



THE ECOGOTHIC
AN INTERVIEW WITH ELIZABETH PARKER
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Trang Dang: You mentioned in the introduction to the *Gothic Nature* journal website that you bonded over your fascination with “the realities and representations of the ‘darker side of nature’ and particular love of the Deep Dark Woods.” Can you tell us a bit more about this

inspiration that drew you to establishing the journal, and about what you mean by the “darker side of Nature” and the “Deep Dark Woods”?

Elizabeth Parker: In terms of the origins of the journal, it all began with the first conference I ever co-organised—which was back in 2014 when I was a PhD student at Trinity College Dublin—called “Landscapes of Liminality.” Noting the themes in the proposed papers, we started to group several of them, including my own, under the heading of “Gothic Nature”: a term borrowed from Professor Tom J. Hillard. Seeing that there were a *lot* that fit this remit, I started to think to myself “this could be worth doing an entire conference on...” So, come 2017, with the support of my amazing supervisor, Dr Bernice Murphy, and a couple of other PhD students, this is exactly what we did with [Gothic Nature I](#). We were delighted to find there was significant interest and we were spoiled for choice when it came to selecting our speakers and were lucky enough to have the conference headlined by Professor William Hughes, who amongst his many accolades is of one of the editors of the seminal collection *Ecogothic* (2013). It was here, amidst the buzz of this event and witnessing the real sense of community and excitement, that my idea for the journal took form. It was here, too, that Professor Hughes introduced me to Michelle—a brilliant speaker who was working not only on Gothic Nature, but on Gothic forests. Flash forward a year or so and I found myself in the editing stages for the first issue of the new journal, in need of more hands on deck, and I then had an idea to contact the person I remembered as “the lovely forest woman.” And so I did—and the rest is history.

Michelle Poland: And I’m very grateful that you did! Working on the *Gothic Nature* journal is so enjoyable, and I am continually blown away by the quality and creativity of the articles, creative pieces, and reviews we receive. Trang, you also asked what Elizabeth and I mean when we talk about the “darker side of Nature,” which is the overarching theme of the journal. Essentially, we’re referring to the more frightening aspects of nonhuman world—both real and imagined—and human fears of or apathy towards Nature, a phenomenon coined by Simon C. Estok as “ecophobia.” Ecophobia underpins our (at least those of us living in industrial-capitalist societies) attempts to control, destroy, silence, and oppress the nonhuman world, and is arguably the unacknowledged and sinister driver of the Anthropocene, a new geological epoch caused by the impact of human activities on the planet. We’re really interested in critically engaging with these fears *of* and *for* Nature, and the way it shapes our perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and interactions with the environment. In the Western cultural imagination, there’s a rich history of Nature being variously constructed as monstrous, spectral, sublime, and uncanny—as spaces, in other words, to be feared. Of course, the way that we conceptualize Nature, and the stories that we tell about it, have a direct impact on our attitudes and treatment of it. It’s this relationship between our fears of Nature and anxieties about the Gothic-like environment we’ve unwittingly unleashed that interests us. The Gothic, which is a mode that deals in fear, provides the critical tools to engage productively with this subject.

TD: I'm glad you mentioned the idea of stories, and our fear of and relationship with nature, as that leads nicely to the second question. I'm curious about how you define the ecoGothic, and am particularly interested in whether your experience of running the *Gothic Nature* journal contributes to your knowledge of the ecoGothic.

EP: Let's start with the term ecoGothic. Because the term is really quite new, there's still a lot of discussion around its precise definitions. Something we want to flag from the outset is the fact that these definitions are evolving, our understandings are evolving—so while we have our opinions about what it is and what it is not, these viewpoints are merely a part of wider conversations. Furthermore, though the term “ecoGothic” is new, the ideas that it deals with are not. In other words, if you boil it down to its very essence—the imbrications between fear and Nature—this relationship is as old as humankind. Essentially, with the word “ecoGothic” what you have is two elements: the “eco” and the “Gothic”. In its simplest and most central sense, then, the ecoGothic is about bringing together the words “ecology” and “Gothic”—and seeing what happens when we do this. It's about looking at this juxtaposition: how does it make us feel? How does it make us think? What does it mean? It invites us to ask ourselves in what ways is Nature already in the Gothic and how does it function? And in what ways do we “Gothicise” the more-than-human worlds arounds us? The ecoGothic is all about unpacking these rich and tasty ideas.

If you're interested in a much more detailed history of the term and its evolutions to the current moment, I'll give a shameless shout-out here to the second chapter of my book, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, which provides this (and is hopefully rather more articulate than I am live!). The term's history is often said to begin with two essays: one by Simon C. Estok and one by Tom J. Hillard. Michelle already mentioned the term “ecophobia,” which is from Estok's essay, and essentially refers to our fears of nature. Estok argues for the importance of addressing—and theorizing—our fears of nature. He contends that while we have much writing on our love of Nature and the bucolic, idyllic sides of it, we desperately need greater attention to, and interrogation into, its darkness in the cultural imagination. For me, and many others, this invitation to “theorize ecophobia” was a call to arms. Similarly, Hillard in his essay talks about ecocriticism, and how it's born from nature loving, and how it is astonishing that we haven't looked as much to the darker sides of our relationships to Nature and its shadowy underbelly. Hillard, too—to my knowledge at least—was the first to coin this term “Gothic nature,” for which we are of course greatly indebted.

Andrew Smith and William Hughes, of course, brought out the important collection *ecoGothic* in 2013. In their introduction to the collection, they boldly state that the ecoGothic is not a genre, but a lens: it is a *way* of looking things, it is a mode of deconstruction. It is, as they state, about positioning the ecological “beyond the Wordsworthian tradition” (Smith and Hughes 3).

There have also been specially themed journal issues and various other publications devoted to the theme of “ecoGothic”—for instance, notable examples include David Del

Principe's guest-edited edition of *Gothic Studies* in 2014 and Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivill's *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* in 2017. One final, but important note, is to credit a scholar named Suzanne Roberts. I stumbled across her unpublished PhD thesis online, which is a brilliant and accessible read, which is an early and intriguing exploration into gendered landscapes and the ecoGothic.

In terms of defining the term "ecoGothic," something that I find useful is to contrast the terms "ecohorror" and "ecoGothic." Are they similar? Are they different? If so, how? Something you will often see is the words "ecoGothic" and "ecohorror" used interchangeably. Finding this disorienting when conducting my own research, I deliberately spent a lot of time thinking about and trying to determine and unpack the distinctions between "ecohorror" and "ecoGothic." I started by considering "horror" and "Gothic" individually. I think of horror as something that is quite immediate: to me, horror is tied to a sense of *event*, something is *happening*, something that is plot-driven and bound clearly to storyline. Whereas the word "Gothic," on the other hand, makes me instead immediately think of *setting*, of *ambiance*, of *atmosphere*. I hear "Gothic" and I see castles, convents, tunnels, hallways, various wildernesses, mountains, the sublime—all of that—and so for me that's the really key part of the ecoGothic...that *environmental* element. I think, too, the fact that Gothic encapsulates fear *and* desire like nothing else is crucial. You get that interplay a lot with the ecoGothic, where you're dealing in binaries that may twist at any moment, where something is alluring and inviting, but it's also terrifying at the same time...

Ecohorror, on the other hand, is a little bit clearer in the sense that fundamentally you have this idea of *Nature's revenge*. With ecohorror, no matter how superficially, there is a sense of raising environmental awareness. With ecohorror, you're always going to have humans at the centre in some way: humans being attacked and being *punished*. This isn't necessarily the case in the ecoGothic: certainly, sometimes there are touches of ecohorror and Nature's vengeance, but we also have many texts in which it is the *humans* (rather than the nonhuman) that are backgrounded. I'm thinking, for instance, of examples like Algernon Blackwood's story *The Willows* (1907), Peter Weir's film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), and Jessica Hausner's more recent film *Hotel* (2004). In texts like these, humans can seem almost entirely irrelevant and the "motivations" of Gothic Nature totally alien and incomprehensible to the human mind.

In a nutshell, the ecoGothic is something I call in my book a "flavored mode." I argue, in line with Smith and Hughes, that it *is* a lens, it is this *way* of looking at things, but at the same time it's important to recognize that it carries trappings of genre. For when you look at what exactly the ecoGothic often is used to look *at*, there's this commonality of themes....

MP: It also took me some time to clearly understand the distinctions between "ecoGothic" and "ecohorror." To echo Elizabeth, the most straightforward way to approach these terms is to treat ecohorror as a genre and the ecoGothic as a critical lens. Ecohorror refers to a branch of horror films defined by its various depictions and explorations of climate crisis anxieties, manifesting more often than not through Nature's vengeance on humanity. EcoGothic,

meanwhile, is most productively understood not as a genre but a critical lens through which we can examine our troubling relationships with the nonhuman world, particularly our fears *of* and *for* our earthly home. The ecoGothic provides us with the tools to explore the monstrous, sublime, spectral, and uncanny constructions of Nature—and, importantly, the significance of this. Critically engaging with ecophobia (with our fears of and apathy towards the nonhuman world) is crucial to navigating the complexities of the present ecological crisis, not least because many of our imaginings of Gothic Nature are, unnervingly, becoming a reality. You also find that science and media often adopt Gothic language to communicate the eco-social crisis, an area which is yet largely unexplored. The ecoGothic provides a timely and important critical tool to interrogate environmental anxieties and to examine both the ecology *in* Gothic and ecology *as* Gothic. The wonderful thing about the subject of Gothic Nature is that there is so much potential for interdisciplinarity, collaboration, and impact.

You asked a question about whether the journal helps us to better understand the ecoGothic. The answer is: yes, absolutely! One of the things it's helped me to notice is that there are at least four clear key areas of interest currently emerging. The first might be classed broadly as the "deep dark green," encompassing all manner of unsettling plants, trees, woods, and wilderness. The second is the "deep dark blue," including terrifying oceans to haunted shores. The third is the monstrous depictions of nonhuman animals, the body, and the horror of carnivorous and unsustainable appetites. And the fourth one is the uncanny future, wherein climate crisis is depicted as apocalyptic or dystopian. The discussions that sit in these spaces are rich and varied, but all are united in their ability to productively engage with the anxieties that arise from our realization that we co-exist, and are inextricably entangled with, the more-than-human world.

EP: I would also add, on the point of our experience running the journal, that one of the most exciting things as an editor is to see essays come in on topics that I never would have thought of or recognized as potentially being ecoGothic, but then being wonderfully convinced. For example, in *Issue II*, we had a standout essay from Kateryna Barnes, which was on Inuit death metal throat singing—and Inuit constructions of Mother Nature and how that rage comes out through music. So it's been, for me, the most exciting part of the journal, I think, celebrating different voices and broadening the discussions.

TD: I think you've given us very rich answers and ideas to think with, and it's definitely bettered my understanding of the ecoGothic because I was slightly confused about what it really means. Let's dig deeper into this mode of investigating the relationship between humans and nonhumans, particularly in the context of American literature. Could you comment on the origin of the ecoGothic in America, and perhaps, on some of the aspects of American culture and politics that brought about its emergence?

MP: Of course! As Elizabeth previously mentioned, the ecoGothic as a critical tool was coined in 2013 by Smith and Hughes in their *Ecogothic* collection so, in that sense, there isn't an origin

story of the ecoGothic in America to speak of. However, there is, of course, a rich history of wilderness in the North American imagination that's central to much current ecoGothic scholarship. Many scholars argue that early North American Gothic is entrenched in and informed by early European settlers' experiences with the New World and its "dark and howling wilderness" (Nash; Murphy; Keetley and Sivils). In *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), Roderick Frazier Nash identifies two key reasons why the early settlers feared the wilderness. The first is that wilderness poses a physical threat to their survival, from fears of attack by wild animals or Native Americans to the possibility that they might lose their sanity in an environment that they perceived to be unrestrained by civilizing rules of society. The second key reason is that, for many Christians, the wilderness had connections to moral vacancy and was believed to harbor heathens, witches, and various other disciples of the devil. Conquering the wilderness wasn't just a matter of profit or security, it was also about the civilizing light of Christianity overcoming the ungodly darkness of the woods.

Much early American Gothic invokes these early European settler and Puritan fears of the wilderness including, for instance, Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly* (1799) and Washington Irving's *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1819). Nathaniel Hawthorne's work is particularly interesting because it both builds on North America's ecophobic past (and present) whilst simultaneously challenging it. Hawthorne had a great interest in transcendentalism and was acutely aware of the heavy deforestation that was taking place in New England during the 19th century, so he was not only exposed to early-conservationist discourses but was also witness to the destructive forces of ecophobia. If you examine closely texts such as "Young Goodman Brown" (1835), "The May-Pole of Merry Mount" (1836), or *The Scarlett Letter* (1850), you'll find early examples of this tension between fears of wilderness and fears for the wilderness. This ingrained ecophobia and emerging sense of unease about the costs and consequences of anthropogenic activity is a tension that has become palpable in 21st-century America (and beyond). This, for me, is a particularly interesting springboard for ecoGothic analysis in early North American Gothic.

EP: If you want a quick two-hour or so introduction to the sheer awfulness of experience and fascinating nature of the wilderness in this early settlement period, I think immediately of Robert Eggers's film "The Witch" from 2015... (#livedeliciously!)

TD: If that is the mood and popularity of American ecoGothic literature in the past, do you think that the discussion about deforestation and ecophobia, this legacy, is still present in today's American ecoGothic literature?

EP: I think very much so, yes. The popularity of these stories and analyses is growing. We're seeing these ideas in different conversations and different avenues of popular culture as they become increasingly mainstream. There's almost a sense of "zeitgeistiness," and I think one of my favorite things about the ecoGothic is that once you start talking about what it is, wherever you are, *everyone* has something to say on it. It's not this niche, abstract idea that only a

few can connect with. I've found in social situations that it doesn't matter what people's backgrounds or interests are, everyone has thoughts, stories, and opinions on these subjects. People become animated and make me think differently...I think part of this popularity of these ideas, on a more depressing note, tied to a mass sense of collective guilt over our treatment of the environment. I think when you're talking about the mood of the ecoGothic now, I think it's grim in some ways, but I also think it's absolutely captivating—and promising—as well.

MP: What I've noticed most about contemporary North American Gothic is that it seems to have taken a step out of the deep dark woods and into the deep dark future. There's a definite contrast between, on the one hand, early North American Gothic which was preoccupied with and haunted by its ecophobic legacy, and, on the other, contemporary American Gothic which seems to express and explore explicitly our eco-anxieties and fears of living in this new human-caused but not human-controlled geological epoch. The most prominent examples of this are Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogies. There's also a novel that has just come through the post today for me, *The Cabin at the End of the World* by Paul Tremblay (shout out to Rebecca Gibson for drawing this to my attention in her article in *Issue II* of *Gothic Nature*), which I'm looking forward to getting stuck into. These texts are eerie and unnerving because the events that take place are rooted in, to varying degrees, reality and they simply ask: what if we were to continue on this destructive path that we're on now?

On a separate note, I think it's really important to stress that we're both acutely aware that the American texts typically examined within this scholarship need to be more diverse and that the ecoGothic needs decolonizing. Kateryna Barnes's essay in *Issue II* of *Gothic Nature*, called "Soundtrack to Settler-Colonialism," (which Elizabeth mentioned earlier) is a fantastic example of this. Barnes explores the music of contemporary Inuit artist and throat singer, Tanya Tagaq, and the way her music challenges dominant settler-colonial narratives about "survival against the hostilities of Nature" being key to the Canadian experience, most famously postulated in Margaret Atwood *Survival* (1972). Positioning Tagaq's music as a form of creative nonfiction horror, Barnes demonstrates how the true horror lies not in Nature itself, but in the monstrous violence of settler-colonialism on Nature and Indigenous peoples. As Editors of the *Gothic Nature* journal, our aim isn't to be gatekeepers of ecoGothic scholarship, but to facilitate and encourage diverse topics, discussions, and texts that inevitably strengthen this scholarship.

TD: In addition to American literature, do you think the ecoGothic modes are also manifested in American film? I'm thinking of the similarities and differences between American ecoGothic literature and film here.

EP: I think the very short answer is yes. How ecoGothic fears function, play out, and are structured, is in many ways very similar across literature, film, and television. But of course, your *experiences* as a reader/viewer/listener etc. are going to be different in terms of affect and how

you “read” environments—and in terms of analysis, as you consider narrative choices made by an author, as opposed to visual or aural choices made by creators of different mediums. There’s a lot, for instance, that has been written on anthropocentrism and film. When you film Nature, you often film it as landscape from an overview shot. You see this perspective again and again in horror, and partly that’s because it’s creepy, it’s vast, it’s unnerving, *but* it also puts us, as humans, in the position of that *godly* figure—looking down, able to own and see it all. There’s something interesting going on here...

I work a lot with film in my writing and what I did in my book was to take the landscape of the forest as an ecoGothic case study of sorts—so it was my way in to talk about the ecoGothic more broadly. When thinking about film and the “Gothic forest,” we can immediately recognise a cliché—this idea of being in the forest and scared is something featured in innumerable texts. Something that I have found especially interesting, when thinking about the development of film and these themes and “clichés,” is to examine the evolution of what I think of as the “forest giants” so I’m talking about “The Blair Witch Project,” “Evil Dead,” “Twin Peaks” — these massive, key texts that have really taken us into the depths of ecoGothic wilderness in America. Something that was really interesting and exciting to see over the last few years is that every single one of those forest giants got remade, revealing I think something in the current cultural and environmental moment, where people are *wanting* to go back to these texts and revisit them. There’s a lot to explore when you compare how we tell that story now to how we told that story then—perhaps especially with “Twin Peaks,” which almost cruelly denies today’s viewers that “return”...

When the ecoGothic manifests in film and television, it’s about bringing us back to that sense of bewilderment in the sense of the word’s origins—of being literally *bewildered*. These texts immerse us, they allow us to lose ourselves, from the safety of our homes. Film is an incredibly powerful medium for achieving this. Think, for instance, of something like “The Blair Witch Project”: very little happens—it’s basically a lot of shots of trees and panicked torchlights—but it’s very evocative...it’s very bewildering. It captures that sense of viewing Nature as a *maze*, as something to be *lost* in—rather than Nature as something that we own and can control.

MP: On the topic of films that might interest those working within ecohorror and the ecoGothic, I think it’s important to briefly acknowledge the recent crop of folk horror films including, for example, Robert Eggers’s *The Witch* (2016), David Bruckner’s *The Ritual* (2017), and Ari Aster’s *Midsommar* (2019). Folk horror studies is a new, exciting, and relatively uncharted territory. There’s a couple of essays in *Gothic Nature Issue II* by Dawn Keetley and Alexandra Hawk who critically engage with this new subgenre—from its unsettling ability to tell stories about devastating human impacts on the environment to how it can reveal and challenge the mutual oppression of women and Nature in patriarchal, anthropocentric systems.

TD: I have a special question for each of you, and I'm going to start with Elizabeth. In your book *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, you mentioned that because today most humans in the Western world live in towns and cities and predators that were once threatening to us are facing extinction, "there is little practical reason to be afraid of the woods" (Parker 2). Then, you go on to say that yet, "there is much evidence to suggest that we continue, indeed, to be 'terrified by the wild wood'" (Parker 2). This led you to pursue the questions of "why we evidently still fear the forest" and "what exactly it is that we fear, when we fear this environment" (Parker 2). What answers have you found in asking these pertinent questions? And what do your findings reveal about the relationship between humans and nonhumans?

EP: Thank you. Yes, in many ways, really this was my starting point for my book. When researching human fears of the woods I began by seeking literal, rational explanations. I asked, "Do many people die in the woods nowadays?" And the answer is no. When you start looking at statistics, you're much, much more endangered in a city than you are going for a walk in the woods. Yet, there is primal fear that still takes you over, even though we know that most of the predators are extinct because of us or in danger of extinction. In the years I spent looking at this, my whole apartment looked like the home of a serial killer, because I was scribbling and mapping everything, sticking it on the walls, linking it together with thread. I probably frightened a few landlords, but never mind...! The conclusion to this work is what became the governing structure for my book. I found there to be the seven *reasons* why we fear the forest, and three main *ways* that these fears manifest—which I will quickly outline.

I termed my seven reasons the "seven theses," in homage to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's seven theses in *Monster Theory* (1996). The first is that the forest is against civilization. We fear it because we define civilization in contrast to the forest. Civilization has been built "out of" and in defiance to the forest. We destroy the forest to create the agricultural, the urban, the settled... You've got this sense of porous boundaries that are always being threatened, which is of course very much at the heart of the Gothic. I think with forest foliage, this is amplified in the image of something that is always creeping, growing, and encroaching...

Secondly, the forest is tied to the past. I think something quite important about the effects of the forest environment is that when you're in it, unless you're a trained expert in reading the signs, it's very difficult to tell what era you're in—there's no obvious reason to the common woman or man why it would look particularly different now, being dropped into the woods, than it would 500 years ago. This sense of timelessness is potentially quite eerie and we worry that in *getting back* to Nature, as though it is something *behind* us, *we* may at risk to regress.

The third reason we fear the forest is because it is a space of trial. This is something you see again and again in fairy tales, and fairy tales are very much tied in with our fears of the woods. An awful lot of particularly Western fairy tales are, of course, set in the forest, and often the trial, the task at hand—as seen in horror films too—is to survive, both physically and mentally. A film that demonstrates this beautifully is Jesse Holland and Andrew Mitton's

YellowBrickRoad (2010). Here, a range of psychological, cultural, and geographical experts are taken into the woods as pinnacles of society and—spoiler alert—they do not survive their trial...

The fourth reason is that it's a space in which we are lost—this is, of course, a big one. This is something that comes to mind straight away when you think of the woods: think Hansel and Gretel, Little Brother and Little Sister... think of that primal fear of being away from family, from settlement, from all that you recognize....

The fifth reason is that the forest is a consuming space. This is tied to the idea of being lost in this sense of threat that the forest is somehow going to consume or *eat* you—that maybe if you die, you will be taken in and imbibed into the very environment. There's an awful lot in imagery, in literature and film, of *mouths* of forests and mouths in forests coming to get us all, about massive monsters...

The sixth point is that the forest is tied to the unconscious. In many psychological works, the imagery of the tree, with its main form above the ground, but the roots concealed below, is a prevalent metaphor for our conscious and unconscious elements. You've also got a section in Freud's famous essay on the uncanny, where he at one point defines the uncanny as the feeling of returning to the same point in the woods again and again. You think you're walking in a straight line, but you keep coming back and you're walking in circles in the woods—exactly as in “The Blair Witch Project” and many other texts besides...

Finally, the forest is an anti-Christian space. There's this sense or fear that the forest is a space where there's either no god or the *wrong* god or gods—or even the Devil himself. There's also a big tie between the forest and paganism, and this idea of Christian terror of human sacrifice in the darkness of these revered wild spaces and blood-drenched groves.

A key point to note is that the forest—as with many key spaces in the ecoGothic—is a *binary* space and so for each of these seven reasons to fear the woods, there are seven reasons behind its enchantment. Every time you've got an example of it being Gothic, dark, and frightening, you've also got an example of it being light, inviting, and magical. For each of those seven theses, you'll also have counter examples, where you'll have the hugely Christian forest, which is God's domain, or a wood in which you *find*, rather than lose yourself, or in which you are rewarded, rather than tried. This duplicity is something that always haunts and enriches this environment—and many other Gothic environments too.

In terms of the three *ways* in which the forest manifests *as Gothic*, these are as follows. Firstly, when the wood itself is animate. There's a line in “Evil Dead,” where after that famous scene in which one of our heroines is molested by a tree she runs to her companions and cries something to the effect of, “oh my god, the woods, the woods,” and someone says to her, “what's in the woods?” and she says, “no, there's nothing in the woods. It's the woods *themselves*.” It's really interesting to look at this idea of the woods themselves as somehow animate and filled with intent, and to explore whether it in fact *is* the woods themselves, or some other—often demonic, or human, and often female (!)—infection. The second way the forest

manifests as Gothic is as *home* to our monsters. It manifests through the dark, creepy things and creatures coming and getting us, chasing us, wanting to eat us... Then, finally, the third way the woods manifest as frightening is revealed in the idea that it's actually *humans* in the forest that make it dark, that make it Gothic. It is good, or at least a neutral space until we infect it and *make* it ominous.

In terms of what my work has revealed about human/nonhuman relationships, something that I found myself coming back to a lot was an idea from Smith and Hughes' introduction to *Ecogothic* about our fragmentation and estrangement from Nature and the emotions that come with this. We've gone from being "forest dwellers" to being "apartment-house-dwellers," as Jay Appleton (1996, 29) says, and though this is not everyone's experience, it's an idea that holds considerable traction in the popular imagination. There is that sense of loss and homesickness there, of being separate from something that maybe we shouldn't be so separate from. I was actually telling Michelle recently that I watched a documentary that some people might have heard of, called "My Octopus Teacher," recently on Netflix. It follows the story of a man who is suffering from depression, and he goes into the sea every single day, and he builds this relationship with this animal that we traditionally see as a monster, that we traditionally see as massively alien and "Other." I found myself getting really emotional watching it, and then, when I read reviews, lots of other people had felt the same—with some even deeming it "the love story that we need right now..." and I really feel that.

The last thing I want to say is that there is *hope* in the ecoGothic, in confronting and exploring these feelings of fragmentation. Fear is so important—and *promising*—because fear has the power to displace cynicism. If you're safe and at home and you're thinking a forest isn't particularly frightening, you're like, "oh, statistically it's not dangerous, it's fine," watch "The Blair Witch Project" and walk into the woods and I challenge you not to feel even a little uneasy. Fear makes us think differently about spaces, and so can make us think differently about *Nature*...so my biggest interest I think in the ecoGothic is the idea that maybe, just maybe, this is a way to reenchant nature and reconnect ourselves to nature.

TD: The next question is for Michelle. I'm interested in the intersection of the cultural debates on the Anthropocene with the ecoGothic. It seems that the language some contemporary scholars use to expound the concept of the Anthropocene invites a strong sense of horror, dread, and trauma. Timothy Clark (2015), for example, considers the Anthropocene "bewildering" and "destructive," and calls it a "crisis of scale and agency," "disorder," and "hopelessness." As a result, there is understandably a concern that this sense of overwhelmingness and despondency might cause either climate change denial or climate change paralysis, where you just don't know what to do about the ecological crisis anymore. Considering that the ecoGothic explores humans' fear and horror when encountering a dark and monstrous nature, do you think that the ecoGothic, in this context of the Anthropocene, might risk preventing us, in some way, from tackling climate change effectively?

MP: I think that's a really interesting question. Given that the ecoGothic is a mode that helps us to critically engage with our fears of and for the environment, I'd argue that the ecoGothic provides us with a unique set of tools with which to address the horrors of the Anthropocene, and therefore enhance understandings about how we can better live in this new world. Public understanding of and reaction to climate crisis is very slowly improving, I think, but to date, it can still largely be characterized by everyday denialism, inertia, inaction, overwhelm, bewilderment, and paralysis—all of which are rooted in fear. If we can better understand how to connect the knowledge and skills of the Gothic Nature community to the "real world" by helping the public to critically engage with these fears, the ecoGothic has exciting potential to meaningfully contribute to mitigating the effects of climate crisis.

You mentioned Timothy Clark; his book *Ecocriticism on the Edge* (2015) completely changed my understanding of the Anthropocene and how we experience it. I'd absolutely recommend it to anyone, particularly those working within the parameters of Gothic Nature. Clark considers how the concept of the Anthropocene confounds our sense of time, space, scale, proportion, and, most unnervingly, ourselves. The sheer unreadability and unthinkability of the Anthropocene dislodges our anthropocentric way of thinking and goes part way to explaining why everyday denialism and inertia is so alluring. Clark argues—and I agree—that it's no longer enough for ecocritics to simply identify ecological tropes in literature and he challenges them/us to take up the seemingly impossible but hugely important task of interrogating these enormous issues. The ecoGothic is particularly well-suited to taking up this challenge. It provides a lens through which to critically think through the horror, terror, bewilderment of the Anthropocene-related phenomena so that it is less horrifying, less terrifying, and less bewildering. By making issues such as climate crisis and mass extinction events more digestible, the ecoGothic might have an admittedly small but significant role to play in mobilizing the public into action. To echo Elizabeth, "there is *hope* in the ecoGothic."

TD: It's compelling to think of the Anthropocene and its impacts as catalysts for us to do something before it's too late. That leads me to the last question of the interview, which I hope to end on an optimistic note. Could you share your opinions on the future of the ecoGothic in terms of its popularity and impacts upon academia and the wider society. What direction do you think that the ecoGothic would take in the future, given the ecological and socio-political issues that we've been through for the past years and especially COVID-19?

EP: This makes me think of an essay in the first issue of *Gothic Nature* by Tom Hillard, where he compares our reactions to what's going on with climate crisis and the developments of ecocriticism to an ecohorror film. He basically asks what if we're in a film right now, what if our reactions to climate crisis are different points of the film—and if so, which point of the film are we up to? His essay is called "The Body in the Basement" because what he argues is that we're at the point in the film where we've been slowly feeling like something's a bit creepy about the cabin we're in, something's a bit wrong, and maybe we need to find out

what's going on... then someone says "there's a weird sound about in the basement". So we've gone downstairs and there's a body. We don't know, necessarily, how it's died, but we know it's dead and that we're probably next. Hillard contends that we're at the point in the movie now where we're looking at the corpse a bit dumbstruck, and maybe looking at each other, and—going back to what Michelle was saying about paralysis—this is where we are right now.

For me, this rings true. In terms of the future of the ecoGothic, I think part of what we're going to see is more and more texts, and more and more discussions, as this becomes increasingly mainstream and of interest and relevance to everyone. I do think it's going to get bigger, and I certainly don't think it's going away.

In terms of key themes moving forward, there are a couple I want to mention. You referenced COVID-19 there—and this is something that we talk about quite a lot in the introduction to *Issue II* because there's obviously huge environmental factors when you're talking about COVID-19. I think with the pandemic, it's a really interesting one because in some ways it's really specific, and in some ways it's terrifyingly vague. Of course, fascinatingly, there's something very Gothic about all the rumors of where COVID-19 came from, with the idea of somehow ingesting the *bat*, an animal that's something of an icon of the gothic mode.

Secondly, and I know Michelle's talked about it very eloquently already, I do want to emphasize this point that we really do need to decolonize the ecoGothic. This is something I really want to see happen and something that I'm throwing out into the universe is the fact that we're very interested in having some guest editors come in and do a special issue of *Gothic Nature* on decolonizing the ecoGothic in future. The diversification of both content and contributors working in these exciting fields is something we really are keen to support.

MP: I wholeheartedly agree. To return to COVID-19, I think there's an intriguing relationship between the pandemic and the ecoGothic, particularly the origins of the virus. COVID-19 emerged out of the shadowy borders of civilization and is a product of the hazardous intermingling between people, livestock, wildlife reservoirs, and zoonotic disease that characterizes the environments of illicit wildlife trades and markets—if that's not a Gothic environment of our own making, I don't know what is. The tale of COVID-19 is filled with all sorts of other ecoGothic tropes, from exposing the porosity and "trans-corporeality" of our own bodies to the horrors of excessive carnivorous consumption (bat soup, anyone?) (Alaimo).

There are a couple of things I'd like to add about the future direction of the ecoGothic. Firstly, I think the direction of travel is that it's going to be increasingly interdisciplinary. The new wave of ecocriticism is inherently interdisciplinary and is effectively engaging with research coming out of the environmental humanities and sciences. I think the ecoGothic will similarly evolve. To echo Clark, it's no longer enough to simply reiterate well-known assertions that the Gothic challenges Romantic ideals of Nature. The recent *Gothic Nature* publications and events are testament to this new direction of travel; they often add original contributions to scholarship by effectively demonstrating the value of an ecoGothic perspective to

all kinds of literary, historical, philosophical, scientific, and political discussions of the current eco-social crisis.

The second new and notable direction that I hope the ecoGothic will take—and somewhat related to this potential move towards increased interdisciplinarity and collaboration—is to consider how the research coming out of the Gothic Nature community can make meaningful difference in the world beyond academia. For example, how might we improve conservation policies for traditionally feared and “unloved” Gothic animals, such as toads, insects, and bats? (McKee). In what ways can we help to protect the dwindling “deep dark woods” that are not only essential to our ecosystem and quality of life but to our cultural history and heritage? How can we share the critical tools of the ecoGothic to help the public to engage with their engrained fears of, and explicit fears for, the environment? This, for me, is the future of ecoGothic.

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YellowBrickRoad. Directed by Jesse Holland and Andy Mitton, Points North, 2010.

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