multiplication and reassembly of forms facilitates, rather than encloses, insurgent potentialities—particularly the collision of the (eco)Gothic with Indigenous storytelling

[57] I do not spend time in this chapter quibbling about Wright's decision to write a novel in English as a Waanyi author. Not only does such debate lean uneasily on notions of pre-colonial purity, but Wright herself has dismissed 'arguing whether people with an oral history should write books'. To her mind, 'the story to be told […] is sung just as strongly from those of our ancestors who wrote our stories on the walls of caves and on the surface of weathered rock' (2006b, 12). Instead, I consider the various ways Wright adapts the novel form for her project of Indigenous storytelling, since these adaptations indicate areas where the traditional novel form comes under critical pressure from anticolonial politics, environmental catastrophe, and deep time.

[58] Discussions of infrastructure typically emphasise the reproduction and sustenance of human 'life'. I use 'entities' and 'beings' in this paper following the instructive writings of Mel Y. Chen (2012) and Kim TallBear (2017), who critique the 'hierarchy of animacies' and draw attention to the important presence of metals, minerals, rocks, and other inanimate matter typically excluded from discussions of life.

forms. I treat narrative forms as 'infrastructures' that operate together and in friction with infrastructures of settler violence and Indigenous resistance.

Rather than using these scholars' works to interpret or explain *Carpentaria*, I position Wright's fiction as a work of theory-making in its own right. As Winona LaDuke and Deborah Cowen attest, 'Indigenous stories are the "theoretical anchor" of critical Indigenous studies' (245, citing Leanne Simpson), facilitating embodied, place-based, and narrative forms of knowledge sharing. I am mindful, however, of Daniel Heath Justice's caution about 'interpretive methods that are specific to Indigenous languages, oratorical practices, and cultural protocols that don't necessarily fit well with Eurowestern literary criticism' (2018, 23). As a white British researcher, there are necessarily limitations to what I can know about Wright's novel and the Waanyi epistemologies embedded in its narratives. I cannot claim interpretative authority or insider knowledge; as Alison Ravenscroft advises, engagement with Indigenous literature for non-Indigenous readers constitutes 'a *movement* towards understanding rather than an *arrival*', where 'knowledge [is] always provisional, not a thing one possesses' (2010, 215). My objective is to move towards and amplify Indigenous literature, scholarship, and activism, and to speculate the generative, critical ways Wright's novel can speak to the emerging ecogothic genre.

Carpentaria is set in the fictional town of Desperance in the Gulf of Carpentaria, located in what is currently northern Australia.[59] When the river running through Desperance changes course, the town loses its shipping industry and its (predominantly white) council turns to the Gurfurritt International mining company for alternative employment and revenue. Desperance is segregated: its white residents

[59] I follow the example set by Nick Estes (2019) and Damien Lee in using the term 'currently' instead of 'now' to describe Australia, to 'open possibilities for imagining futurities beyond the settler state' (Lee 2018). See also Mark Rifkin on how 'non-native accounts, governmental and popular, treat the space of the United States as a given in which to set the unfolding of events' (2017, 1).

live in central Uptown while its Aboriginal communities live on the outskirts, divided between Eastside and Westside camps, the latter named the Pricklebush. In Desperance, colonialism and neoliberalism are reproduced through the physical and socio-political infrastructures of local councils, jail cells, mine shafts, pipelines, and landfills; yet these same infrastructures become sites of Indigenous resistance and reclamation. Amid stories of geopolitical and interpersonal conflict emerges a central plotline of Indigenous resistance: a group of Aboriginal pilgrims-turned-activists sets fire to Gurfurritt infrastructure, destroying the mine and pipeline. Meanwhile, extreme weather events culminate in a cyclone that washes Desperance into the sea.

At this intersection of insurgent political action and ecological upheaval, artefacts of fossil capital are transformed into alternative infrastructures that serve Indigenous sovereignty. *Carpentaria* stages acts of repurposing waste materials: tin for building homes, plastic for catching rainwater, and discarded textual material like eviction notices and archival records that are amalgamated into the narrative form. Crucially, Wright is not only thematically concerned with the destruction of fossil-capitalist infrastructure and the repurposing of wreckage; she also adapts the literary forms of the settler state and reconstitutes them into an anti-colonial Waanyi epic infused with ethics of Indigenous sovereignty and environmental defence. In place of the orderly narratives and infrastructures of powerful nation-states or transnational corporations, Wright depicts the saboteurs' improvised tactics of direct action through a multigeneric, polyvocal (Rader 2012, 5) narrative that dismantles and reclaims those infrastructures. *Carpentaria* is a 'long song' (Wright 2006b, 2), a palimpsest of voices layered into co-existing and contradictory formations. The narrator incorporates disparate materials encountered on its journey through deep time, 'making do' (à la Michel de Certeau [2011, 29]) with written documents, oral tales, maps, archives,

ghost stories, and multispecies' songs. With this formal complexity, Wright rejects the hegemonic story of Australian nationhood and holds together heterogenous accounts of Land in its place, attentive to the agencies, obligations, and relations of the Gulf country. It is through this expansive, fragmentary aesthetic that Wright offers a literary model for exploding anthropocentric colonial forms and putting the detritus of fossil fuel infrastructure to new uses.

Throughout this chapter, I treat material and textual forms as interwoven and mutually reproducing 'infrastructures': the court order that works in tandem with the jail cell, the eviction notice that enables the expansion of the landfill site. Understanding these phenomena as *forms*—means of organising, directing, and distributing power—can help us perceive how a textual form like the ecogothic can work against or alongside other structures, rather than keeping literature abstracted and separate from 'real-world' political formations. The first section of the chapter outlines the history of the Australian Settler Gothic and its fraught relationship with Indigenous peoples and literatures. I show how Wright draws from this legacy in *Carpentaria* by incorporating Gothic elements to depict a hysterical settler perspective ignorant of local ecological relations that demonises those with the knowledge and skills to live symbiotically with such ecologies. The second section demonstrates how Wright Gothicises colonial influence. She does this primarily through the image of spectral white hands that influence the Aboriginal lives but also through the uncanniness of settler violence and debris: the unsettling forms of plastic, rubbish, the detrimental impacts of imported agricultural techniques, and the proliferation of invasive species that collectively make home unfamiliar. The third section evaluates the coexisting forms of spirits and hauntings in *Carpentaria*: the settler hauntings of Gothic lineage and the presence of ancestral spirits that aid Indigenous connection to, and defence of, the Gulf country.

The fourth section looks in greater depth, using theories of grounded normativity (Coulthard 2014), at Wright's positioning of pipeline protest as fulfilling Indigenous obligations to land. The final section looks to Indigenous narrative aesthetics: the palimpsestic forms, oral traditions, and transgenres (Byrd 2014) that both incorporate and exceed the boundaries of the ecogothic novel.

Gothic as Settler Hysteria

Gothic sensibilities have infused descriptions of the Australian landscape since James Cook's arrival in 1770 (Hassall 2021, 14). As Linda Hassall writes, the transportation of convicts from Britain to Australia 'occurred concurrently with the popular rise of the Gothic literary genre in Europe', priming conceptions of the penal colony as 'a monstrous place […] resisting all known systems of logic and or reason' (2021, 15). These terrors were directed at the colony's perceived criminality and lawlessness, feared to return vengefully upon the imperial centre, and the continent's unfamiliar environment. The Gothic imagination fuelled perceptions of the Australian landscape as a place of crime, disorientation, and madness:

> The solstices were reversed. The heavenly constellations were upside down. Birds screamed and shrieked. The flowers didn't have a pleasant scent and the plants were dry and brittle […] The weather was extreme, and the climate was untenable. There was too much vast empty distance to become lost in and the never-ending horizon could drive one mad. (Hassall 2021, 15)

For settlers arriving later, the Gothic contributed to the formation of an Australian national identity distinct from the British Empire. With its vast isolating deserts and

disorientating bush scrub populated by toxic creatures, the Australian Colonial Gothic depicted feats of rugged masculine survival and mastery over unruly ecologies.

Katrin Althans identifies an 'uneasy relationship of Australian Aboriginal literature with the Gothic' (2013, 139) due to the genre's European origins and depiction of history from the coloniser's perspective. She writes that although 'the literary Gothic was embraced as a means to express Australian identity pitted against villainous English authorities', these were rarely its main enemy: '[t]he true monster of Australian Gothic fiction, however, was the white settlers' dark Other, Australian Indigenous people' (2019, 277). The Gothic's 'metaphoric darkness' was soon transmuted into 'actual blackness': the racialised fear of 'black devils, and bloodthirsty savages' (Althans 2013, 140). Aboriginal peoples, treated as an extension of the dangerous landscape, became the primary target of Settler Gothic fear. Like in North America, the Gothic served as a cultural mechanism to dehumanise the continent's Indigenous peoples and to exploit and appropriate their beliefs as monstrous and supernatural. The Settler Gothic may register legacies of colonial violence through ghost stories and haunted houses, but such tales typically render living Indigenous peoples and cultures as extinct rather than contemporaneous, or as monsters enacting supernatural vengeance. Indigeneity becomes an 'object' (Burnham 2014, 226) or symbol of the settler nation's genocidal history onto which non-Native guilt and anxiety is projected. Michelle Burnham thus identifies an 'extractive relationship' in Settler Gothic texts, 'in which indigenous peoples serve as a resource from which classic […] literature mines its material' (2014, 227).

Burnham's use of the word *mines* is telling; Settler Gothic effectively functions as an extractive industry akin to mining infrastructure, excavating sacred knowledge in place of naturally-occurring metals and minerals. The Gulf of Carpentaria has been

subject to extensive mining for zinc, lead, and silver; indeed, the Century Mine erected on Waanyi land in the 1990s was Australia's largest open pit zinc mine until its closure in 2016. Wright based her Gurfurritt mine on Century Zinc's operations, and protests by fellow Waanyi people likely informed her depiction of Indigenous activism and resistance.[60] This regional history sits within the broader context of resource extraction in Australia, including its Victorian gold rushes and mining booms of the 1850s—which spurred mass migrations of settlers—and the country's contemporary status as a major producer and exporter of metals, minerals, fossil fuels, and precious stones.

Writing in productive tension with the Gothic's colonial lineage, Wright uses the genre to expose the hypocrisies and irrationalities of settler colonialism. Lack of local ecological knowledge makes it difficult for settler descendants to survive in Desperance. Unlike Indigenous protagonist Normal Phantom, who 'could grab hold of the river in his mind and live with it as his father's fathers did before him' (Wright [2006] 2008, 5), Uptown's residents have 'no knowledge of the way of the river' (9) and fail to catch any fish. Their agricultural techniques and livestock imported from Europe are similarly unproductive: 'herds of Braham-cross cattle grind the top layers of soil to powdered bulldust' (5), while feral pigs and cane toads drive out the native animals. The land's apparent resistance to settler occupation is therefore partly a consequence of Uptown's own destructive ecological practices. Uptown, however, attributes these problems to a hostile and even haunted environment. They see evidence of spirits everywhere plaguing the land: in the changing course of the river that leaves Desperance without a port; in the giant spiderwebs and bat colonies that blow in with seasonal storms; and in floods that claim the cemetery, washing the buried dead out

[60] As Benedict Scambary notes, 'An occupation of the mine by approximately 150 Waanyi people in 2002 threatened its closure (Meade 2002). Such action asserted the centrality of the GCA [Gulf Communities Agreement] and Indigenous stakeholders by highlighting the mine's vulnerability to Indigenous direct action' (2013, 188).

to sea. Relaying these events, the narrator adopts the hushed tone of a ghost story, complete with theatrical exclamations:

> The yellow waters were like whirlpools tearing through the mud, searching for the bodies of all the old fishing men and their wives, and when the arms of the earth gave up clinging to their wooden boxes, the coffins shot up, poof, to the surface and were carried off to sea. Sometimes, the coffins of Desperance can still be seen floating around in the circular currents of the Gulf. (Wright 2008, 70)

Carpentaria is hot and humid, and the region experiences tropical cyclones; Uptown's residents read these extreme weather events as indications of a sinister landscape. Desperance's policeman, Truthful, faints in a panic when he sees 'a cloud of travelling spiders drop onto land from the sea and start building their webs the height of house walls'; but the phenomenon is simply 'an old story' (299) to the Pricklebush elders, the spiders one of many species to migrate through the Gulf country. Wright adopts the ecogothic mode to depict the perspective of the settler population who, lacking knowledge of local ecosystems, condemn the land as unproductive and inhospitable.

This apprehension of the land as hostile echoes tropes and traditions of Settler Gothic literature, in which 'the eeriness and isolation of the Australian landscape [is] a source of fear' and 'difficult to read and to navigate for the European colonisers' (Gildersleeve 2020, 92-3). Tom Lynch identifies a tendency in early settler women's writing to describe the arid or semi-arid grasslands of the western United States or Australian Outback as 'nothing but land' (2014, 375): a conjecture that serves to rhetorically denounce the presence of Indigenous peoples and native species while pre-emptively celebrating the productivity and 'civilisation' of settler land management. Melissa Edmundson similarly writes of the 'fear, isolation, and violence' that dominate

settler women's experience in Barbara Baynton's early-twentieth-century Gothic stories. Edmundson suggests that the ecological fear expressed in Baynton's writing 'point[s] to a larger anxiety over the Australian colonist's relationship with the outback, as the land itself "resists" the settler-invaders' (2018, 203). The 'settler-colonial imaginary' (Lynch 2014, 379) is sustained by an imported European Gothic archive reshaped for new environments.

The Gothic tradition is laced with fears of Indigenous and nonhuman agency, which in *Carpentaria* gives rise to 'full-blown hysteria' (Wright 2008, 349). Incensed by the belief that migrating fruit bats 'carried a deadly disease' (391), Uptown chops down trees to prevent the bats from roosting. Years of deforestation have driven the bat colonies near to extinction, such that '[n]obody really saw bats anymore. Showers of bat piss caught the imagination instead' (391). This distinctly Gothic fantasy of vampiric infection nevertheless possesses Uptown. Its inhabitants become so occupied with felling trees that they fail to notice the cyclone approaching from the sea. Even when they acknowledge the danger, the town 'turn[s] a blind eye, and continued with the ceremony of belonging it had created for itself' (393). Uptown expresses its sense of entitlement to land through practices of deforestation—ownership inscribed through elimination. As Lynch writes, 'when the goals of the settler-colonial imaginary are resisted by local phenomena—climate, ecology, Indigenous people, or even anti-colonial critiques—the validity of such phenomena is usually denied' (2014, 379-80). Such is the strength of Uptown's desire to believe in the settler colonial project, to supplant the native ecology and people with an imported European one, that even when the settlers are confronted with the land's material-ecological reality, they dismiss that reality as unreal.

Uptown's Gothic fright is not only directed at the environment, but also towards those in possession of the skills and knowledge required to live securely within it. Ravenscroft reads this dynamic: 'Out of [Uptown's] own incapacity to acquire a working knowledge of the world they find themselves in […] they read others' knowledge and skills in the register of magic' (2010, 203). These superstitions manifest as racialised fear. Both Aboriginal inhabitants and non-white migrants are described by Uptown residents as ghosts and sorcerers. The first ghost story told in *Carpentaria* relates to the killing of two Afghan brothers who once supplied goods to Desperance by camel train. When Uptown hears the 'foreign bells' around the abandoned camels' necks, they believe the sound emanates from the brothers' ghosts: 'levitating, taking over, helping themselves […] That was the trouble with new Australians the town claimed: *Even dead ones had no manners*. Unnaturalised. Really un-Australian' (Wright 2008, 4, emphasis in original). The ghosts Uptown fears are specifically 'dark-skinned' (5), rebuked even in death for their presence on the land and perceived lack of assimilation into Euro-Australian culture. The narrator relays these claims with irony, emphasising the gap between reality (the camel bells) and settler superstition (ghosts) to show how Gothic forms are quickly deployed in support of entrenched racial hierarchies and a newly formed (white) Australian settler identity.

Wright deploys the Gothic with irony to expose the genre's historical function as a tool for othering Indigenous and non-white inhabitants to justify settler colonial expansion. Another such a ghost story demonstrates the direct relationship of Gothic to land grabbing, when an Uptown resident claims the Phantom family home is a 'haunted house':

> They complained it sent the cold shivers running up and down their spines, just from looking at that sinister fortress of corrugated iron

> flanked by closed thickets of prickly bush. But they looked from a long way off, at the other end of that long muddy road from town. Crows flew around it at night they claimed. (Wright 2008, 295)

The Phantom house is transformed in the settler-colonial imaginary into a Gothic fortress populated by crows and exuding a powerful dark magic. The depiction of Aboriginal homes as haunted houses has sinister consequences in the novel. The narrator makes clear that this image is conjured from afar by those who want to evict the Pricklebush community and destroy their homes. It is through such complaints that the traditional owners are pushed to the town's geographic margins: '"edge" people, all of the blackfella mob living […] in higgily-piggerly, rubbish-dump trash shacks' (46). The council promises to provide the Pricklebush community with government-built houses, but delivery is perpetually delayed. In the meantime, the Phantoms are targeted for eviction, ostensibly because 'their poor state of wellbeing was becoming an issue, for the Council at least' (18). *Carpentaria* reflects contemporary contexts of forced evictions in Australia, where Aboriginal peoples continue to be driven from their ancestral and traditional homelands. Dispossession and low income levels force the vast majority of Aboriginal peoples to rely on public housing, where they are vulnerable to being evicted by government housing agencies and becoming homeless (Beresford 2001, 40). Forced evictions represent the most recent phase of Indigenous dispossession in Australia, following long histories of *terra nullius*—the legal principle that asserted Australia empty of human beings before the arrival of British settlers and so available for occupation, overturned only in 1992—and more recent dispossession strategies, including the removal of Aboriginal children from their families by government and church authorities between 1905 through to the 1970s (known as the Stolen Generations).

Wright draws attention to the state's uneven provision of shelter and its prevention and destruction of Indigenous-built alternatives. Angel Day, Normal Phantom's wife, constructs their home with materials reclaimed from the nearby rubbish dump: a mode of socially and economically autonomous living that stands in the way of corporate expansion and settler territorialisation. Her house is immediately perceived as a threat to the town's white population; as Deborah Bird Rose notes, the Native gets in the way of settler colonialism 'just by staying home' (1991, 46). The 'wellbeing' of Angel Day's family is evaluated in terms of their willingness to assimilate into the infrastructure of the colonising state: to be eliminated 'as cultural, political, and legal *peoples*' (Coulthard 2014, 4) distinct from Australian citizens. Deviation from council-sanctioned enclosures is met with accusations of sorcery and haunted fortresses. By stoking settler anxiety about Indigenous claims to land, the Gothic thus works alongside other textual forms invested with colonial power. Rifling through a bag of discarded council records at the rubbish dump, Angel Day unknowingly brushes against her own family's eviction notice. The council records produce a powerfully negative affect: the papers 'intimidate her' so much that 'her fingers felt shaky, just to touch officialdom' (Wright 2008, 18). The materiality of the medium—the 'white paper' of 'white persons' (18)—is encoded with the force of colonial legal power. Prolonged contact leaves Angel 'with a sense of melancholy' (18-9) even when she cannot bear to read the documents. The papers constitute material traces of coloniality.

The extension of colonial infrastructures into Indigenous territories forces dependency on the settler state by eradicating Indigenous lifeways already in place. For Coulthard, this is an example of 'the purportedly diversity-affirming forms of state recognition and accommodation' under settler colonialism that 'subtly reproduce nonmutual and unfree relations' (2014, 17). Infrastructural assimilation represents a

more insidious form of the logic of elimination: the socially acceptable face of genocidal policies (Wolfe 2006, 403). The substitution of Aboriginal-built houses for council-built ones emblemises a deeper rationale of colonial replacement; as Wright's narrator reflects, '[t]he greatest of all Uptown desires was to have the house and all the prickly bush flattened by a grader. Once and for all' (Wright 2008, 295). It is not enough to evict the Pricklebush residents; Uptown seeks to eliminate all traces of their original occupancy and prior claims to land. Wright presents infrastructure as a tool for the advancement of genocidal colonial ideologies and the continued dispossession, displacement, and precarity of Aboriginal peoples under the guise of social welfare. Infrastructure is deployed to seize territory for settler states, to assimilate and eliminate Indigenous peoples, and, through the destruction of ecosystems, to eradicate possibilities for lifeways outside state control (Wolfe 2006, 395). Wright's ironic deployment of Gothic conventions in these scenes exposes the genre's long-standing entanglements with ecophobia, biodiversity destruction, deforestation, and settler colonial ideologies, as well as its weaponised discourses of monstrosity against Indigenous peoples and their land relations. Activating a Gothic register allows Wright's narrator to parody and ridicule settler experience as irrational, delusional, and genocidal. The Gothic continues to function as a textual representation of settler experience, but in *Carpentaria*, it is subsumed as one hysterical voice in a diverse palimpsest of tales about the Gulf country.

Gothicising Settler Infrastructures

In a complex weaving of representations, Gothic images and techniques are also recruited in *Carpentaria* to convey the uncanny presence of settlers from the perspectives of Indigenous characters. The white settler-descendants who live in

Uptown are often described by the narrator as ghostly or spectral—people out of place. This effect is compounded by the stories Uptown tells to explain away their origins: one of Tuck and Yang's 'settler moves to innocence' (2012, 3), or what Lynch calls 'a strategic forgetfulness' (2014, 381). The narrator suggests 'those people had more than one legend about how they got to belong to a place' (Wright 2008, 48), but their self-mythologising is most keenly revealed in their identification with Elias Smith, a white man who washes ashore to Desperance with no memory of who he is or how he came to be there. Elias represents to Uptown the image of their own imagined arrival: clean of violence, land theft, or historical baggage. However, Elias is also labelled an 'apparition' and a 'ghostly phenomenon' (54) by the narrator, by which Wright introduces the notion of settler contact as a form of haunting Aboriginal land. In their reluctance to come to terms with how they came to live on the continent, the white inhabitants of Uptown create a void of their own ancestry:

> They could trace back the family line on a sheet of paper or a line drawn with a stick on the ground just to prove they could reach the point of infinity to show they did not exist. […] Their original forebear, a ghostly white man or woman, simply turned up one day, just like Elias. (Wright 2008, 49)

Their attempts to escape guilt and culpability for Indigenous dispossession ultimately constitute an erasure of the self. As Ravenscroft writes of Uptown, 'theirs is a timelessness, of men and women wandering without recourse either to origin or destination, without culture, song, or sacred places, ghostly men and women living with no past they could remember' (2010, 203). For the Pricklebush community, the Gulf country is haunted by these ghostly apparitions who perpetuate Australia's original invasion and occupation.

The pervasive effects of invasion are further rendered through the spectral visions of the Lawman Mozzie Fishman, who sees white hands physically manipulating the land:

> Sometimes he saw thousands of these hands at work. He could see them killing Aboriginal people. He believed the hands belonged to all kinds of white people, some dead, some still alive, and he knew because he was able to recognise hands, that some of those hands belonged to people who were still living and still sitting themselves on top of traditional Law. (Wright 2008, 107)

Reversing the roles of Settler Gothic, in which European arrivals are tormented by restless Indigenous spectres, *Carpentaria*'s Aboriginal Lawman is haunted by white invaders living and dead whose influences continue to shape the parameters of Indigenous lives. If, following Levine's proposal, we 'expand[] our usual definition of form in literary studies to include patterns of sociopolitical experience' (2015, 2), then this shaping of conditions for Aboriginal life by white paper and white hands constitutes an important form in *Carpentaria*. Wright's literary metaphor 'Gothicize[s] the experience of colonialism' (Althans 2013, 141) by illuminating the convergence of multiple constraining forms: the physically confining infrastructure of the jail cell that works alongside the punitive social structure of racial profiling, which leads to three young boys from the Pricklebush being framed for murder and subsequently committing suicide. If political struggles are fought over 'the proper places for bodies, goods, and capacities' (Levine 2015, 3), the political struggle in *Carpentaria* is over those forms—literary, socio-political, and material—that engineer the dispossession and deaths of Aboriginal people. Wright's narrative form illuminates these connections between oppressive forms, not necessarily in patterns of direct causation but as

constellations of constraining and colliding formal arrangements. *Carpentaria* effectively makes the infrastructure of the novel form and the infrastructures of settler violence and Indigenous resistance *intimate*.

The spectral white hands that symbolise colonial power in Desperance also collide in unexpected ways with environmental forms such as humidity. Seasonal humidity produces copious mould and rot, which causes Uptown's residents to behave in strange and sinister ways: 'careering around dressed as feral fairies or devils, […] hugging trees, or hiding among spinifex like birds […] Others turned killers without cause' (Wright 2008, 261). In this sudden eruption of violent madness, Wright attaches the Gothic's sinister effects to settler presence rather than to an Indigenous presence already existing in the landscape. As in VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* series, with its rotting journals and contaminating spores, fungal matter is closely associated with porosity and the traversal of boundaries between beings: 'mould of strange-coloured greens invaded every dampened premise, person or thing' (Wright 2008, 261). But in *Carpentaria*, the spread of mould gains additional significance through its association with systemic racial violence. While the mould causes some white residents to 'turn[] killers without cause', it is three young Indigenous boys—Tristrum and Junior Fishman, and Aaron Ho Kum—who are falsely accused of murder. The boys are incarcerated in Desperance's jail where, during the humid season, policeman Truthful also stores his tropical houseplants:

> [The boys] were left there, locked up in the town's little jail, known as Truthful's planetarium, neglected amongst the crowded foliage of the *jarrbikala*'s strappy and viney tropical indoor oasis, feeling like they were starting to rot. Nobody gave a continental that those boys were standing in the same clothes they had been arrested in. Clothes turning mouldy

> in the damp cell. […] That they waited *sine die* for justice was nobody's concern. (263)

Wright uses the imagery of rot, mildew, and decay to depict the insidious violence of the settler penal system, which operates in consort with racial profiling, neighbourhood surveillance, and vigilante justice. In a reversal of the colonial dynamic in *The People in Trees*, the imagery of ecogothic fauna is put to work in *Carpentaria* to represent Indigenous subjectivities besieged by invading forces. While alert to, and often mocking of, the colonial origins and legacies of the Gothic through Uptown's hysterical ghost stories, Wright also utilises the ecogothic as a set of affective experiences that resonate with contemporary Indigenous experience.

Of all the settler infrastructures orchestrated by white hands, perhaps the most uncanny form is the appropriation of Indigenous land and water for the disposal of plastics, pollution, and waste. The collision of waste management infrastructures with extreme weather makes those exploitative networks more visible. *Carpentaria* is bookended by cyclones. The 'wild weather'—indicative of the land's stirring ancestral spirits—brings to the fore corpses and trash typically ignored by the people of Desperance:

> Dead birds flew past. Animals racing in frightened droves were left behind in full flight, impaled on barbed-wire spikes along the boundary fences. In the sheddings of the earth's waste, plastic shopping bags from the rubbish dump rose up like ghosts into the troposphere of red skies to be taken for a ride, far away. Way out above the ocean, the pollution of dust and wind-ripped pieces of plastic gathered, then dropped with the salty humidity and sank in the waters far below, to become the unsightly decoration of a groper's highway deep in the sea. (Wright 2008, 193)

The violence of the boundary fences is laid bare as both physical borders and symbolic declarations of settler claims to land: their spikes strewn with the corpses of animals whose flight from the cyclone was blocked. Plastic, too, is depicted as a disruption to multispecies' movement and kin relations. Ghostly plastic bags are sent 'far away' from the dump by the wind, but not obliterated or disappeared. The narrator follows the path of 'away' to the groper's sacred Dreaming track. The oxymoron of 'unsightly decoration' suggests domesticity defiled, the plastic intruding on the groper's home. The refuse collects on the sea floor, narrated in a list of odd, disparate objects:

> on the basement of the ocean floor amongst the remains of ancient shipwrecks, lost forever to the tranquil music of thousands of bits and pieces of chipped and broken china – sugar bears, yellow chickens, spotted dogs, and pink babies of lost cargo, hanging and clanging against each other, all over the reef ledges in an other-worldly abyss. (52)

The 'tranquil music' juxtaposes the jumble of commodities in their unexpected deep-sea setting. Artificial replicas of animals—the yellow china chickens and spotted dogs, eerie approximations of absent life—replace the marine creatures and coral that ought to thrive in the reef. Plastic is a material embodiment of settler violence, its deadening of Land and its relations. Again, the ecogothic mode is used to illuminate those often-overlooked lifeways whose existence is under attack from the sprawl of settler infrastructures.

Trash is the flipside of extraction, another material infrastructure of invasion. As Anne Spice writes, 'settler accumulation of energy, capital, and territory is reliant on the parallel distribution of toxicity and violence to Indigenous nations' (2018, 50). When the second cyclone strikes, Will Phantom—Normal Phantom's son, a land rights

activist—survives by clambering onto Desperance's infrastructural remains, which are reconstituted by the storm into 'an extraordinary floating island of rubbish' (Wright 2008, 417). From this mass of waste materials, Will crafts vessels to collect drinking water, grows edible plants, catches fish, and navigates by the stars in an almost utopian image of self-sufficiency. Just as Will's mother, Angel Day, built their house from 'tin, cloth, and plastic too, salvaged from the rubbish dump' (4), so Will constructs a raft from the detritus of the storm to forge 'a practical man's paradise' (419). The island conjures a fantasy of beginning again; yet it is not an uncomplicated paradise, and ultimately Will cannot sustain the illusion of a pre-contact society. Tormented by feelings of claustrophobia, Will fears 'discoverers' who might 'call the sole inhabitant on his sinking oasis: a native' (424)—a nightmare in which ghostly settlers force Will to relive the founding invasion of Australia. The trash island, a microcosmic representation of the continent, is vulnerable to threats of invasion. Will bears witness to passing boats laden with passengers held against their will, compressing the violent history of Australia into a traumatic perpetual present.

Neither is the debris that constitutes the island desirable material. In another uncanny doubling of animal life and plastic waste, Will initially confuses dozens of floating plastic bottles for seagulls before identifying them as 'an ominous message from the guardian spirits of the place' (323). Will notes the unusual temporality of trash as he imagines a container ship spilling bottles into the ocean: 'It could have happened a long time ago, or it could have been only a few months' (324). Plastic endures long after being discarded; in this 'afterlife of the commodity' (Ty 2015, 608), the bottles' continued presence becomes a haunting relic of invasion that makes once-familiar land strange and threatening. The cyclone initially appears to rectify the effects of industrial pollution that make '[t]he country look[] dirty from mining, shipping, barges

spilling ore and waste' (Wright 2008, 338). Despite Will's hopes that the cyclone will 'run a rake across the lot' (388) in a redemptive new beginning, every part of Desperance's infrastructure remains in the environment, rolled into a 'monster' that cannot be banished or resolved:

> There was no town of Desperance. It was gone. A monster followed [Will] instead. The houses, the loading port, the boats and cars, every bit of so-and-so's this or that, along with the remains of the pipeline for the ore from the mine, and even the barges and cargo snatched up by the cyclone had travelled inland, and were coming back. (415)

Between Will's survival on trash island and his mother's construction of their home from salvaged material, *Carpentaria* suggests fossil infrastructure can be repurposed in support of Indigenous sovereignty, but the environmental scars wrought by mining, construction, and dismantling can only be partially undone. Wright's narrative brings pollution and toxic waste transported 'elsewhere' back into view as a life-destroying infrastructure whose presence is a ghostly reminder of settler invasion and decimated marine life.

Ecogothic Limitations

Scholars have often read Aboriginal Australian literature in the register of spectrality and haunting (e.g. Laura A. White [2018] on Kim Scott's novels), typically relying on a Western epistemological tradition to do so, such as Freud's understanding of the 'uncanny' and Derrida's 'hauntology'. As Jodey Castriciano reads Eden Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* (2000), however, *Carpentaria* 'simultaneously invites, resists, and exceeds a Western European Gothic explanatory model' (2006, 806). An Indigenous understanding of ghosts, afterlives, and spiritual presence as forms of

relationality and connection to sustaining ancestors operates very differently to a European Gothic model. One of the limitations of the ecogothic mode for depicting Indigenous experience is its reliance on a linear understanding of time—even one interrupted by a lively, recurrent past. Apalech scholar Tyson Yunkaporta writes that the problem with discussing Aboriginal temporalities in English is 'you can only describe it as "non-linear" […] by saying what it is not, rather than what it is' (2021, 18).[61] He describes the time of Creation as ongoing, 'breathing out and in, no start or finish but a constant state […] I breathe the breaths of Ancestors, and everybody else's too' (Yunkaporta 2021, 38). Yunkaporta laments the limited English vocabulary both for time and spirits, ideas that are closely interwoven in the image of shared ancestral breath. *Carpentaria* similarly writes with a sense of the 'all times' of Waanyi cosmology (Wright 2006b, 3): an expansive temporal understanding that does not linearly separate past, present, and future.

Yunkaporta further describes the insufficiency of the English word 'spirit' to describe '*ngeen wiy*, *maany*, *oony way*, *ngangk pi'an*, and so forth—things we have so many words for that have no translation in English' (2021, 91). Often in *Carpentaria* does the narrator indicate the intimate proximity of life and death, past and present: 'In this country, where legends and ghosts live side by side in the very air' (Wright 2008, 79), where dead men wander the town, and people known to be alive are mistaken for ghosts. Some of *Carpentaria*'s ghosts are threatening, like the spectral white hands that haunt Mozzie Fishman; but others are ancestral spirits, constant and familial. Constitutive of Indigenous identity and heritage, these spirits are vital connections to memory and kin. Burnham writes that rather than indicating a disturbing

[61] A similar criticism can be made of 'nonhuman': a term that attempts to de-exceptionalise and decentre the human as animal among other animals, but which nevertheless uses the 'human' as its point of reference against which other entities are contrasted.

presence, ‘in Indigenous Gothic, ghosts just might deliver psychological wholeness and healing’ since they ‘help to preserve and value the past, and bring the dead into dialogue with the living’ (2014, 234, 233). In *Carpentaria*, these different ways of knowing and assigning meaning to spirits coexist.

Whereas the ghosts of European Gothic must be banished, eliminated, or reconciled as pathological traces of an unresolved past, *Carpentaria*’s ancestral spirits do not haunt the Gulf country in the Gothic sense; instead, they protect human and nonhuman kin. Having retrieved the bodies, Will Phantom, Mozzie Fishman, and Fishman’s convoy of pilgrim-activists enter sacred underground caves to bury the three boys who die in custody. Fishman leads the funeral procession to an ancient subterranean sea, where they place the boys’ bodies in canoes and entrust them to ‘the spirits of the old people […] to take them home’ (Wright 2008, 372). In the cave, Will grasps an old, braided rope to draw in one of the canoes. The physicality of the rope helps Will to access his own ancestral time:

> [Will] was surprised to find the rope was still as supple and strong as the day it was made, possibly thousands of years ago. Did it take aunties, grannies, mothers, sisters, sitting together working the reedy grass in a day of clear blue skies with sunlight on their hands as they talked about living things around them? (371)

In contemplating the makers of the rope, Will narratively conjures those women back into being. In an ecofeminist connection that transcends linear time, the narrative gives attention to the care-work of women in the distant past with an emphasis on ‘living things’ and the vibrancy of their ecology, rather than on the dead or being haunted.

Inside the cave, time is measured by the accumulation of soot on the rock made by generations of people lighting ritual fires:

> The ceiling left evidence of fires, of those who had come and cooked and slept beside a fire, back, back and further back in time, one hundred thousand years of dreams, ascending in smoke that rose to the ceiling and stayed there in a dense cover of soot. And the walls, they screamed at you with the cryptic, painted spirits of the Dreamtime. And inside the walls, was the movement of spirits, moving further and further forward, so the surface appeared to be falling into the frightened eyes of the Fishman's men. (368)

Wright renders the surface of the solid rock wall thin and permeable, bringing the spirits into close proximity with the living. As Fishman's men delve further into the cave, they enter 'into the people's past' (369). Wright's image of soot amassed by generations through deep time has similarities to the temporal model of climate change: the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere as the 'accretion of the past, a thickening of the air' (Menely 2014, 100). However, whereas Menely reflects upon how air breathed in the present is already polluted by the activities of previous generations, for Wright, soot is the material trace of ancestral connection. Time is figured not in discrete, sequential moments, but as the accumulation of carbon, dreams, spirits, and knowledge that lingers in the air. Rifkin suggests such 'cross-temporal communications, impressions, and relations' in Indigenous storytelling and world-making, often prompted by the presence of spirits, constitute a '*prophetic temporality*' (2017, 131, emphasis in original): a non-chronological relationship to time. Prophecy 'indicates both intimacy across periods and the action of nonhuman entities as causal agents that take part in processes of becoming' (Rifkin 2017, 131). In *Carpentaria*, the spirits, soot, and rock paintings help to express non-linear modes of Indigenous temporal experience. In a moment of direct address, the narrator urges, 'Millions of

years ago, what was it like? Remember!' (Wright 2008, 210). Such moments express not only a deep temporal understanding, reaching back into expansive geological histories; in Rifkin's words, they 'reconceptualize *historicity*, including the principles by which to understand the relation between the past and the present and the possibilities for Indigenous futurity/ies' (2017, 132, emphasis in original). *Carpentaria* both contains and exceeds ecogothic modes of understanding time, history, and hauntings.

Pipeline Protest as Grounded Normativity

Numerous interlocking infrastructures shape Aboriginal lives in *Carpentaria*—the council records office, the Desperance jail, the rubbish dump, social housing—but Wright focuses most intently on oil infrastructure. This focus is perhaps unsurprising since Spice asserts, '[p]ipelines become a key link between the expropriation of Indigenous homelands and industrial expansion, environmental crisis, and imperialist war' (2018, 44-5). Inspired by the Century Zinc mine built on Waanyi ancestral territory in the 1990s, the Gurfurritt mine creates a dangerous labour environment for workers who lack alternative employment opportunities and toxic habitat for native animals that drink from its wastewater. When the mine and pipeline are destroyed, the Australian media elevates the ore scattered in the explosion to heroic status: 'the dead ore body lying across the ground like a fallen hero, filled the TV screens across the nation' (Wright 2008, 349). The framework of critical infrastructure disseminated by media discourse primes the settler public to instil mining architecture with national symbolism 'like the death of an icon' (350), its personhood elevated above that of the Pricklebush residents, native species, and claypans. Mass public works 'represent state power to its citizens' (Larkin 2013, 333), announcing the sophistication and intended permanence of the modern state. As Jessica Hurley and Jeffrey Insko attest,

‘infrastructures have long constituted visible signs of progress; they are seen as wonders of technological ingenuity that promise civilizational advancement, wealth, and freedom’ (2021, 347). Operating at ‘the level of fantasy and desire’ (Larkin 2013, 333), the pipeline is a symbol of Australian development and of the inevitability of settler futures (Spice 2018, 44); its destruction is framed as a terrorist attack on the Australian nation itself.

After the explosion of Gurfurritt mining infrastructure by Mozzie Fishman and his activists, Wright’s narrator identifies the ‘bits of pipeline sticking out of the ground and throughout the surrounding bushland like an exhibition of post-modern sculpture outside the Australian National Gallery or Tate Modern in London’ (Wright 2008, 351). The narrator perceives the pipeline’s ruins not (only) as evidence of a criminal act, but as an art object in fragments, valuable for its myriad interpretative possibilities. ‘The disturbance of material and conceptual infrastructures is’, in Lauren Berlant’s words, ‘a radical opportunity’ (2022, 96). For Wright, blowing up infrastructure is an opportunity to reclaim, reuse, and reinterpret the forms of fossil-fuelled empires, to practice obligations to Land, and to affirm sovereign Indigenous futures.

Carpentaria offers a way into thinking about the lively assemblages of non/human beings that constitute life and the reciprocal ethics that can guide relations between them. While much of *Carpentaria* concerns the human lives of Desperance, its ancestral spirits, rivers, claypans, rocks, weather patterns, and migrating animals constitute important environmental forms that shape the novel. While ‘[t]he outsider […] saw only open spaces and flat lands’ (Wright 2008, 50)—territory to be divided, claimed, developed, mined for minerals and oil wealth—the narrator depicts the Gulf country as a membrane containing spiritual power. The landscape itself is an animate and agential character, whose ‘[c]laypans breathed like skin, and you could feel it, right

inside the marrow of your bones. […] It made you think that whatever it was living down underneath your feet, was much bigger than you' (314). Through direct address, the narrator invites 'you' the reader to engage affectively and sensually with the earth as living being: to experience with humility the ecology's immensity and to feel its power conducted through one's own porous skin. Whereas Rubenstein et al. attribute a sense of 'infrastructural sublimity' to the 'light, steel, engineering, dirt, pollution, workers, raw materials, and distribution networks' of fossil infrastructure (2015, 576), Wright (re)assigns that sublime affecting power to the vast nonhuman assemblages of the Gulf country. Her depiction of more-than-human entanglement is interspliced with awe for the unassimilable alterity of nonhuman Others.

From entities dizzyingly large to those near and familiar, Wright's human characters bear witness to creatures who act in ways beyond their comprehension. Normal Phantom observes large schools of gropers 'swimming off quickly, knowing it was time for them to follow sea tracks which did not belong to him' (Wright 2008, 211), and 'listen[s] to the crows culk and chuckle to each other', whose 'sounds only emphasised how much he did not know' (248). Gerald Vizenor describes 'animal characters with a tricky sense of consciousness' (2009, 10) as a distinctive Native aesthetic, whereby nonhuman knowledge illuminates and informs—if in obscure, unexpected, ironic, challenging, 'tricky' ways. By following groper tracks and the movement of the stars after the cyclone, Norm is able to return home even when the physical infrastructure of Desperance has been swept out to sea. Learning from the land through nonhuman kin facilitates Norm's material and spiritual senses of belonging.

Wright describes writing *Carpentaria* 'as if the land was telling a story about itself as much as the narrator is telling stories to the land' (2006b, 9). This sense of

storied knowledge emanating from one's embeddedness in an ecology resonates with Coulthard's concept of 'grounded normativity'. As the 'place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice', grounded normativity entails perceiving 'the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations*' (Coulthard 2014, 13, emphasis in original).[62] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson points out there are many such 'place-based practices and associated knowledges' (2013, 22) across Indigenous cultures, in which land serves as the intellectual and ethical framework guiding more-than-human relations. These philosophies share an investment in 'way[s] of living' that are 'designed to generate life—not just human life but the life of all living things' (Simpson 2013, 3). Coulthard and Simpson's descriptions of land as a 'system' of relations 'designed to generate life' resemble yet significantly *expand* discussions of infrastructure by guiding our attention away from built anthropocentric structures and towards networks of interdependence, reciprocity, and mutual obligation co-constituted by diverse webs of humans and nonhumans.

In 'Dreaming of Infrastructure', Patricia Yaeger notes that '*Infra* means beneath, below, or inferior to' (2007, 15). What lies below Desperance is the Waanyi creation spirit, 'a creature larger than storm clouds' (Wright 2008, 1) that forms the caves and underground rivers of Rainbow Serpent country long before the arrival of humans. Its subterranean power is by no means 'inferior'. The ancestral spirit influences the winds and tides as well as the moods and behaviours of the town's human groups. Since the serpent 'is porous; it permeates everything' (2). In this alternative infrastructural perspective, the Phantom house is relocated from the precarious margins to the geographic and narrative centre, situated on top of the creation spirit's nest.

---

[62] 'Grounded normativity' is a response to the 'normative developmentalism' of much of Karl Marx's work. Coulthard rejects the teleological sense embedded within Marx's developmentalist ontology in favour of a place-based criticism.

The ancestral spirit is also closely connected to the infrastructural sabotage conducted by Mozzie Fishman's convoy of pilgrim-activists. The act of mining collapses the relationality of ancient time with its sudden pace of extraction and profit accumulation, represented as a violation of the spirit's sacred territory. The Pricklebush elders complain of 'horrible devils that the gigantic yellow mining equipment scraped out of the big open-cut holes' (Wright 2008, 83), and Kevin Phantom is seriously injured when he descends into the mine, only to hear 'the ancestor's voice when an explosion with fiery rocks went flying at him' (92). When Fishman's activists set fire to the mine, the landscape intervenes in ways they do not expect; the wind 'picked up all the trash' by the mine and 'spirited the whole lot across the flat towards the line of hangars on fire' (347). The resulting explosion is described as 'a monster cut loose from another world […] roaring like a fiery serpent' (346). The creation spirit becomes an insurgent infrastructure, rising from its underground nest to resist and reshape the materials of transnational corporate development. Fishman pronounces the explosion 'holy in its glory' (347), transforming corporate sabotage into a spiritual act.

Since the dirt, rocks, and claypans are permeated by the spirit, infused with will, agency, and consciousness, the earth becomes a significant actor in the battle against extractivism. Anne Stewart traces an undercurrent in decolonial fiction whereby 'the earth moves […] as a furious and rebellious entity, surging and retreating in ways demonstrative of its rejection of the structural conditions shaping its terrestrial surface' (2022, 3). When Will Phantom is chased by one of Gurfurritt's mercenaries, his pursuer suddenly trips:

> Instantly, his head was split open at the temple by a rock that had, up to that moment, lain on the ground, embedded in soil that was thousands of seasons old, untouched by humankind since the ancestor had placed

> it in this spot, as if it had planned to do this incredible thing. (Wright 2008, 342)

Soil and rocks are not 'relegated to a mere unwitting player in the game of human understandings' (Watts 2013, 30); rather, earth intervenes in multispecies conflicts in agential ways. The same earthly formations that prove fatal to extractivists move to protect the saboteurs from harm during the explosion, when they are 'thrown down for shelter behind the boulders, in the fold of the ancestral spirit' (Wright 2008, 343). The scene illustrates the reciprocity of grounded normativity: as Deborah Bird Rose puts it, 'the person takes care of the country and the country takes care of the person' (2000, 107). Wright shows anti-colonial direct action in conceptual and ethical alignment with human obligations to Land and its ancestral spirits. As Nick Estes writes, 'Indigenous resistance to the trespass of settlers, pipelines, and dams is part of being a good relative to the water, land, and animals, not to mention the human world' (2019, 21).

Through the small act of lighting a fire, the activists bring multiple forms into contact—rock formations, wind direction, the oil well, pipeline, piles of trash, creation spirit, wire fencing—and thereby splinter distributions of power into new arrangements. Like the bushfire that allows banksia plants to germinate (Barrett 2013, 36), the destruction of settler infrastructure spreads the seeds of new life. *Carpentaria*'s narrator adopts the collective pronoun 'we' in the aftermath of the explosion:

> We were burning the white man's very important places and wasting all his money. […] A flick, flick, here and there with a dirt-cheap cigarette lighter, and we could have left the rich white people who owned Gurfurritt mine, destitute and dispossessed of all they owned. […] We were supposed to say, Oh! No! You can't do things like that to the, umm, beg

> your pardon, please and thankyou, to the arrr, em, WHITE MAN. […] Now, we were looking at the world like it was something fresh and inviting to jump into. (Wright 2008, 344)

Richard Carr suggests these moments of collective narration resemble the 'chorus' of epic theatre: 'the voice of the social context' (2022, 11). The chorus stresses the ease with which seemingly unthinkable acts of infrastructure destruction can be carried out and norms of deference overturned. Pipeline resistance serves as a reminder that settler states 'possess a *precarious* assumption that their boundaries are permanent, un-contestable, and entrenched' (Simpson 2014, 22, emphasis in original). Far from a fixed and inevitable guarantee of settler futures, fossil fuel infrastructure is reinterpreted as plastic and malleable; its cheap destruction opens up a range of Indigenous world-making possibilities. Wright articulates 'a network of life that simply refuses to disappear and relinquish its embedded relationships with the spaces and places from which Indigenous peoples emerge' (Yazzie and Risling Baldy 2018, 1). Lively, wilful assemblages of rocks, birds, spirits, and humans act in unison to defend ecologies and bolster Indigenous sovereignty, halting the attempts of settler states to domesticate, control, and extract through infrastructures. In her depiction of a living, breathing landscape, Wright foregrounds ecological networks with pre-existing claims to land, life, and autonomy.

What comes after the explosion, and indeed, after infrastructure? Pipeline protests are not, as Spice reminds us, 'simply spaces of negation' (2018, 48) but also spaces of possibility where Indigenous sovereignty, jurisdiction, and continuing more-than-human relations may thrive. For Coulthard, disrupting the flow of resources from dispossessed Indigenous lands to international markets is an affirmation of Indigenous law that 'embod[ies] through praxis our ancestral obligations to protect the lands that

are core to who we are' (2014, 169). Not limited to mere reaction, the interruption of settler infrastructures by means of blockades and other tactics 'offer[s] a more *affirmative* gesture or alternative built into the practice itself […] they become a *way of life*, another form of *community*' (Coulthard 2014, 169, emphasis in original). Estes, too, writes of communities formed on protest sites as opportunities to cook, teach, learn, and take care of one another in ways that affirm Indigenous governance and ownership of land (2019, 58-9). In *Carpentaria*, Fishman and his activists escape to the bush and traverse traditional routes across country by car, collecting devotees on their journey and sheltering the sick and poor. Probing assumptions about 'natural' movement, the narrator compares the convoy's journey to that of migrating species, 'as pure as the water birds of the Wet season's Gulf country lagoons flying overhead' (Wright 2008, 101). The cars are continually repaired in 'an astonishing modern-day miracle of recycling by those spiritual men […] who had artisan hands and the minds of genius, using tools and parts found only in nature' (101). The pilgrims' skills of mobility, adaptation, and innovation—their ability to repurpose fossil infrastructure to revive cultural rituals—are depicted as part of Indigenous 'survivance' (Vizenor 2009, 85). Wright foregrounds these ways of moving matter across country, aligned with the tracks of the creation spirit, to emphasise Indigenous presence and continuation, and to juxtapose the pipeline's attempt to fix and mark white ownership of land.

Indigenous Narrative Aesthetics

What kind of narrative forms are capable of communicating the layered, multispecies, and often conflicting infrastructures of Wright's Gulf country? *Carpentaria*'s style is reminiscent of modernism in its collage effect and use of free indirect discourse

(Ravenscroft 2010, 205).[63] In its length, scope, and traces of oral tradition, *Carpentaria* is an epic.[64] Critics have described *Carpentaria*'s narrative voice as 'unpinnable' (Ravenscroft 2010, 205) and 'difficult' to parse (Syson 2007, 86). The narrator is heterodiegetic but positioned in intimate relation to Desperance's inhabitants, parodying the linguistic patterns of focalised characters with colloquial familiarity: the self-important tone of Desperance's councillors, the vernacular of the Pricklebush youth, the magisterial voice of the Land. The narrator speaks with a vernacular tone and rhythm 'that belongs to the diction of the tribal nations of the Gulf' (Wright 2006b, 10), with exclamations of 'Look!', 'Goodness!', 'Oh!' (Wright 2008, 14) serving as 'invocations of an oral, conversational storytelling voice' (Rodoreda 2017, 10). The narrator's memory stretches 'from time immemorial' (Wright 2008, 1) to the afterlife, and they speak as one of '[t]he old Gulf country men and women who took our besieged memories to the grave [and] might just climb out of the mud and tell you the real story of what happened here' (10). Multiple, heterogenous forms are at work.

Daniel Heath Justice argues for an expansive definition of Indigenous-signed texts: 'our literatures include […] cane baskets, wampum belts, birchbark scrolls, gourd masks, sand paintings, rock art, carved and painted cedar poles, stones and whale bones, culturally modified trees, and so on' (2018, 22). The flexible accommodation of diverse expressive forms—a willingness to utilise 'whatever media have been most convenient and meaningful at the time' (Justice 2018, 21-2)—is a common motif in *Carpentaria*: old cars become vehicles of pilgrimage endlessly repaired and recycled, homes are built from scavenged materials, and the entire infrastructure of the town is reconstituted into a floating island of trash, an inadvertent lifeboat for multiple species

[63] Wright has cited James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) as an influence (Wright 2006a, n.p.).
[64] Wright describes the 'contemporary Indigenous story world' as 'epic': 'our story world follows the original pattern of the great ancient sagas that defined the laws, customs and values of our culture' (2006b, 2).

displaced by the cyclones. But Wright also treats the novel itself as a site for reinscription and rearrangement. In Dean Rader's sense of 'compositional resistance' (2012, 5) articulated at the level of narrative structure, Wright's reinterpretation of the novel form speaks to a decolonial politics. The voice that begins *Carpentaria* in a short opening frame of capitalised text is immediately interrupted by the Gulf narrator, whose interjection is marked by italicisation: 'A NATION CHANTS, *BUT WE KNOW YOUR STORY ALREADY*' (Wright 2008, 1). With their dismissal of the nation's chant, the interjecting narrator refuses to locate the story that follows within the colonial framework and so resists 'appropriation and assimilation into "national" or "Australian" histories' (Willis 2021, 8). The didactic story of the Australian nation is not excluded from the narrative—like the spectres of white hands, its presence is a persistent, haunting influence—but its voice is pushed to the narrative margins as a limited way of conceptualising time, place, and relations. The narrator refuses to accede to 'settler time' those 'notions, narratives, and experiences of temporality that de facto normalize non-native presence, influence, and occupation' (Rifkin 2017, 9). Tuck and Yang propose that 'the refusal stance' seen in Wright's denial of the national origin story 'pushes us to *limit* settler territorialization of Indigenous/Native/community knowledge, and *expand* the space for other forms of knowledge, thought-worlds to live' (2014, 817, emphasis in original).

Wright presents the historical formation of the Gulf country and its tribal Nations to contest Australia's founding story and its government's claims to legitimacy and authority. Rader calls this 'engaged resistance': the narrative means by which Indigenous authors resist 'the ubiquitous colonial tendencies of assimilation and erasure' and 'connect[] to tribal ways of telling stories' (2012, 1). Early in *Carpentaria*,

the narrator gives a brutal account of how Desperance's imported goods came to be delivered by petroleum vehicles instead of camel trains:

> The screaming, uncooperative animals didn't comprehend English, or barbarism either. After being hounded for several hours by their pursuers on foot and horseback, and stoned and whipped, the camels were eventually moved out over the claypans and shot. In the archival records written with a thick nib by a heavy-handed municipal clerk it is recorded, *Camels removed*. The first entry of work completed by the Town's Municipal Council. (Wright 2008, 5)

The council records are brief and perfunctory, concealing gratuitous acts of violence in the sanitising language of 'removal'. Mishuana Goeman describes the archiving of a nation as 'colonial spatializing': a process whereby 'maps, travel logs, engravings, newspapers, almanacs, and many other forms of colonial writings formed a systemic practice of confining and defining Native spaces from land to bodies' (2008, 296). Territory is mapped through texts. Desperance's first written record is, significantly, an extermination event motivated by the changing infrastructural demands of an industrialising continent, which evokes the nation's founding genocidal campaign against Aboriginal peoples. Kanoi et al. offer a view of infrastructure as a meaning-making (or meaning-breaking) device: 'etymologically, then, infrastructures are not just foundations for material structures, they are also the foundational systems that mediate, enable, or disable the making of meaning and meaningful action' (2022, 2). Desperance's archives work *as and alongside* settler infrastructures: part of the overlapping material and aesthetic forms by which goods, objects, histories, and ideas are moved through time and space to constitute particular lifeways and to obscure

others. In this way, Uptown's archives are a narrative infrastructure that enables settler expansion while covering up lives eliminated in the process.

The narrator and the Pricklebush elders provide more critical histories. The elders keep 'a library chock-a-block full of stories of the old country stored in their heads' and trade in 'intelligence, etiquette of the what to do, how to behave for knowing how to live like a proper human being, alongside spirits for neighbours' (Wright 2008, 207). This specialised knowledge is the Aboriginal Law, which guides human–ecological–spiritual relations. Normal Phantom is one such storyteller invested in the upkeep of the Law:

> What Norm could do with stories he had practised down to a fine art and glued it to surviving relics, like the still-to-be-found fire-gutted ghost gum willed by providence to the families' memories of Westside, where the local pastoralist whipped Aboriginal men and women, the boulders with a peephole view where cartridges were as many as stones on the ground from the massacre of the local tribespeople. (87)

Norm's 'counter-memories' (Foucault 2019, 160) fill in narrative gaps left by Desperance's written archives, keeping histories of atrocities committed against Aboriginal peoples in circulation. His stories are shaped around nonhuman entities: the ghost gum and boulders are 'textual markers in the landscape which aid the upkeep of an oral literature of the land and its people' (Rodoreda 2017, 5). Desperance's white residents imagine the earth's surface to be inert, static, inanimate—a blank canvas to be inscribed: 'the folk Uptown showed their boundaries which they said had been created at the beginning of their time […] they said it was invisibly defined on the surface of the earth by the old surveying methods' (Wright 2008, 50-1). Kathryn Yusoff takes this idea further when she writes of colonialism: 'As

land is made into tabula rasa for European inscription of its militant maps, so too do Indigenes and Africans become rendered as a writ or ledger of flesh scribed in colonial grammars' (2018, 33). When Indigenous peoples are considered part of the land, their bodies and cultures, too, are treated as blank pages for colonial inscription. While Uptown's narratives of colonial spatialising pave over Indigenous and nonhuman life, however, Norm's oral histories derive knowledge from more-than-human relations. Wright recovers Indigenous ways of theorising and vocalising time and place 'to reconfigure [the] violent cartographies' (Goeman 2008, 300) of the Australian nation-state.

The place-based knowledge of *Carpentaria*'s protagonists indicates the powerful influence of grounded normativity in shaping Wright's narrative forms. The local specificity of this knowledge is combined with an awareness of global struggles against settler colonialism and epistemic violence. Seamus Heaney's poem 'The First Words' serves as *Carpentaria*'s epigraph, providing a paratextual connection to both the British colonisation of Ireland and communist dictatorship and censorship in Romania.[65] The poem articulates an understanding of language and knowledge as deeply entwined with place. When a native language is suppressed or contaminated by colonial influence and that 'first' expression denied, what remains is 'meaning from the deep brain, / What the birds and the grass and the stones drink' (Heaney 1996, 5-6). Since '[i]ntelligence flows through relationships between living entities' (Simpson 2014, 155), knowledge can be recovered through acts of ecological caretaking. Wright describes *Carpentaria* as a 'very long melody of different forms of music' (2006b, 9), which encompasses the multispecies musicality of 'crickets that sang *Glory! Glory!*'

[65] Attributed to Heaney in Wright's epigraph, 'The First Words' is a translation of a Romanian poem by Marin Sorescu, first printed in English in the collection *The Biggest Egg in the World* (1987).

(Wright 2008, 177) and ‘a mass choir of frogs’ (438). *Carpentaria*’s final lines indicate the rejuvenating quality of song to affirm Indigenous futurities: ‘It was a mystery, but there was so much song wafting off the water land, singing the country afresh’ (Wright 2008, 438).

Through her multiplication of narrative forms, Wright makes space for what the Eurowestern Gothic novel has been unable to convey: the ‘all times’ (Wright 2006b, 3) of Waanyi cosmology, irreducible to linear, sequential time; the deep reciprocal relations of Indigenous peoples with nonhuman entities; and the multiple ontologies, epistemologies, and aesthetic forms negotiated by Aboriginal peoples as they utilise traditional ecological knowledge and settler ‘scientify’ (Wright 2008, 209) concepts. In her accompanying essay ‘On writing *Carpentaria*’ (2006), Wright describes her desire to challenge the limitations of the novel form:

> this fictional work could not be contained in a capsule that was either time or incident specific. It would not fit into an English, and therefore Australian tradition of creating boundaries and fences which encode the development of thinking in this country, and which follows through to the containment of thought and idea in the novel. (3)

Wright refuses to allow Eurowestern literary forms to restrict her understanding of time, place, and being—a restriction she compares with infrastructures of spatial containment like boundaries, fences, and national borders. If ‘[i]t is the work of form to make order’ (Levine 2015, 3), Wright experiments with the irreconcilable and insurgent, placing forms in new arrangements to create alternative orders of power. Thoughts and ideas are not neatly contained in *Carpentaria*; they spill out in unexpected arrangements and collisions. Ravenscroft suggests the novel ‘accomplishes its political work through an aesthetics of uncertainty, a radical,

irresolvable equivocality in language and form' (2010, 205). *Carpentaria* is not a work of political or aesthetic reconciliation or resolution; instead, its narrative forms make tensions, contradictions, and conflicts visible in order to directly challenge and repurpose settler forms.

Speaking to Native American literary traditions, Jodi Byrd suggests Indigenous authors 'test the limits of genre's laws and transgress the boundaries of taxonomy' by creating 'transgenres' (2014, 346). Transgenres disrupt and reinterpret colonial conventions of meaning-making. While *Carpentaria* is grounded in a Waanyi cosmology, Wright similarly employs transgeneric aesthetics: she uses the Gothic mode to depict the haunting of the Gulf country by white hands; she parodies the Western when Desperances's white mayor styles himself sheriff and erroneously imprisons the three Pricklebush boys; she plays on the action thriller genre in chase scenes between the Gurfurritt mercenaries and Aboriginal activists, fashioning the saboteurs as daring heroes; and she evokes desert-island survivalist stories with Will's stranding on the trash island. Narrative hybridity is partly a means of recognising a complicated literary inheritance; rather than writing to an imagined pre-colonial state, incorporating Eurowestern forms and genres serves as a textual reminder of settler violence and the interwoven lives that have followed. But reinterpreting traditional 'genres of conquest' (Byrd 2014, 350) demonstrates the capacious, creative, and ironic storytelling possibilities opened up by Indigenous transgeneric innovations. The structures of settler colonialism constitute only one part of a far longer storytelling tradition centring the creation history of the Waanyi and their multispecies kinships. By combining genres, turning them against each other, and placing them in new arrangements with Indigenous forms, Wright 'create[s] multidirectional narratives that explore the alternate lives of genres simultaneously' (Byrd 2014, 355).

Part of *Carpentaria*'s creative repurposing of settler forms emanates from the narrator's variously playful, mocking, acerbic, grandiose, colloquial, and ironic tones (Carr 2022, 6). Wordplay gives *Carpentaria* the quality of a fable: 'Gurfurritt' sounds like 'go for it!'—its extractivist ethos urging action without thought for consequences—while 'Desperance' conjoins 'espérance' (from the French for 'hope'), and the prefix 'des-', meaning 'lack of' (Carr 2022, 7).[66] Wry humour undermines the authority of the settler state. As with the chorus recognising their power to refuse norms of deference ('We were supposed to say, Oh! No! You can't do things like that to the, umm, beg your pardon, please and thankyou, to the arrr, em, WHITE MAN' [Wright 2008, 344]), humour allows Wright to push against the boundaries of acceptable discourse, to imagine the destruction of settler infrastructures and the reassertion of Indigenous political sovereignties through combined material and aesthetic interventions. 'Desperance' further evokes Jacques Derrida's (1982) concept of '*différance*', which denotes how a word's meaning is constituted by its difference from other words and yet perpetually deferred. Derrida describes *différance* as a '*sheaf* […] an interlacing which permits the different threads and different lines of meaning […] to go off again in different directions' (1982, 3). Wright describes *Carpentaria* in strikingly similar terms as a 'helix of divided strands' that is 'forever moving, entwining all stories together, just like a lyrebird is capable of singing several tunes at once' (Wright 2006b, 6). Blowing up infrastructures—physical and narrative—ruptures settler forms: the fragments created by the explosion multiply meaning into a sheaf of possible futures.

Carpentaria traces the flow of archives into rubbish dumps, plastic into oceans, and oil pumped from Aboriginal lands to fuel settler infrastructures and generate profit

[66] In 2007, the real town of Esperance in Australia was declared a 'natural disaster area' due to extreme flooding, which killed tens of thousands of sheep and washed away the main highway.

for transnational corporations. With the obliteration of Desperance, Wright speaks to the accelerated erasure of timekeeping technologies caused by intensifying climate change, ecological catastrophes, and fraught political relations. Will observes of the cyclone's destruction, 'history could be obliterated when the Gods move the country. He saw history rolled, reshaped, undone and mauled' (Wright 2008, 415). This vision of history reshaped by the ancestral spirits challenges a 'settled' history that is '"done," "finished," "complete" […] the presumption that the colonial project has been realized' (Simpson 2014, 11). The Gulf country reasserts itself in ways capable of revising both the past and future.

As these constraints shape possibilities for recordkeeping into the future, Wright implies Indigenous oral methods for recording, maintaining, and transmitting knowledge are better poised to survive. Like the *Southern Reach* series, *Carpentaria* resists written archivisation processes, showing written materials overcome by environmental forces. When the cyclone washes Desperance into the sea, the elders flee to the bush and Will survives on the trash island while the council offices and library are destroyed. The longevity of Desperance's written records proves lesser than the embodied Law, which constitutes the only memory of Desperance after the town's destruction. Moreover, where written records require extensive material resources—Uptown uses up 'plenty of ink and paper recording what they blabbered to each other' (Wright 2008, 18)—oral memory requires only those resources necessary to sustain human bodies. Having long been cast by the settler state as a remnant of the past, indigeneity, the novel insists, is the only mode of living and knowing capable of surviving into a climate-altered future. *Carpentaria* envisages capacious narrative forms capable of weathering climatic changes and assaults from

colonial extractivists, while its guerrilla projects of resisting and salvaging fossil fuel infrastructures propel Indigenous lives into a resilient, sovereign future.

Conclusion: Indigenous Futurisms

The ecogothic plays a curious and often conflicting role in *Carpentaria*'s matrix of forms. The historical legacy of the Gothic genre used by European settlers to define a distinct Australian identity is a prominent influence, often incorporated with ironic humour to illustrate the lack of ecological knowledge among settler descendants. But its imagery and affective registers are also used to represent Indigenous experience in the context of ongoing invasion by sinister forces. Wright relocates Australian Settler Gothic settings from the vast desert and disorientating bush to industrial farmland, oil wells and pipelines, rubbish dumps, and county jails, Gothicising the material infrastructures that enable and reproduce colonial power. *Carpentaria* also demonstrates the limitations of the ecogothic's capacity to represent Indigenous experience, for its vocabulary of ghosts, spectres, and hauntings cannot encapsulate the numerous and often affirmative relations of Waanyi ancestral spirits. The Gothic's largely linear (if irruptive) temporality is similarly unable to sufficiently grasp the 'all times' of Waanyi cosmology. The novel's dual reliance on written material forms and a European canon relegates it, in *Carpentaria*'s logic, to a precarious textual archive that is less able to withstand climatic changes and political censorship into the future than oral narrative forms.

Carpentaria's deconstruction of the novel demonstrates how the rearrangement of narrative forms can support Indigenous knowledge systems and affirm Indigenous sovereignty. *Carpentaria*'s voice is specific to the Gulf country and its local conflicts over mining and land rights, yet its narrative stretches to encompass the global millions

(human and otherwise) whose lifeways are impinged upon by fossil fuel infrastructure (Yaeger 2007, 14). Wright places disparate infrastructures in constellation to highlight moments of collision when power may be toppled and reshaped. Like the dismantling of oil infrastructure, Wright reassembles the narrative infrastructures of the settler state into new forms conducive to supporting the lifeways of the Waanyi and their multispecies kin. In Rader's terms, *Carpentaria* brings together contextual and compositional resistance in an illustration of how narrative forms can be reconstituted into life-sustaining infrastructure counter to the infrastructures of settler governance and white supremacy.

CONCLUSION

Ecogothic at the Novel's Edge

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have sought to illustrate both the revolutionary potential and reactionary limitations of contemporary ecogothic fiction. By tracing shared formal and thematic concerns across these otherwise disparate texts, I parse the emergence of a distinct and contemporary ecogothic genre. With this Conclusion, I summarise and further contextualise the distinctive features of the ecogothic novel before evaluating the central contributions of the thesis as a whole. I then turn finally to the stakes and implications of the ecogothic mode in the broader context of cultural production and its relationship with political action and environmental engagement.

Each of the four texts studied has offered a quintessential example of one of the four major qualities of an ecogothic novel while simultaneously embodying the other three. Although the four texts used as case studies in this thesis offer, in my view, ideal touchstones for interrogating the primary elements of the ecogothic, many other novels could have been selected in their place. Texts that meet the definition I have outlined here, on the basis of particular renderings of time, intimacy, affect, and form, include: *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy, *The Terror* (2007) by Dan Simmons, *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (2009) by Olga Tokarczuk, *The Swan Book* (2013) by Alexis Wright, *All the Birds, Singing* (2013) by Evie Wyld, *Infinite Ground* (2016) by Martin MacInnes, *Starve Acre* (2019) by Andrew Michael Hurley, *The Animals in That Country* (2020) by Laura Jean McKay, *How Much of These Hills*

is Gold (2020) by C Pam Zhang, *The Only Good Indians* (2020) by Stephen Graham Jones, *Hummingbird Salamander* (2021) by Jeff VanderMeer, and *The Morning Star* (2020) and *Wolves of Eternity* (2023) by Karl Ove Knausgaard. Given the broad reach and critical acclaim that many of these texts have inspired, it is reasonable to suggest the ecogothic novel is an important part of the contemporary cultural imaginary, particularly when it comes to representing environmental challenges and sublimes. Indeed, the ecogothic emerges as 'a culturally significant point of contact between literary criticism, postcolonial and ecocritical theory (Byrne 2017, 964). As I stated in the Introduction, I offer this definition not to demarcate an enclosed and exclusive categorisation—it is not intended to keep texts or authors *out*—but to provide an organising framework for the ecogothic's unique contributions to critical and creative discourses.[67] The ecogothic novel is a popular and proliferating genre; as the aforementioned texts indicate, it is also a porous one, appearing within and alongside eco- and folk horror, science fiction, (anti-)Westerns, thrillers, historical fiction, detective fiction, and Anthropocene Noir.

Neither is the ecogothic geographically restricted. While these Anglophone texts generally adhere to the genre's traditional strongholds in the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia, they also include novels in translation (*Drive Your Plow*, *The Morning Star*). Indeed, the ecogothic is related to recent theorising around a 'global Gothic' illustrated in Holly-Gale Millette and Ruth Heholt's *The New Urban Gothic: Global Gothic in the Age of the Anthropocene* (2020), Glennis Byron's *Globalgothic* (2013), and Andrew Hock-Soon Ng's *Asian Gothic* (2008). Such an expansive reach is perhaps fitting for a genre dealing in global crises such as climate

[67] Defining generic borders can entail 'a kind of questionable gatekeeping' (Byron 2012, 370) that I seek to avoid here while maintaining the useful facets of genre as a strategy for theorising and organising groups of texts.

change, especially if we understand the Gothic as following the zeitgeist of cultural anxieties (Cohen 1996, 4). The Gothic is increasingly positioned as a site for comparative literature: 'a method of inquiry into our socio-cultural conditions' (Ng 2008, 2) that traces 'multidirectional flows' (Byron 2012, 373) of cultural influence. As Glennis Byron notes,

> Gothic was from the start the product of a process of cultural exchange, although then the exchange was primarily Anglo-French-Germanic. Today, as the processes of exchange are expedited and intensified by the increasing mobility of both people and cultural products, the Gothic mode is experiencing what may be its most radical transformation to date. (2012, 373)

Rising attention to a 'global Gothic' does not mean ignoring or downplaying the specificity of local ecologies, histories, and political contexts, but it can help us to illuminate sites of common struggle where solidarities may emerge, especially in the processing of colonial traumas and articulation of resistance to transboundary fossil-fuel infrastructures. Rather than treating the Gothic as necessarily a 'colonial imposition' (Byron 2012, 370) on non-European epistemologies and cultural forms, the (eco)Gothic has itself transformed these transnational relations. As I have aimed to demonstrate, the ecogothic contends with its own complicated cultural heritage in the service of anti-imperial and queer perspectives.

While existing studies of ecogothic have generally been content to treat it as a subgenre or niche thematic focus within Gothic, I suggest ecogothic's deep rooting in a disrupted human–ecological relationship produces texts that are fundamentally different to those of the Gothic tradition. Ecology cannot simply be 'added on' to existing Gothic narratives because it forms the basis for all other relations. The 'eco'

in ecogothic marks an alternative 'orientation' in Sara Ahmed's sense of 'be[ing] turned toward certain objects, those that help us find our way' (2006, 1). But if '[o]rientations […] are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places' (Ahmed 2006, 8), the globally dominant extractive relationship between (human) body and (planetary) dwelling place leaves us on unsteady ground: perhaps more accurately termed a *dis*orientation. If eighteenth-century Gothic responded to changing material conditions on the cusp of industrialisation, the ecogothic responds to similar material changes in the Anthropocene—but these changes are amplified to the extreme. This ecological (dis)orientation marks a pertinent distinction between Gothic and ecogothic at a time when Gothic is increasingly marketed as safe, narratively satisfying, and even 'happy' reading (Spooner 2017), exhausted—particularly in its numerous neo-Victorian iterations and retellings—of any real terror or transgressive impulse (Botting 2002).[68] In such texts, their Gothicity is a temporary intrusion into narrative (and implicit social and environmental) stability, for the unruly ghost or monster is eventually laid to rest. Conversely, ecogothic's sense of haunting saturates the everyday; there is no presumed return to stability in an epoch of global anthropogenic climate change and mass extinction. Fred Botting writes of the early Gothic sublime: 'the past is appropriated and expelled in an attempt to separate a civilized, rational eighteenth century from its barbaric and feudal forebears' (2002, 278). If early Gothic sought to emphasise its break with a barbaric past, ecogothic identifies that barbarism within Western civilisation as the site of ongoing struggle. Indeed, by looking backwards to make certain repressed histories of colonialism and extractivism legible, the ecogothic can never be entirely new. Rather, the genre draws attention to what was *already*

[68] On (postmodern) Gothic as an exhausted genre, Fred Botting writes: 'Inured to Gothic shocks and terrors, contemporary culture recycles its images in the hope of finding a charge intense enough to stave off the black hole within and without, the one opened up by postmodernist fragmentation' (2002, 298).

there. Despite or alongside ongoing efforts to assimilate the Gothic into the mainstream and divest it of its power to shock, the ecogothic novels studied here and the broader archive mentioned above offer productively inconclusive, challenging, uncomfortable, and disorienting narratives that continue to unsettle both their readers and the novel form.

Time

Environmental time poses a challenge to the conventional pacing of a novel, which is usually centred on the interpersonal dramas of an individual or small networks of human characters.[69] Climate change and other global ecological crises (temperature and sea level rise, mass extinction) require an expansion of the temporal imagination beyond the scope of a single human lifetime, registered in new theoretical concepts such as the Anthropocene, hyperobjects, and deep time. 'History has sprung alive, through a nature that has done likewise' (2018, 11), writes Andreas Malm. This sudden awareness of the conjunction of human and geological temporalities has also produced innovations in the narrative structures of contemporary novels. For ecogothic fiction, this means turning towards a deep temporal past to histories of industrialisation, settler colonialism, and even longer histories of species development charted through evolutionary time.

In *The People in the Trees*, Yanagihara accelerates the workings of colonial extraction and biodiversity loss to make ecocide tangible, compressing diverse histories and geographies into one Micronesian archipelago over a roughly fifty-year period. The violence of vast global systems is distilled into the actions of one individual

[69] Novels that depart from this individual temporal scale, meanwhile, are often met with resistance from critics, such as Annie Proulx's *Barkskins* (2016) about the deforestation of North America, told through successive generations of migrant characters over three-hundred years.

perpetrator, whose crimes against Indigenous children are paralleled with devastating ecological effects, in which he is complicit but for which he is never held accountable. In this oscillation between sudden and spectacular harm, and slow (if accelerated) violence, Yanagihara not only makes visible environmental damage that is typically obscured, but she also insinuates connections between these forms of harm as manifestations of a colonial-scientific logic that apprehends Indigenous peoples and nonhuman entities alike as sites of extraction and sacrifice. This progressive application of the ecogothic genre resonates with Sharae Deckard's insight that authors can 'deploy[] Ecogothic aesthetics to rectify historical amnesias around the frontier violence of colonialism' (2019, 178). With editor and co-conspirator Kubodera, Perina seeks to exert a godlike narrative control in his journal entries: to rewrite the past, to banish evidence of wrongdoing, and to reorder history into a sequence that will rehabilitate his reputation. And yet, as in traditional Gothic narratives, the secrets of the past are eventually revealed, emerging with irruptive force from the novel's paratextual margins.

With the *Southern Reach* series, VanderMeer similarly creates a zone of accelerated environmental activity but in place of devastation, Area X manifests as pristine wilderness: a fantasy of anthropogenic pollutants and toxins expelled and human influence undone. But the temporality of Area X is circular; rather than offering an Edenic return, Area X continually redelivers the violence of the past. Through allusions to a destroyed Indigenous settlement that once inhabited the lighthouse site, the *Southern Reach* implies that, as a colonising and vanquishing force, Area X is not an unprecedented future threat but the reiteration of atrocities that have already occurred. To refer back to Kyle P. Whyte's point in the Introduction chapter, the Anthropocene is really an 'experience of déjà vu', for 'the hardships many

nonIndigenous people dread most of the climate crisis are ones that Indigenous peoples have endured already due to different forms of colonialism' (2018, 227, 226). The *Southern Reach*'s 'weird' looping temporality repeats the original trauma of colonial contact upon the settler population.

Bestiary is the result of Daughter's archival efforts to recover familial and cultural histories from landfill sites and to tell neglected stories from below. Chang is attentive to the way such histories are altered through time: translated through multiple languages, retold for new lands and contexts. With its interest in evolutionary time, *Bestiary* has a particularly deep temporal perspective. The novel depicts the spectre of the nonhuman lurking within human genetic material by having that nonhuman presence tangibly appear in the form of Daughter's tiger tail. The tail is an 'umbilical cord', the material manifestation of Daughter's connection to lineages ancestral, matrilineal, and nonhuman. *Bestiary* challenges presumptions of evolution as forward development by stressing the ongoing construction of human beings by their relations with more-than-human others. Shared evolutionary heritage becomes a source of solidarity between the human and nonhuman, even as the novel recognises the dangers of comparing nonhuman animals and racialised minorities as the historical foundation for the construction of racial and species hierarchies.

Carpentaria stretches its temporal vision to encompass the 'all times' of Waanyi cosmology, significantly expanding beyond the lifetime of a single person to chart the early formation of rivers by the Rainbow Country creation spirit and to assert the resilient futures of Indigenous communities. This deep temporal perspective offers a history of the Gulf country and its inhabitants, human and otherwise, that precedes the founding of the nation of Australia and thus contests its colonial government's authority. Suspicious of both the colonial force and material vulnerability of written

documents, *Carpentaria* suggests Indigenous oral forms of maintaining and transmitting knowledge are better prepared to survive into a climate-altered and less predictable future.

Each of these texts provides a nonlinear telling: either to deliberately obscure and delay the delivery of incriminating information (as in *The People in the Trees* and *Annihilation*, where Perina and the biologist respectively withhold details to appear trustworthy), or to emphasise alternative temporalities in which ancestral presences loom large and utopian futures emerge from glimpses of suppressed pasts (in *Bestiary* and *Carpentaria*). These ecogothic novels experiment with different kinds of narrative trajectories to a progressive teleology, modelling temporal forms such as simultaneity, repetition, and deferral. Often fragmented into multiple narrative perspectives, these texts stress the subjectivity of temporal experience, humbling pretensions to objectivity and scientific remove. They illustrate human entanglement with other species *and* with other times.

Significantly, each of these experimental approaches to narrative time carries the potential to undermine or pose alternatives to the organised rhythms of industrial capitalist society. Humidity and mould make surprisingly frequent appearances inside clock mechanisms, literally stopping time. In *The People in the Trees*, humidity causes Perina's watch to stop when he arrives on Ivu'ivu, untethering him from the regulatory time of the imperial homeland; in *Carpentaria*, the first cyclone causes all the clocks in town to break, an interruption to settler organisation of time caused by extreme weather; and mould consumes the journals that attempt to make sense of Area X in the *Southern Reach*. These scenes in which organic matter becomes a force of disruption illustrate the precarity—and often the moral corruption—of contemporary systems for keeping time and recording history. An Anthropocene epoch of

increasingly extreme weather, unruly precipitation, and forced mass migration interrupts the presumed stability and regularity of clock time, prompting the swift adoption of new rhythms and adaptive strategies.

In their overriding concern with the past, ecogothic novels are preoccupied with ghosts and hauntings. Their temporal structures do not seek relief from history's torments through conciliation or closure. Instead, they live with the knowledge of violence and its legacies as an ethical relation to both the past and present. They wear their wounds as testaments to the ongoing processes of 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway 2016)—of living amid this 'mid-Collapse condition' (2016), in VanderMeer's terms. In this way, ecogothic fiction is especially compatible with the melancholy attachments of queer theory, which present openness to haunting as an ethical position (Freccero 2006, 75), and to Indigenous theory that emphasises the political orientation of refusal over recognition or assimilation (Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2014; Tuck and Yang 2014). '*[Y]ou're supposed to prepare me for any future*,' Daughter insists in *Bestiary*. Like Mother, these novels seem to ask, '*But who* […] *can prepare you for the past?*' (Chang 2020, 45, italics in original). Ecogothic identifies today's climate and ecological crises not as concerns of the present or near-future but rather as the logical conclusion of extractivist processes hundreds of years in the making: the accumulation of historical violence newly visited upon the wealthy in the Global North as it has already shaken and ended lifeworlds elsewhere. Ecogothic time is nonlinear, backwards looking, and irruptive. The genre turns away from the future, from glittering visions of technological solutions and interplanetary escape or cathartic apocalypses, to welcome ghosts and nonhuman ancestors as its constant companions.

Intimacy

The ecogothic novel foregrounds human–nonhuman relations and often seeks to move beyond anthropocentric narratives, most strikingly demonstrated in the profusion of non/human hybrids and the blurring of species' categories across the novels studied. In *The People in the Trees* and the *Southern Reach*, categorical confusion often produces horror *and* wonder as beings shift from animal to plant, food to pet, prey to predator, human to nonhuman. Transgression and liminality are also central to *Bestiary*, whose human/animal transformations are paralleled with gender trans-ings, generating queer intimacies across species by de-exceptionalising the human as an animal body among others, subject to the same needs and desires and possessing the same vulnerability to environmental disasters (a vulnerability nevertheless stratified by race, class, gender, and citizenship status). In *Carpentaria*, multispecies kin are fundamental to the survival of the Phantom family protagonists during the cyclones as birds provide warnings of approaching danger and groper tracks lead the way home. Yet Wright's human characters retain a respectful distance in their awareness that other creatures possess knowledge and purpose outside their understanding. The ecogothic novel is densely populated with persons of many species whose interactions with lively ecologies shape not only setting but plot, character, and narrative perspective, too.

These enmeshed worlds are not utopian depictions of interspecies harmony; rather, this is the Gothic 'brush with the "other" that shifts perception, creates discomfort and uncertainty, and points to countless worlds of perception which are forever closed to us' (Heholt and Edmundson 2020, 7). Ecogothic fiction reintroduces friction and resistance to concepts of intimacy, including porosity, trans-corporeality, and entanglement. In environmental humanities scholarship, the individual subject is

increasingly at risk of becoming a sort of soup—or 'compost', à la Haraway (2015, 160)—of undifferentiated non/human beings. But in Gothic fiction, *becoming compost* has long been a source of dread and anxiety: the decomposition of the body and its invasion by external nonhuman forces inextricably entwined with fears of death and decay. Curiously, like the spectre of Lovecraft's Cthulhu monster that echoes through Haraway's Gaia-esque Chthulucene, ecogothic is again invoked as the dark, repressed mirror image of ecocritical concepts. The ecogothic is also preoccupied with the image of the human body as compost—but that prospect is met with horror, not hope (Weinstock 2023).

The other problem with the erosion of distinctions between human and nonhuman, nature and culture, is the unwitting inscription of the human into every facet of what was once distinguished as 'nature'. As Neyrat wryly argues,

> Ecological thinking doesn't even risk entering into the "night where all cows are black," to borrow Hegel's expression […] it doesn't even know that it has entered into an indistinct night, of no longer even knowing whether it's a cow or noncow, human or nonhuman, prions or dauphins. By fighting against separations, […] an ecological thinking will do nothing but undertake an anaturalism through a radical colonization of everything that is nonhuman by the human. (2019, 151)

To be sure, this seems a problem for a particular strand of object-oriented ontology rather than 'ecological thinking' wholesale. But Neyrat's point is that in its assertion of essential *sameness*—that there is no meaningful distinction between nature and culture, that the human is made up of and interpenetrated by nonhuman entities, thereby the human is inscribed across the nonhuman—the human effectively colonises the nonhuman. There is a risk that locating nonhuman agencies inside the

human body actually reinforces an anthropocentric perspective wherein the nonhuman Other is comfortably mapped as an extension of the Human, dispelling nonhuman alterity through assimilation. As Freccero writes of cannibalism, 'the desire to incorporate the other within the self fundamentally destroys its alterity or otherness and consequently negates the other' (2006, 87-8). What ecogothic fiction does, by contrast, is to refute that sense of familiarity and to reinscribe distance, uncertainty, complexity, and alterity into human–nonhuman relations.

While not denying the reality of entangled forms of existence, the ecogothic flags certain anxieties and undesirable features of enmeshed being. As Giraud observes, descriptions of entanglement often fail to consider 'which worlds are materialized over others' (2019, 11)—how relations are denied or foreclosed in the imposition of others. The most prominent example of undesirable entanglement across the studied texts is settler colonialism and its disruption of Indigenous lifeways and multispecies kinships. Perina's violence is orchestrated through his sense of entitlement to visit the remote Ivu'ivu, to obtain for himself its people's sacred knowledge, and adopt their children—in other words, by becoming deeply entangled with Ivu'ivu's society and ecology. The entanglements of colonial contact foreclose Indigenous lifeways and supplant them with the workings of global racial capitalism and industrialisation. In the *Southern Reach*, cohabitation with nonhuman animals is a positive, symbiotic experience only when human characters maintain some degree of distance, as with the biologist and the owl. Maintaining alterity is a desirable component of relations seeking to achieve a balance between mutual care and independence. *Bestiary*'s folktales chart the successive waves of invasion suffered by the Tayal, where the imposition of colonial languages and customs estranges the family from their matrilineal cultural heritage, while *Carpentaria* depicts Indigenous

activists acting in powerful resistance to colonial extraction. To protect sustainable relations, extractive ones must be denied and sometimes forcibly excluded.

Other undesirable forms of entanglement emerge in these novels, too. The flipside of mutual care so often emphasised in discussions of intimacy is vulnerability and exposure to invasion by external forces: situations of domestic abuse, sexual violence, and contamination by toxic pollution and disease. As the brunt of climate change and ecological collapse is borne by the global poor, so their entanglements in polluted environments and globalised labour markets disproportionately entail injury and death. Both *Bestiary* and *Carpentaria* feature protagonists who live on rubbish dumps, their families exposed to toxic waste and mountains of discarded plastic presumed to have gone 'away' but more often made the problem of poor communities deemed expendable by the state. Home is made uncanny in the encroachment of what Lawrence Buell calls 'gothicized environmental squalor' (2001, 42-3). In *The People in the Trees*, Yanagihara uses the imagery of oil as a marker of slow death, exposing how populations like the fictional U'ivuans are 'marked out for wearing out' (Berlant 2007, 761) by industrial empires. While Yanagihara's petroaesthetic conveys the dispersed, spiralling harms of colonialism, oil also inspires the fear of nonhuman agency in *Annihilation*, with Area X taking its shape from the excessiveness and uncontrollability of the real Deepwater Horizon oil spill of 2010. The circumstances of slow death are naturalised by oil's omnipresence; as Stephanie LeMenager observes, 'petroleum naturecultures envelop many of us as seamless atmosphere' (2012, 62). However, once these petrocultures are rendered legible, they can be resisted; as an antagonistic incursion into Waanyi territory, oil infrastructure becomes the target of *Carpentaria*'s insurgent narrative. Insistent across the novels is the necessity of becoming *dis*entangled from the hegemonic relations of colonial petrocultures in order

for other, more sustainable worlds to be materialised. In some ways this thesis starts and ends with a politics of oil and its aesthetic rendering in fiction. Indeed, it is arguably the work of literary modes such as the ecogothic to make the violence of fossil fuels visible and objectionable.

The valorising of distance and autonomy in ecogothic fiction moreover echoes increasingly popular strategies within mainstream environmentalism, including veganism and rewilding: the latter designed to restore nonhuman habitat through the reintroduction of native species and deliberate retreat of human presence. These efforts effectively (re)insert a divide between the human and nonhuman—not to assert superiority or mastery, but to diminish human dominion and presumptions to allow or disallow other forms of life. Along these same lines, Plumwood calls for:

> a depolarizing re-conception of non-human nature that recognizes the denied space of our hybridity, continuity and kinship, and which is also able to recognize, in suitable contexts, the difference of the non-human in a non-hierarchical way. (2003, 60)

This is a vision of alterity without hierarchy, of distance without the reassertion of power differentials. To similar ends, Halberstam in *Wild Things* (2020) and Giraud in *What Comes After Entanglement?* (2019) argue:

> While remaining suspicious of essentializing notions of nature […] some notion of wilderness might nonetheless be worth recuperating in order to oppose particular relations that, once accomplished, cause harm or violence that can never be completely reversed. (Giraud 2019, 10)

Ecogothic fiction is particularly compatible with this direction emerging from both mainstream environmental movements and a particular strand of environmental humanities scholarship, which suggests there may yet be political value to recovering

‘wildness’ or ‘wilderness’—not as a means of clinging to a pure, fantasy Nature, but in recognition of the fundamental otherness of nonhuman beings as intrinsically valuable.

Affect

The ecogothic novel is differentiated from other genres in part by its negative and ambivalent affects, particularly those produced in response to environmental phenomena. Like with the Gothic sublime, the subjects of ecogothic fiction often find themselves overwhelmed by a vast and unruly ecology that threatens to diminish their sense of self and separateness. As noted in the prior discussion of intimacy, ecogothic’s ambivalent affects in response to such proximity—flatness, numbness, uncertainty, conflicted feelings—register the importance of possessing choices, including the choice to become *dis*entangled: to extricate oneself from damaging relations. But there is also value to dwelling in negative feelings rather than immediately seeking to overcome or banish them. If we look to Sedgwick’s (1995) reading of shame as marking one’s ongoing engagement and interest in the world,[70] we can perceive an ecological shame at work in these novels. Characters signal their continued investment in environments that cause shame in their advertisement of anthropogenic harms: sacrifice zones, landfills, food deserts, and polluted reservoirs. For Sedgwick, shame is importantly social and transmissible; its perception can awaken a mirror response in others.

Negative emotions can be potent fuel for political action, as recent studies into the primacy of anger over hope as a motivator for participating in climate action attest (Gregersen et al. 2023). Indeed, contrary to commentary that suggests doom-and-

[70] Citing Silvan Tomkins: ‘[shame] operates only after interest or enjoyment has been activated […] The innate activator of shame is the incomplete reduction of interest or joy’ (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995, 500).

gloom messaging turns off or numbs audiences' receptivity to climate change messaging, social science studies report 'negative emotions [a]re strongly related to mitigation motivation and feelings of efficacy', while 'the optimistic message reduced participants' sense that climate change represented a risk to them' (Hornsey and Fielding 2016; see also Morris et al. 2020). Hope can contribute to complacency and decrease political participation, while anger, guilt, and worry are generally found to increase mitigation action (Rees et al. 2015; Bouman et al. 2020).

Cultural representations of environmental problems contribute to the production of these emotional responses. Ben De Bruyn argues *angry* fiction in particular offers 'an alternative to compromise aesthetics and its depoliticising effects […] by downplaying beauty and amplifying outrage' (2023, 1492). De Bruyn suggests the depiction of degraded environments can become a catalyst for direct action. While ecocriticism has long been concerned with nature writing, pastoral idylls, and the rejection of urban space, in the ugly, developed, contaminated (and contaminating) landscapes and sacrifice zones depicted in ecogothic novels, we see a different kind of environmental writing and a different kind of affective engagement. We see this affect-to-action pipeline exemplified particularly in *Carpentaria*, where righteous anger, combined with the desire to protect kin and defend the despoiled land, prompts Mozzie Fishman's activist group to destroy mining infrastructure.

The long durations of these negative emotions may also be apt for addressing environmental challenges. The persistence of dread and anxiety in ecogothic fiction speaks to the slow yet ever-escalating violence of ecological disasters. As Min Hyoung Song argues, climate change demands 'a willingness to sit with discomfort that doesn't fit too neatly into narrative plots' (2022, 67). Outside of its localised manifestations—worsening storms, droughts, heatwaves, or floods—climate change is not a dramatic

event that can be illustrated with plots of fluctuating passions and returns to equilibrium, since that baseline for ordinary experience is always shifting. But the texts studied here are not conventionally plotted novels: they ruminate on dilemmas that remain unresolved and eschew development, progress, or triumph for endurance and bearing witness. *Living with* damage resonates with an ecogothic approach, where enduring negative feeling is perhaps the only demonstrable acknowledgement of environmental damage that remains ongoing, unaddressed, and unresolved: a means of recognising nonhuman entities whose injuries and extinctions struggle to be recognised as damage, lacking political representation or legal protection.

The affective modes of the ecogothic might be better attuned to the long durations of ecological collapse and thus capable of sustaining attention to environmental challenges; but there are potential limits to its political applications. While I have argued the ecogothic attempts to rejuvenate or resurrect personal agency from its obstructed, dispersed, and compromised Anthropocene manifestations, only *Carpentaria*—the novel most distanced from, and cynical of, the ecogothic—actually portrays direct action with its collective of saboteurs that blow up oil infrastructure. As Giraud warns, '[i]rreducible complexity […] can prove paralyzing and disperse responsibilities in ways that undermine scope for political action' (2019, 2). The ecogothic may hold our attention to the haunting horrors of environmental catastrophe, but it may also freeze us in place while the cyclone approaches from the shore.

Form

The novels analysed in this thesis model unusual textual forms to contend with the structural oddities of the Anthropocene. *The People in the Trees* utilises a frame narrative, its taboos and anxieties suppressed to a Gothic paratext, while its fictional

editor defers the novel's pivotal scene to its very end. By the time the scale of Perina's violence is confirmed, it is already too late to intervene. The *Southern Reach* creates a constellation of perspectives across three short, interlinked novels: a series of entangled texts that fail to confirm anything concrete about its central mystery. *Bestiary* occupies a liminal form between languages, prose and poetry, history and folklore, and explicitly welcomes its own rewriting and retelling. *Carpentaria* reinvents the epic in combination with a Waanyi oral tradition, facing the future by rejuvenating very old forms.

These not-quite-novels show the novel form transforming under the weight of today's cumulative ecological crises. Time stretches into deep fossilised pasts, while our actions now reverberate far into the future. From the Lovecraftian horror of Area X to the protective force of the Rainbow Country creation spirit, 'setting' is not an inert background but an unpredictable, agential force. Character, too, comes under pressure: once presumed human and sovereign, characters in ecogothic are non-/post-/trans-human 'monsters' like the dreamers, the Crawler, and Daughter—transhuman cyborgs, interspecies hybrids, and doppelgängers whose narratives fracture into multiple and sometimes conflicting perspectives. Plots are unresolved (as in the *Southern Reach*) or almost non-existent (*Bestiary*), giving way to other, traditionally less prominent elements of the novel form, including tone, wordplay, description, character, relationality, and affect (Bradway 2021). Rather than a rigidly charted course or set of proposed solutions,[71] these are fleeting touches across time (Dinshaw 2007), fragments shored against the incomprehensibility of the present.

[71] Kim Stanley Robinson's *Ministry for the Future* (2020) is a popular example of the 'solutions' cli-fi novel, its narrative chapters interspersed with non-fiction essays and policy proposals for innovations like geoengineering and carbon taxes. In the end, the world is saved by bankers; the actions of its saboteur characters dismissed as criminal and pathological.

Indeed, the fragment remains a form of particular (eco)Gothic interest. Despite these texts' persistent scepticism about the capacity of human language and knowledge to materialise change or even to make coherent meaning, media forms nevertheless proliferate in letters, journals, poems, video tapes, documents, songs, and maps. Family histories are dug from landfills, journals retrieved from lighthouses, memoirs produced as evidence of guilt, council records and eviction notices recovered (then promptly burned or destroyed by extreme weather). Textual material is dismissed as insufficient yet compulsively returned to as a means of making do with those residual forms available for re-use—evoking Fredric Jameson's assessment of postmodern historicity, in which 'the past as "referent" finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts' (1984, 66). In other words, the 'found manuscript' trope continues—but in *Bestiary* and *Carpentaria*, oral narratives also become ascendant. These are stories preserved in human memory (sometimes with the assistance of nonhuman place markers), told and retold in different languages and contexts to survive the migrations demanded of changing climates and political regimes. Ecogothic narratives effectively recycle and put to use numerous forms including those historically dismissed as unscientific or unofficial, such as oral narratives, folklore, and myth. This lends ecogothic fiction distinct anti-colonial potential; as Deckard argues, 'in its reconfiguration of folkloric materials', ecogothic texts 'reactivate earlier cultural materials in order to embody collective memory from below, in opposition to imperial cultures of governance' (2019, 186).

As method, the ecogothic provides an alternative mode of archiving a trace, a ghost: something that would not usually be prioritised for (public) memory and so is typically lost to time. *Bestiary*'s very title indicates its function as a kind of encyclopaedic archive of beasts that recovers Tayal folktales through Daughter's

curation of Grandmother's poetic letters. *Carpentaria*'s epic form documents a deep history told from the Land's perspective, an archive of traditional ecological knowledge conveyed and maintained orally. *The People in the Trees* contains a Gothic paratext that absorbs suppressed details of militant Indigenous resistance groups and the voices of trafficked children, which its narrator attempts, unsuccessfully, to bury. And the *Southern Reach* insists that the changing non/human body is itself a message, an inscription in flesh. These novels are interested in collecting together particular kinds of stories, species, and histories; they function as performative archives of another sort. Instead of insisting the past is past, these novels draw attention to the ongoing violence inflicted upon Indigenous peoples, nonhuman species, and biodiverse landscapes. Their archives are open to reiteration, expansion, and modification. They resist spatial confinement (of populations of humans and nonhumans alike) and temporal containment (the closing off of history as complete, inaccessible, or resolved). As such, these polyvocal texts often resemble palimpsests in their combination of new and residual narrative forms. Narrators write and rewrite over one another, moving away from the god's-eye view of omniscient narration to a splintered multitude of uncertain perspectives, even gesturing towards a less anthropocentric viewpoint. Even as the texts register the impossibility of truly capturing a nonhuman perspective within human-authored texts (Baker 2019), the powerful presence of the nonhuman echoes throughout, from the gaze of the opa'ivu'eke to the rabbits that rebel against the Southern Reach agency, to the crows and gropers that defy even Norm Phantom's vast ecological understanding. If the Gothic embodies textual excess, a crisis of representation, then these texts reflect the unstable, uncertain status of knowledge in the Anthropocene.

In contemporary literatures, '[t]he political urgency of ecological issues is often self-consciously elaborated' (Smith and Hughes 2013, 5). Environmental degradation has become a—if not *the*—saturating concern. What distinguishes these novels from their Gothic forebears is not just their environmental focus, however, but also their metafictional distance from the Gothic tradition, even as they often draw self-consciously from that same tradition. Deckard points to 'a propensity within Ecogothic narratives to mine or recalibrate literary resources produced in response to prior contexts of environmental crisis' (2019, 180), particularly earlier Gothic texts. Whereas *The People in the Trees* introduces a colonial Gothic genealogy to show how the genre has been complicit in both extractivism and the positioning of Native peoples as objects of horror, by the time we reach the final chapter on *Carpentaria*, we can see how Wright mocks that relationship from the perspective of the Native subject. Often intersecting with postcolonial discourses, ecogothic novels articulate guilt and shame about the political consequences of Gothic literature. Like the Anthropocene epoch, the ecogothic is newly self-aware about the catastrophic effects of its ancestors. Though both can be backdated to when their effects are first felt (in the colonisation of the Americas, the onset of mass agriculture or industrialisation for the Anthropocene; Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* [1818] or Richard Jefferies' *After London; Or, Wild England* [1885] for ecogothic), it is only in the twenty-first century that these concepts gain a distinctively neurotic self-awareness.

Contributions

In summary, I have sought to make three central contributions to literary studies and ecocriticism with the analyses contained within this thesis. Firstly, I have outlined a new definition of the contemporary ecogothic novel and given flesh to that definition

through interrogation of what I propose are its four main features: time, intimacy, affect, and form. The contemporary ecogothic novel is invested in recovering environmental histories (often tied to socio-political histories of invasion, settler colonialism, and extraction); it recognises the entanglement of non/human being and simultaneously seeks to recover distance between human and nonhuman spheres; it generates negative and ambivalent affects to maintain attention to the long durations of ecological crises; and it deploys nonlinear, palimpsestic, and meta- narrative forms to reflect on the positionality of the Gothic tradition and the novel itself as compromised strategies for meaning-making.

Secondly, I have identified areas where ecogothic fiction complicates and/or challenges dominant ideas in the environmental humanities. I have presented the ecogothic genre as the dark inverse (or *invert*)[72] of ecocriticism. Often concerned with the same subject matter, the ecogothic presents a neurotic, anxiety-fuelled vision of ecocritical concerns, such as bodily porosity, trans-corporeality, entanglement, exposure, contamination, agency, and burdens of care. These novels do not deny the notion of an entangled world of human and nonhuman agencies; rather, they point to the uncomfortable and dangerous repercussions of that entanglement for humans and nonhumans alike.

Thirdly, I have begun to trace the ecogothic's engagement with racial and decolonial politics, an intersection frequently found to be lacking not only in ecogothic studies but across queer ecology, ecocriticism, and environmentalism more broadly. In its more radical or subversive guises, ecogothic fiction frequently intersects with postcolonial and decolonial critiques to centre Indigenous subjects and people of

[72] 'Invert' retains the ecogothic's queer associations with non-normative sexuality as well as its backward-looking gaze, its sense of being out of step with a heteronormative, progressive teleology.

colour in its narratives; to Gothicise environments made uncanny by colonialism, war, extraction, and waste; to tell histories from below by embracing ghosts and suppressed knowledge systems; and to forge solidarities between racialised minorities and nonhuman kin, alert to the complications and potentially problematic repercussions of such an alliance.

Sharpening the Stakes: Provocations for Future Research

One key critique of the ecogothic genre and its status as a potentially ethical or political mode is Simon Estok's accusation that the ecogothic is at core ecophobic: centred on fears of an agential nature. As I have sought to illustrate in my analysis, the contemporary ecogothic novel typically engages ecophobic ideologies in order to expose their insidious presence, interrogate their motives, and mock their tendencies toward hypocrisy and hysteria. The ecophobic perspective is typically held by ignorant or antagonistic characters, such as Norton Perina or Uptown's settler descendants. Elsewhere, ecophobia is a response to ecologies made uncanny by human influence: Area X's origins in oil spills, for instance, where 'ecophobia'—fear, horror, dread, disgust—registers an inappropriate and/or undesirable human presence. Like Victor Frankenstein's horror at his hubristic creation, ecogothic portrays the fear of humanity's own shadow on the landscape in a reckoning with anthropogenic legacies.

There is another aspect inherent to ecogothic fiction that I propose is potentially more problematic than its use of ecophobia, and that is its cynicism about human (capacity for) knowledge. The radical self-doubt and scepticism of scientific knowledge production depicted in these novels lends itself, on the one hand, to a rightful criticism of colonial methodologies and an openness to both Indigenous knowledge systems and hitherto unknown nonhuman intelligences; on the other hand, that same doubt

can become the foundation for conspiracy thinking, anti-intellectualism, and the kinds of anti-scientific discourse relied upon by climate deniers and vaccine sceptics alike by suggesting humans can never truly know the world around them. With no stable framework for the verification of information, there is a risk that self-doubt and ineffability cause not only paralysis and passivity but potentially even the forceful adoption of extremist right-wing views.[73] Like Norton Perina with his admiration for neat and tidy explanations—even after they are proven fundamentally invalid—the conspiracist is enthralled to orderly diagnoses for complex phenomena. When it comes to the multiple realities engendered by climate change—states of emergency combined with states of denial—Barbara Herrnstein Smith suggests, 'we grant not, of course, the equal validity of all views or the equal consequentiality of all realities but the equal *force* of all views and realities for those who hold and inhabit them' (2018, 124). To abandon all claims to the possibility of obtaining truth or knowledge *would* grant equal validity to all views—and leave us with no tools to navigate and no room to act, returned instead to bewildered passivity and the whims of authoritarian strongmen. To what extent can 'archives of feeling' and other non-empirical modes of investigative research aligned with the (eco)Gothic play into anti-intellectualism and conspiracy theories? To what extent is the ecogothic an irrational, paranoid, anti-scientific form that might be fundamentally ill at ease with climate science—even with the building of social collectives required for environmental change? In its more troubling guises, the ecogothic adopts the position of the already defeated and

[73] Nicole Seymour investigates the similarity of right- and left-wing positions on 'elite' scientific and environmental knowledge as an underexamined problem in the chapter '"I'm no botanist, but…": Irony, Ecocinema, and the Problem of Expert Knowledge', in her book *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), pp. 39-72. Seymour ultimately advocates for environmental communications that utilise a thoroughgoing irony to allow researchers to speak from a position of moral and epistemic humility. The neurotic self-reflexivity of ecogothic fiction may align well with such a strategy.

collapses into disconcerted helplessness in the face of those totalising global networks that threaten to swallow us whole.

This line of questioning leads us back to the notion of whether the ecogothic, with its negative affect, backwards-looking temporality, and insistence on complexity and nuance, is politically deflating: a genre of fright, alienation, melancholy, and confusion. This predicament is described by Fredric Jameson as that of the postmodern theorist:

> the more powerful the vision of some increasingly total system or logic […] the more powerless the reader comes to feel. Insofar as the theorist wins, therefore, by constructing an increasingly closed and terrifying machine, to that very degree he loses, since the critical capacity of his work is thereby paralysed, and the impulses of negation and revolt, not to speak of those of social transformation, are increasingly perceived as vain and trivial in the face of the model itself. (1984, 57)

Even if ecogothic fiction accurately grasps the scale of climate and ecological collapse and the forces accelerating them, by making these forces communicable, Jameson suggests the genre would counterintuitively deter mitigation efforts. For Malm, any cultural theory—and this thesis approaches the ecogothic as not only genre but theoretical *method*—that muddies the waters of direct action on climate change must be cast out:

> Any theory for the warming condition should have the struggle to stabilise climate – with the demolition of the fossil economy the necessary first step – as its practical, if only ideal, point of reference. It should clear up space for action and resistance. (2018, 18)

Under the guise of epistemic humility, humanities scholarship has been all too ready to surrender both human agency and capacity for knowledge to the vacuum of unknowability—overwhelmed by the scale of both the issues faced and the response they demand.

While unwilling to reduce literature to its instrumental value—these texts contain much in the way of artistic and cultural merit that makes them worthy of study beyond any impacts they may or may not have on readers' political engagement—there is nevertheless an argument to be made that ecogothic fiction is more compatible with radical environmental action than other genres of climate and apocalypse fiction. For one, ecogothic novels repeatedly return to themes of Indigenous dispossession, environmental racism, and climate justice. They not only centre power disparities and uneven responsibilities for environmental issues as they exist in the present, they also persistently turn back to violent histories of invasion, colonialism, and land theft as ongoing and unresolved injustices: a stance that resonates with movements for Indigenous land rights and reparations for slavery. In its concern with non/human entanglements, ecogothic fiction moreover tends to emphasise ecological problems beyond those that only negatively impact humans by dwelling on species extinctions, biodiversity loss, and disrupted migration routes. It extends its locus of worry and care outward to include persons of many species, encouraging an expansion of the kinds of lives considered grievable (Butler 2004). Indeed, it is by lingering in such gloomy, morbid, and unsettling situations that ecogothic fiction gains its unique insights. As Emily Alder and Jenny Bavidge write in their appraisal of the genre:

> Adept at transgressing boundaries and creating monsters without pretending such moves aren't scary or unproblematic, Gothic can go where other aesthetics cannot […] to appal us into action, to help us to

> confront mysteries or difficult subject matter, or to articulate political and cultural trauma caused by racism, genocide, and geocide. (2020, 231-2)

Perhaps most unexpectedly, and in direct contrast to much ecocriticism that seeks to de-centre, de-prioritise, and de-exceptionalise human power, the ecogothic retains an investment in individual human agency, even if that agency is decidedly *negative*—illustrated, for instance, in the destructive repercussions of the actions of nefarious individuals reproducing the fossil fuel economy via neo-colonial extractivism—or ambivalent, in the sense that the precise causal nature of individual activities is difficult, if not impossible, to measure against such vast political-ecological systems. This is where ecogothic's potential political power is reignited, however: in its insistence that individual human beings do *something*. With *Carpentaria*, Wright presents the most radical example of that deliberate exertion of agency through protagonist Will Phantom, the daring ecosaboteur who defies corporate mercenaries to destroy oil pipelines and mining infrastructure to reclaim unceded Indigenous land. But articulations of resistance reverberate through all the texts, even if those articulations are sometimes confined to the margins: in the Ivu'ivuan children who give evidence against Perina in court, holding him to account for sexual violence; in Control's final leap of faith to attempt to alter or destroy Area X; and in Daughter's rebellion against her abusive father, encouraged by salvaged ancestral tales of anti-imperial defence. These are not triumphalist novels, but neither are they devoid of courageous moral action. One can still make moral choices about how to act in complicated terrain. We must.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. ‘Making Feminist Points’. *feministkilljoys*, 11 Sep. 2013, https://feministkilljoys.com/2013/09/11/making-feminist-points/. Accessed 23 Feb. 2024.

---. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.

Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Indiana University Press, 2010.

---. *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*. University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

Aldana Reyes, Xavier. *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film*. University of Wales Press, 2014.

Alder, Emily, and Jenny Bavidge. ‘Ecocriticism and the Genre’. *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, edited by Clive Bloom. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 225-42. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-33136-8_14.

Althans, Katrin. ‘Aboriginal Gothic’. *Twenty-First-Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes. Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 276-88.

---. ‘White Shadows: The Gothic Tradition in Australian Aboriginal Literature’. *A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature*, edited by Belinda Wheeler. Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 139-54.

Amin, Kadji. ‘Trans* Plasticity and the Ontology of Race and Species’. *Social Text 143*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2020, pp. 49-71.

Arata, Stephen D. ‘The Occidental Tourist: “Dracula” and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization’. *Victorian Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1990, pp. 621-45.

Azzarello, Robert. ‘Unnatural Predators: Queer Theory Meets Environmental Studies in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*’. *Queering the Non/Human*, edited by Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird. Ashgate, 2008, pp. 137-57.

Baker, Timothy C. *New Forms of Environmental Writing: Gleaning and Fragmentation.* Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.

---. *Writing Animals: Language, Suffering, and Animality in Twenty-First-Century Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Barrett, Susan. ‘“The land is me”: Indigenous Australian story-telling and ecological knowledge’. *ELOHI*, vol. 3, 2013, pp. 29-40. doi:10.4000/elohi.592.

Bateman, Benjamin. *Queer Disappearance in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*. Oxford University Press, 2023.

Bedford, Anna. 'Transecology—(re)claiming the natural, belonging, intimacy, and impurity'. *Transecology: Transgender Perspectives on Environment and Nature*, edited by Douglas A. Vakoch. Routledge, 2020, pp. 1-16.

Benjamin, Walter. 'On the Concept of History'. *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938-1940*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Harvard University Press, [1940] 2005.

Beresford, Quentin. 'Homeswest versus Aborigines: Housing Discrimination in Western Australia'. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 2, 2001, pp. 40-6.

Berger, James. *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse*. University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Berlant, Lauren. 'Genre Flailing'. *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2018, pp. 156-62. https://doi.org/10.22387/CAP2018.16.

---. *On the Inconvenience of Other People*. Duke University Press, 2022. doi:10.1515/9781478023050.

---. 'Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)'. *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2007, pp. 754-80.

Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Harvard University Press, 1995.

---. 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' *October*, vol. 43, 1987, pp. 197-222. https://doi.org/10.2307/3397574.

Bezio, Kelly L. 'How Quarantine Attempts to Universalize the Black Condition'. *American Literature*, vol. 92, no. 4, 2020, pp. 697-706.

Blazan, Sladja, editor. 'Vegetomorphism: Exploring the Material Within the Aesthetics of the EcoGothic in *Stranger Things* and *Annihilation*'. *Haunted Nature: Entanglements of the Human and the Nonhuman*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, pp. 67-90.

Boast, Hannah. 'Theorizing the Gay Frog'. *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2022, pp. 661-79. DOI 10.1215/22011919-9962959.

Boltanski, Luc. *Mysteries and Conspiracies: Detective Stories, Spy Novels and the Making of Modern Societies.* Polity Press, 2014.

Bond, David P. G., and Stephen E. Grasby. 'Late Ordovician mass extinction caused by volcanism, warming, and anoxia, not cooling and glaciation'. *Geology*, vol. 48, no. 8, 2020, pp. 777-81.

Botting, Fred. ‘Aftergothic: Consumption, Machines, and Black Holes’. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 277-300.

Bouman, Thijs, Mark Vershoor, Casper J. Albers, Gisela Böhm, Stephen D. Fisher, Wouter Poortinga, Lorraine Whitmarsh, and Linda Steg. ‘When worry about climate change leads to climate action: How values, worry and personal responsibility relate to various climate actions’. *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 62, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2020.102061.

Bracke, Astrid. *Climate Crisis and the 21st-Century British Novel*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Bradway, Teagan. *Queer Experimental Literature: The Affective Politics of Bad Reading*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

---. ‘Queer Narrative Theory and the Relationality of Form’. *PMLA*, vol. 136, no. 5, 2021, pp. 711-27.

Bruhm, Steven. ‘The Contemporary Gothic: Why We Need It’. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 259-76.

Bruhn, Jorgen, and Heidi Hart. ‘Melting, Blurring, Moaning: *Annihilation* as Narrative Adaptation to Planetary Crisis?’ *Diegesis*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2020, pp. 1-15.

Bryant, Levi R. *The Democracy of Objects*. Open Humanities Press, 2011.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture.* Harvard University Press, 1995.

---. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U. S. and Beyond*. Harvard University Press, 2001.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, edited by Adam Philips. Oxford University Press, [1759] 1990.

Burnham, Michelle. ‘Is There an Indigenous Gothic?’ *A Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Charles L. Crow. John Wiley & Sons, 2014, pp. 225-37.

Butler, Judith. ‘Kinship beyond the Bloodline’. *Queer Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging,* Form, edited by Teagan Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman. Duke University Press, 2022, pp. 25-47.

---. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2004.

Byrd, Jodi. ‘Red Dead Conventions: American Indian Transgeneric Fictions’. *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature*, edited by James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice. Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 344-58. doi:10.1093/

Byrne, Eleanor. 'Ecogothic Dislocations in Hanya Yanagihara's *The People in the Trees*'. *Interventions*, vol. 19, no. 7, 2017, pp. 962-75. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2017.1403942.

Byron, Glennis, editor. *Globalgothic*. Manchester University Press, 2013.

---. 'Global Gothic'. *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter. John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2012, pp. 369-78.

Carr, Richard. 'On the Brink of Possibility: Alexis Wright's Tragicomic Novel'. *Commonwealth Essays and Studies*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2022, pp. 1-13. https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.11294.

Castriciano, Jodey. 'Learning to Talk with Ghosts: Canadian Gothic and the Poetics of Haunting in Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach'*. *University of Toronto Quarterly* vol. 75, no. 2, 2006, pp. 801-13.

Cattelino, Jessica R. 'The cultural politics of water in the Everglades and beyond: Transcript of the Lewis Henry Morgan Lecture given on October 14, 2015'. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2015, pp. 235-50. http://dx.doi.org/10.14318/hau5.3.013.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 'The Climate of History: Four Theses'. *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 197-222. https://doi.org/10.1086/596640.

Chang, K-Ming. *Bestiary*. Harvill Secker, 2020.

Chen, Mel Y. *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Duke University Press, 2012. doi:10.2307/j.ctv11vc866.

Chen, Yi-shiuan, Sandra Suchet-Pearson, and Richard Howitt. 'Reframing Indigenous water rights in "modern" Taiwan: reflecting on *Tayal* experience of colonized common property'. *International Journal of the Commons*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2018, pp. 378-401. DOI: 10.18352/ijc.823.

Chen, Yue. 'Conversation: K-Ming Chang'. *Sine Theta Magazine*, no. 16, 2020, pp. 14-9.

Clapp, Jeffrey. 'Jeff VanderMeer, or the Novel Trapped in the Open World'. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 62, no. 4, 2021, pp. 414-27. https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2020.1816890.

Clark, Timothy. *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept.* Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, editor. 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)'. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 3-25.

Cole, Teju. *Open City*. Faber and Faber, 2011.

Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition.* University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Council of Indigenous Peoples. 'Atayal'. Ministry of Interior. 2021. https://www.cip.gov.tw/en/tribe/grid-list/A7F31083995F0E60D0636733C6861689/info.html?cumid=D0636733C6861689. Accessed 27 Jul. 2024.

Coverley, Merlin. *Hauntology: Ghosts of Futures Past*. Oldcastle Books, 2020.

Craps, Stef. 'Climate Change and the Art of Anticipatory Memory'. *Parallax*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2017, pp. 479-92. https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2017.1374518.

Crutzen, Paul J., and Eugene F. Stoermer. 'The "Anthropocene"'. *Global Change Newsletter* no. 41, The International Geosphere–Biosphere Programme (IGBP): A Study of Global Change of the International Council for Scince (ICSU), May 2000, pp. 17-8. http://www.igbp.net/download/18.316f18321323470177580001401/1376383088452/NL41.pdf. Accessed 21 Nov. 2023.

Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture.* Duke University Press, 2003.

Davis, Heather, and Zoe Todd. 'On the Importance of a Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene'. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2017, pp. 761-80.

De Bruyn, Ben. 'The Hot War: Climate, Security, Fiction'. *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2018, pp. 43-67.

---. 'Introduction: Beyond the Sacrifice Zone'. *Textual Practice*, vol. 37, no. 10, 2023, pp. 1475-98. DOI: 10.1080/0950236X.2023.2264675.

De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven F. Rendall. University of California Press, 2011.

Deckard, Sharae. 'Ecogothic'. *Twenty-First-Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes. Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 174-88.

---. '"Uncanny states": global ecoGothic and the world-ecology in Rana Dasgupta's *Tokyo Cancelled*'. *EcoGothic*, edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes. Manchester University Press, 2013, pp. 177-94.

DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2007.

Del Principe, David. 'Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century', *Gothic Studies* vol. 16, no. 1, 2014, pp. 1-8.

Derrida, Jacques. ‘Différance’. *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass. University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 3-27.

---. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Routledge, 2006. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203821619.

---. ‘Spectres of Marx’. *New Left Review*, 1 May 1994, pp. 31-58.

Di Chiro, Giovanna. ‘Polluted Politics? Confronting Toxic Discourse, Sex Panic, and Eco-Normativity’. *Queering the Non/Human*, edited by Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird. Ashgate, 2008, pp. 199-230.

Dillon, Sarah. *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory*. Continuum, 2007.

Dinshaw, Carolyn, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, J Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, and Tan Hoang Nguyen. ‘Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion’. *GLQ*, vol. 13, no. 2-3, 2007, pp. 177-95. https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2006-030.

Donald, Dwayne Trevor. ‘Forts, Curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining Decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian Relations in Educational Contexts’. *First Nations Perspectives*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2009, pp. 1-24.

Duncan, Rebecca, editor. ‘Introduction: Globalgothic beyond Globalisation’. *The Edinburgh Companion to Globalgothic*. Edinburgh University Press, 2023.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Edmundson, Melissa. *Women’s Colonial Gothic Writing, 1850-1930: Haunted Empire*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Estes, Nick. *Our History is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*. Verso, 2019.

Estok, Simon C. ‘The Ecophobia Hypothesis: Re-membering the Feminist Body of Ecocriticism’. *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism: Making a Difference*, edited by Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok, and Serpil Oppermann. Taylor & Francis, 2013, pp. 70-83.

---. ‘Theorising the EcoGothic’. *Gothic Nature*, vol. 1, 2019, pp. 34-53.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann. Pluto Press, [1952] 2008.

Farrier, David. *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction*. University of Minnesota Press, 2019.

---. ‘Deep time’s uncanny future is full of ghostly human traces’. *Aeon*, 31 Oct. 2016, https://aeon.co/ideas/deep-time-s-uncanny-future-is-full-of-ghostly-human-traces. Accessed 5 Sep. 2023.

Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Zero Books, 2014.

Foucault, Michel. ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard. Cornell University Press, 2019, pp. 139-64.

Fox, Renée. ‘Gothic Realism, or Reading is Believing in *Dracula*’. *Irish University Review*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2023, pp. 9-26.

Fradenburg, Louise, and Carla Freccero, editors. *Premodern Sexualities*. Routledge, 1996. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315811529.

Freccero, Carla. *Queer/Early/Modern*. Duke University Press, 2006. https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1215/9780822387169.

Freeman, Elizabeth. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Freud, Sigmund. ‘The Uncanny’. Revised English translation from 1919. *Dialogues in Philosophy, Mental and Neuro Sciences*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2018, pp. 84-100.

Gentz, Edward J. ‘Medicine and Surgery of Amphibians’. *ILAR*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2007, pp. 255-59.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

---. ‘Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel’. *The New Republic*, 2 Mar. 1992, 29-33.

Giffney, Noreen, and Myra J. Hird, editors. *Queering the Non/Human*. Ashgate, 2008.

Gildersleeve, Jessica. ‘Contemporary Australian Trauma’. *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, edited by Clive Bloom. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 91-104.

Ginn, Franklin, Michelle Bastian, David Farrier, and Jeremy Kidwell. ‘Introduction: Unexpected Encounters with Deep Time’. *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2018, pp. 213-225. https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-4385534.

Giraud, Eva H. *What Comes after Entanglement?: Activism, Anthropocentrism, and an Ethics of Exclusion.* Duke University Press, 2019.

Goeman, Mishuana. ‘(Re)Mapping Indigenous Presence on the Land in Native Women’s Literature’. *American Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 2, 2008, pp. 295-302. doi:10.1353/AQ.0.0011.

Grano, Simona A. *Environmental Governance in Taiwan: A New Generation of Activists and Stakeholders.* Routledge, 2015.

Gregersen, Thea, Gisle Andersen, and Endre Tvinnereim. 'The strength and content of climate anger'. *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 82, 2023, pp. 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2023.102738.

Gross, Lawrence W. *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being*. Ashgate Publishing, 2014.

Hageman, Andrew, Timothy Morton, and Jeff VanderMeer. 'A Conversation Between Timothy Morton and Jeff VanderMeer'. *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 24 Dec. 2016, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/a-conversation-between-timothy-morton-and-jeff-vandermeer/. Accessed 31 Oct. 2023.

Halberstam, Jack. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Duke University Press, 1995.

---. *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire*. Duke University Press, 2020.

Hamilton, Jennifer Mae, and Astrida Neimanis. 'Composting Feminisms and Environmental Humanities'. *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2018, pp. 501-27.

Haraway, Donna J. 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin'. *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, 2015, pp. 159-65.

---. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.

---. *When Species Meet*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Haraway, Donna, Noboru Ishikawa, Scott F. Gilbert, Kenneth Olwig, Anna L. Tsing, and Nils Bubandt. 'Anthropologists Are Talking – About the Anthropocene'. *Ethnos*, vol. 81, no. 3, 2016, pp. 535-64.

Hardin, Michael. 'Standing Naked Before the Storm: Linda Hogan's *Power* and the Critique of Apocalyptic Narrative'. *From the Center of Tradition: Critical Perspectives on Linda Hogan*, edited by Barbara J. Cook. University Press of Colorado, 2003, pp. 135-55.

Hassall, Linda. *Theatres of Dust: Climate Gothic Analysis in Contemporary Australian Drama and Performance Landscapes*. Palgrave Pivot, 2021.

Hassig, Debra, editor. 'Sex in the Bestiaries'. *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature*. Routledge, 1999, pp. 71-93.

Heaney, Seamus. 'The First Words', from the Romanian of Marin Sorescu. *The Spirit Level*. Faber & Faber, 1996, p. 38.

Heholt, Ruth, and Melissa Edmundson, editors. *Gothic Animals*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

Hillard, Tom J. 'Gothic Nature Revisited: Reflections on the Gothic of Ecocriticism'. *Gothic Nature*, vol. 1, 2019, pp. 21-33.

Hogle, Jerrold E., editor. 'Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture'. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 1-20.

Hogue, Bev. 'Florida Gothic: Shadows in the Sunshine State'. *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*, edited by Susan Castillo Street and Charles L. Crow. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 149-60.

Holmes, Chris, and Thom Dancer. 'The Novel at the Limit'. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 62, no. 4, 2021, pp. 374-385. DOI: 10.1080/00111619.2021.1904816.

Hornsey, Matthew J., and Kelly S. Fielding. 'A cautionary note about messages of hope: Focusing on progress in reducing carbon emissions weakens mitigation motivation'. *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 39, 2016, pp. 26-34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2016.04.003.

Houser, Heather. *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect.* Columbia University Press, 2014.

Hughes, William, and Andrew Smith, editors. *Queering the Gothic*. Manchester University Press, 2009.

Hurley, Jessica, and Jeffrey Insko. 'Introduction: The Infrastructure of Emergency'. *American Literature*, vol. 93, no. 3, 2021, pp. 345-59. doi:10.1215/00029831-9361209.

Hurley, Kelly. *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge University Press, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511519161.

Indigenous Action, 'Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto', 19 Mar. 2020, pp. 1-12. https://www.indigenousaction.org/wp-content/uploads/simple-file-list/rethinking-the-apocalypse-PRINT.pdf. Accessed 2 Nov. 2023.

Jackson, Zakiyyah Iman. *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World.* New York University Press, 2020.

Jameson, Fredric. 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'. *New Left Review*, vol. 146, no. 1, 1984, pp. 53-92.

Juskus, Ryan. ‘Sacrifice Zones: A Genealogy and Analysis of an Environmental Justice Concept’. *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2023, pp. 3-24. DOI 10.1215/22011919-10216129.

Justice, Daniel Heath. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018.

Kanoi, Lav, Vanessa Koh, Al Lim, Shoko Yamada, and Michael R. Dove. ‘“What is infrastructure? What does it do?”: Anthropological perspectives on the workings of infrastructure(s)’. *Environmental Research: Infrastructure and Sustainability*, vol. 2, 2022, pp. 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1088/2634-4505/ac4429.

Kara, Selmin, and Cydney Langill. ‘Weirding Climate Realism in *Sunshine* and *Ex Machina*’. *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 2-3, 2020, pp. 60-80.

Kariyawasam, Kanchana. ‘Protecting Biodiversity, Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property in the Pacific: Issues and Challenges’. *Asia Pacific Law Review*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2008, 73-90.

Keetley, Dawn. ‘Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror; or, Why Are Plants Horrifying?’ *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, edited by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 1-30. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-57063-5.

Keetley, Dawn, and Matthew W. Sivils, editors. ‘Introduction: Approaches to the Ecogothic’. *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*. Iowa State University Digital Repository, 2017, pp. 1-20.

Kerridge, Richard. ‘Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Form and Genre: Urgency, Depth, Provisionality, Temporality’. *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, edited by Greg Garrard. Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 361-76.

Kinzer, Stephen. *Poisoner in Chief: Sidney Gottlieb and the CIA Search for Mind Control*. St Martin’s Griffin, 2020.

Klein, Naomi. ‘Dancing the World into Being: A Conversation with Idle No More’s Leanne Simpson’. *YES! Magazine*, 6 Mar. 2013, https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2013/03/06/dancing-the-world-into-being-a-conversation-with-idle-no-more-leanne-simpson. Accessed 13 Aug. 2023.

---. *Doppelganger: A Trip Into the Mirror World*. Allen Lane, 2023.

---. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*. Simon & Schuster, 2014.

Knausgaard, Karl Ove. *My Struggle: Book 2: A Man in Love*, translated by Don Bartlett. Vintage, [2009] 2019.

Kong, Belinda. 'The Asian-American Hyphen Goes Gothic: Ghosts and Doubles in Maxine Hong Kingston and lê thi diem thúy'. *Asian Gothic: Essays of Literature, Film and Anime*, edited by Andrew Hock-Soon Ng. McFarland & Company, 2008, pp. 123-39.

LaDuke, Winona, and Deborah Cowen. 'Beyond Wiindigo Infrastructure'. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 119, no. 2, 2020, pp. 243-68. doi:10.1215/00382876-8177747.

Lambert, Shannon. '"Fingeryeyed" Description: Laboratory Animals and Transspecies Empathy in VanderMeer and Yanagihara'. *SubStance*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2021, pp. 74-92.

Larkin, Brian. 'The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure'. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 42, 2013, pp. 327-43.

Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Lee, Damien [damienlee]. 'When I write, I avoid the phrase "...in what is now Canada." I use "...in what is currently Canada" to open possibilities for imagining futurities beyond the settler state'. *Twitter*, 31 Jan. 2018, https://twitter.com/damienlee/status/958698343135244288?s=20. Accessed 27 Nov. 2023.

LeMenager, Stephanie. 'The Aesthetics of Petroleum, after Oil!' *American Literary History*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2012, pp. 59-86.

---. 'Climate Change and the Struggle for Genre'. *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, edited by Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Tayler. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017, pp. 220-38.

---. *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Lerner, Ben. *10:04*. Granta Publications, 2014.

Levine, Caroline. *The Activist Humanist*. Princeton University Press, 2023.

---. *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

Lewis, Simon L., and Mark A. Maslin. 'A Transparent Framework for Defining the Anthropocene Epoch'. *The Anthropocene Review*, vol. 2, no. 2., 2015, pp. 128-46. DOI: 10.1177/2053019615588792.

Liboiron, Max. *Pollution is Colonialism*. Duke University Press, 2021.

Lloyd-Smith, Allan. *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction*. Bloomsbury, 2004.

Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Harvard University Press, 2007.

Lovecraft, H. P. *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. [1927]. Lunata Berlin, 2021.

Lynch, Tom. '"Nothing but land": Women's Narratives, Gardens, and the Settler-Colonial Imaginary in the US West and Australian Outback'. *Western American Literature*, vo. 48, no. 1, 2014, pp. 374-99.

Mackey, Allison. 'Guilty Speculations: The Affective Climate of Global Anthropocene Fictions'. *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 45, 2018, pp. 530-44.

Magnone, Sophia Booth. 'Human Contamination: The Infectious Border Crossings of Jeff VanderMeer's Area X'. *Somatosphere*, 2017, http://somatosphere.net/2017/human-contamination-the-infectious-border-crossings-of-jeff-vandermeers-area-x.html/. Accessed 14 Jun. 2021.

Maldonado-Torres, Nelson. 'On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept'. *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2007, pp. 240-70, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162548.

Malm, Andreas. *The Progress of this Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World*. Verso, 2018.

Mansfield, Nick. '"There is a spectre haunting…": ghosts, their bodies, some philosophers, a novel and the cultural politics of climate change'. *Borderlands*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2008, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A193247311/AONE?u=ed_itw&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=ef27ae66. Accessed 5 Sep. 2023.

Marx, Karl. 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte'. [1852]. *Works of Marx & Engels 1852*, translated by Saul K. Padover. Marx/Engels Internet Archive, 1999, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm. Accessed 8 Sep. 2023.

Mawhinney, Janet. '"Giving up the ghost": Disrupting the (re)production of white privilege in anti-racist pedagogy and organizational change'. Masters Thesis, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, 1998, http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/tape15/PQDD_0008/MQ33991.pdf. Accessed 17 Sep. 2023.

Mbembe, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Duke University Press, 2019.

McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian*. [1985]. Picador, 2015.

---. *The Road*. [2006]. Picador, 2010.

McHugh, Susan. 'Mourning Humans and Other Animals through Fictional Taxidermy Collections'. *Configurations*, vol. 27, 2019, pp. 239-56.

McManus, Phil. ‘Infrastructure, health and urban planning: rethinking the past and exploring future possibilities as a response to Harris & De Leeuw (2022)’. *Oxford Open Infrastructure and Health*, 2022, pp. 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1093/ooih/ouac001.

McPhee, John. ‘Angular Unconformity’. *Basin and Range*. The Noonday Press, 1980, https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/mcphee.pdf. Accessed 5 Sep. 2023.

Menely, Tobias. ‘Anthropocene Air’. *Minnesota Review*, vol. 83, 2014, pp. 93-101. DOI 10.1215/00265667-2782279.

Mishra, Vijay. ‘The Gothic Sublime.’ *A New Companion to the Gothic*, edited by David Punter. John Wiley & Sons, 2012, pp. 288-306.

Moore, Jason W., editor. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. PM Press, 2016.

Morris, Brandi S., Polymeros Chrysochou, Simon T. Karg, and Panagiotis Mitkidis. ‘Optimistic vs. pessimistic endings in climate change appeals’. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, vol. 7, no. 82, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00574-z.

Mortimer-Sandilands, Catriona. ‘Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies’. *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, edited by Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson. Indiana University Press, 2010, pp. 331-58.

Mortimer-Sandilands, Catriona, and Bruce Erickson, editors. *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*. Indiana University Press, 2010.

Morton, Timothy. *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*. Columbia University Press, 2016.

---. *The Ecological Thought*. Harvard University Press, 2012.

---. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

---. ‘Queer Ecology’. *PMLA*, vol. 125, no. 2, 2010, pp. 273-82.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York University Press, 2009.

Newson-Errey, Georgie. ‘Weird Horizons and the Mysticism of the Unhuman in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Southern Reach* Trilogy’. *The Cambridge Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2021, pp. 368-88. https://doi.org/10.1093/camqtly/bfab033.

Neyrat, Frédéric. *The Unconstructable Earth: An Ecology of Separation*, translated by Drew S. Burk. Fordham University Press, 2019.

Ng, Andrew Hock Soon, editor. ‘Introduction: The Gothic Visage of Asian Narratives’. *Asian Gothic: Essays on Literature, Film and Anime*. McFarland & Company, 2008, pp. 1-15.

Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard University Press, 2007.

Nguyen, Tan Hoang. *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*. Duke University Press, 2014.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

Palmer, Paulina. *The Queer Uncanny: New Perspectives on the Gothic*. University of Wales Press, 2012.

paperson, la. *A Third University Is Possible*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

Park, John S. W. *Elusive Citizenship: Immigration, Asian Americans, and the Paradox of Civil Rights*. New York University Press, 2004.

Parker, Elizabeth. ‘“Just a Piece of Wood”: Jan Švankmajer’s *Otesánek* and the EcoGothic’. *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, edited by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 215-25.

Parker, Elizabeth, and Michelle Poland, editors. ‘*Gothic Nature*: An Introduction’. *Gothic Nature*, vol. 1, 2019, pp. 1-20.

---. ‘We Live in EcoGothic Times: *Gothic Nature* in the Current Climate’. *Gothic Nature*, vol. 2, 2021, pp. 1-12.

Pierrot, Briggetta, and Nicole Seymour. ‘Contemporary Cli-Fi and Indigenous Futurisms’. *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2020, pp. 92-113.

Plumwood, Val. ‘Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-colonial Era’. *Decolonizing Relationships with Nature*, edited by William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan. Earthscan, 2003, pp. 51-78.

---. ‘Towards a Food-Based Approach to Death’. *Environmental Values*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2008, pp. 323-30.

Preciado, Paul B. *Can the Monster Speak?* translated by Frank Wynne. Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021.

Prendergast, Finola Anne. ‘Revising Nonhuman Ethics in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Annihilation*’. *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 58, no. 3, 2017, pp. 333-60.

Puar, Jasbir K. ‘Coda: The Cost of Getting Better: Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoints’. *GLQ*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2011, pp. 149-58. DOI 10.1215/10642684-1422179.

Rader, Dean. *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI.* University of Texas Press, 2012.

Ravenscroft, Alison. 'Dreaming of Others: *Carpentaria* and its Critics'. *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2010, pp. 194-224. https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v16i2.1700.

Rees, Jonas H., Sabine Klug, and Sebastian Bamberg. 'Guilty conscience: Motivating pro-environmental behavior by inducing negative moral emotions'. *Climatic Change* vol. 130, 2015, pp. 439-52.

Richardson, Rebecca. 'The Environmental Uncanny: Imagining the Anthropocene in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*'. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2019, pp. 1062-83.

Rifkin, Mark. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Duke University Press, 2017.

Rigby, Mair. 'Uncanny Recognition: Queer Theory's Debt to the Gothic'. *Gothic Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2009, pp. 46-57.

Robbins, Bruce. 'The Smell of Infrastructure: Notes toward an Archive'. *boundary 2*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2007, pp. 25-33. https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-2006-025.

Robinson, Cedric J. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. [1983]. The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Rodoreda, Geoff. 'Orality and Narrative Invention in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*'. *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1-13.

Rose, Deborah Bird. 'Anthropocene Noir'. *Arena Journal*, no. 41/42, 2013-2014, pp. 206-84.

---. *Dingo Makes Us Human: Life and Land in and Australian Aboriginal Culture*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

---. *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River and Wave Hill Stations*. Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991.

Rubenstein, Michael, Bruce Robbins, and Sophia Beal. 'Infrastructuralism: An Introduction'. *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2015, pp. 575-86. doi:10.1353/mfs.2015.0049.

Scambary, Benedict. *My Country, Mine Country: Indigenous People, Mining, and Developing Contestation in Remote Australia*. ANU Press, 2013.

Scott, Bede. 'Affective Entropy: Cultural Difference and the Decline of Wonder on Ivu'ivu'. *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2020, pp. 96–114.

Scranton, Roy. ‘Lessons from a genocide can prepare humanity for climate apocalypse’. *MIT Technology Review*, 24 Apr. 2019, https://www.technologyreview.com/2019/04/24/1036/lessons-from-a-genocide-can-prepare-humanity-for-climate-apocalypse/. Accessed 28 Feb. 2023.

Sederholm, Carl H. ‘The New Weird’. *Twenty-First-Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes. Edinburgh University Press, 2019, pp. 159-73.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*. Methuen, 1986.

---. *Epistemology of the Closet.* University of California Press, 2008.

---. *Tendencies*. Duke University Press, 1993.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, and Adam Frank. ‘Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins’. *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1995, pp. 496-522.

Seymour, Nicole. *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

---. ‘Down with People: Queer Tendencies and Troubling Racial Politics in Antinatalist Discourse’. *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism: Making a Difference*, edited by Greta Gaard, Simon C. Estok, and Serpil Oppermann. Taylor & Francis, 2013, pp. 203-18.

---. ‘“Good animals”: The past, present, and futures of trans ecology’. *Transecology: Transgender Perspectives on Environment and Nature*, edited by Douglas A. Vakoch. Routledge, 2020, pp. 190-204.

---. *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination*. Illinois University Press, 2017.

Shaw, Katy. *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Shiva, Vandana. ‘Bioprospecting as Sophisticated Biopiracy’. *Signs*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2007, pp. 307-13. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/508502.

Silan, Wasiq, and Mai Camilla Munkejord. ‘Hmali’, rgrgyax and Gaga: a study of Tayal elders reclaiming their Indigenous identities in Taiwan’. *AlterNative*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2022, pp. 354-63.

Simpson, Audra. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke University Press, 2014.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

Smith, Andrew, and William Hughes, editors. *Ecogothic*. Manchester University Press, 2013.

Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. *Practicing Relativism in the Anthropocene: On Science, Belief, and the Humanities*. Open Humanities Press, 2018.

Song, Min Hyoung. *Climate Lyricism*. Duke University Press, 2022.

Sperling, Alison. 'Second Skins: A Body-Ecology of Jeff VanderMeer's *The Southern Reach Trilogy*'. *Paradoxa*, no. 28, 2016, pp. 230-54.

Spice, Anne. 'Fighting Invasive Infrastructures: Indigenous Relations against Pipelines'. *Environment and Society*, vol. 9, 2018, pp. 40-56. doi:10.3167/ares.2018.090104.

Spooner, Catherine. *Post-Millennial Gothic: Comedy, Romance and the Rise of Happy Gothic.* Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

Steffen, Will, Wendy Broadgate, Lisa Deutsch, Owen Gaffney, and Cornelia Ludwig. 'The trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration'. *The Anthropocene Review* vol. 2, no. 1, 2015, pp. 81-98. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019614564785.

Stewart, Anne. *Angry Planet: Decolonial Fiction and the American Third World.* University of Minnesota Press, 2022.

Straube, Wibke. 'Posthuman ecological intimacy, waste, and the trans body in *Nånting måste gå sönder* (2014)'. *Transecology: Transgender Perspectives on Environment and Nature*, edited by Douglas A. Vakoch. Routledge, 2020, pp. 54-78.

Strombeck, Andrew. 'Inhuman writing in Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach Trilogy'. *Textual Practice*, vol. 34, no. 8, 2020, pp. 1365-82.

Stryker, Susan. 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage'. *GLQ*, vol. 1, 1994, pp. 237-54.

Stryker, Susan, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore. 'Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?' *Women Studies Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 3/4, 2008, pp. 11-22.

Syson, Ian. 'Uncertain Magic'. *Overland*, vol. 187, 2007, pp. 85-6.

TallBear, Kim. 'Beyond the Life/Not-Life Binary: A Feminist-Indigenous Reading of Cryopreservation, Interspecies Thinking, and the New Materialisms'. *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World*, edited by Joanna Radin and Emma Kowal. MIT Press, 2017, pp. 179-202.

Taylor, Jesse Oak. 'The Novel after Nature, Nature after the Novel: Richard Jefferies's Anthropocene Romance'. *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2018, pp. 108-33.

---. *The Sky of Our Manufacture: The London Fog in British Fiction from Dickens to Woolf*. University of Virginia Press, 2016.

Thacker, Eugene. *In the Dust of this Planet: The Horror of Philosophy Vol. 1*. Zero Books, 2011.

Toadvine, Ted. 'Our Monstrous Futures: Global Sustainability and Eco-Eschatology'. *Symposium*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2017, pp. 219-30.

Todd, Zoe. 'An Indigenous Feminist's Take On The Ontological Turn: "Ontology" Is Just Another Word For Colonialism'. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2016, pp. 4-22. https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1111/johs.12124.

Tongson, Karen. *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries*. New York University Press, 2011.

Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. University of Virginia Press, 2015.

Tseng, Jennifer. 'Woman Warrior for the 21st Century: An Interview with K-Ming Chang'. *The Margins*, 30 Sep. 2020, https://aaww.org/interview-with-k-ming-chang-bestiary/. Accessed 23 Apr. 2023.

Tsing, Anna L. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

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

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. 'Decolonization is not a metaphor'. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40.

---. 'R-Words: Refusing Research'. *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*, edited by Django Paris and Maisha T. Winn. SAGE Publications, 2018, pp. 223-48.

---. 'Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research'. *Qualitative Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 6, 2014, pp. 811-8.

Ty, Michelle. 'Trash and the Ends of Infrastructure'. *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2015, pp. 606-30. https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2015.0053.

VanderMeer, Jeff. *Acceptance*. Fourth Estate, 2014c.

---. *Annihilation*. Fourth Estate, 2014a.

---. 'Area X Secrets?' Blog, 10 Aug. 2015a. https://www.jeffvandermeer.com/2015/08/10/area-x-secrets/. Accessed 14 Nov. 2023.

---. *Authority*. Fourth Estate, 2014b.

---. 'From *Annihilation* to *Acceptance*: A Writer's Surreal Journey'. *The Atlantic*, 28 Jan. 2015b. https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2015/01/from-annihilation-to-acceptance-a-writers-surreal-journey/384884/. Accessed 21 May 2023.

---. 'Hauntings in the Anthropocene: An Initial Exploration'. *environmental critique*, 7 Jul. 2016. https://environmentalcritique.wordpress.com/2016/07/07/hauntings-in-the-anthropocene/. Accessed 21 May 2023.

---. 'I wanted to haunt my own novel'. *The Globe and Mail*, 12 Jul. 2014d. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/i-wanted-to-haunt-my-own-novel-jeff-vandermeer/article19567750/. Accessed 21 May 2023.

Vizenor, Gerald. *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*. University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

Voyles, Traci Brynne. *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Harvard University Press, 2018.

Watts, Vanessa. 'Indigenous place-thought & agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)'. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society,* vol. 2, no. 1, 2013, pp. 20-34.

Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. *Gothic Things: Dark Enchantment and Anthropocene Anxiety*. Fordham University Press, 2023.

Wells, Paul. *The Animated Bestiary: Animals, Cartoons, and Culture*. Rutgers University Press, 2008.

White, Laura A. 'Haunted Histories, Animate Futures: Recovering Noongar Knowledge through Kim Scott's *The Deadman Dance*'. *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* vol. 41, no. 1, 2018, pp. 63-74. https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.391.

Whyte, Kyle P. 'Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises'. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, vol. 1, no. 1-2, 2018, pp. 224-42.

Willis, Freya. 'A Reconciled Nation? *Mabo* and the Reimagining of Australia's National History'. *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2021, pp. 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2021.1974922.

Witze, Alexandra. ‘This quiet lake could mark the start of a new Anthropocene epoch’. *Nature*, 11 Jul. 2023, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-02234-z. Accessed 14 Sep. 2023.

Wolfe, Patrick. ‘Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native’. *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, pp. 387-409.

Wong, Sabrina. ‘Colonialism and Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan’. *BYU Asian Studies Journal*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2022, pp. 25-36.

Wright, Alexis. *Carpentaria*. Constable, [2006] 2008.

---. ‘Crossing the Gulf’. Interview with Michael Fitzgerald. *TIME*, 25 Sep. 2006a, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1539146,00.html. Accessed 9 Jun. 2023.

---. ‘On writing *Carpentaria*’. *HEAT* vol. 13, 2006b, pp. 1-17.

Praiseworthy. And Other Stories, 2023.

Wynter, Sylvia. ‘Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species?: Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations’. *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick. Duke University Press, 2015, pp. 9-89. https://doi-org.ezproxy.is.ed.ac.uk/10.1215/9780822375852.

---. ‘Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument’. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2003, pp. 257-337.

Yaeger, Patricia. ‘Introduction: Dreaming of Infrastructure’. *PMLA*, vol. 122, no. 1, 2007, pp. 9-26. doi:10.1632/pmla.2007.122.1.9.

Yanagihara, Hanya. ‘The New Novel to Pack for Your Next Trip (by One of Our Own)’. *Condé Nast Traveler*, 12 Aug. 2013, https://www.cntraveler.com/stories/2013-08-12/new-book-the-people-in-the-trees-hanya-yanagihara. Accessed 14 Sep. 2023.

---. *The People in the Trees*. [2013]. Picador, 2018.

Yazzie, Melanie K., and Cutcha Risling Baldy. ‘Introduction: Indigenous peoples and the politics of water’. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-18.

Yunkaporta, Tyson. *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World*. HarperCollins, 2021.

Yusoff, Kathryn. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

Zolkos, Magdalena. ‘Hanya Yanagihara’s *The People in the Trees* and Post-Colonial Trauma Criticism’. *Textual Practice*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2020, pp. 147-68. https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2018.1508062.