MONSTERS, MADNESS, AND THE DEMONIC

IN HORROR FROM NINETEENTH-CENTURY FICTION

TO CONTEMPORARY FILM

By

Alyce Elizabeth Gabrielle Mary Soulodre

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Program in English Language and Literature

in conformity with the requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Queen's University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

July, 2023

This portfolio is dedicated to my parents, Jean and Mary Anne Soulodre.

Thank you for everything. I love you tremendously.

Abstract

This portfolio explores monstrous figures in horror and mystery texts spanning from the 1790s to 1980s, including literature and film, analyzing the ways that they depict monstrosity and anxieties around the Other to promote terror. I argue that this spectre of the Other demonstrates the ways that these ideas are artificially constructed and therefore unstable and open to disruption, as well as how they require careful and consistent maintenance. The texts range from short stories, novels, and feature films, and depict various monsters, demons, creatures, and ghosts, to name a few. I draw attention to many otherwise neglected texts to assert their value and importance to the cultural lexicon, analyzing them in the context of their given historical moment. I trace monstrous figures from Victorian literature to contemporary film through monstrous creatures and landscape; madness and psychological instability in relation to masculinity in late-Victorian horror and mystery fiction; and demonic or haunting figures from 1790s fiction to 1907s-80s film. I analyze dynamics such as relationships to nature, homosocial bonds, curses and cult activity, community narratives, creepy crawlies, and haunting. I explore these figures largely through cultural anxieties about the Other, and what those fears reflect about dominant ideals. By focusing on this Othering and the anxieties it invokes and perpetuates, I examine the ways that these texts depict cultural fears. Through various genres, forms, and time periods throughout these pieces, I analyze the ways that horror articulates cultural fears and anxieties. Ultimately, I argue that these monstrous figures and the anxieties they invoke reveal the actual monstrosity of dominant discourses that must allegedly be maintained at any cost.

Co-Authorship

The following pieces are co-authored as indicated:

Reid, Benjamin, Rhoads, Sean, and Soulodre, Alyce. “roar / frogs.” *Monster Club ™ Podcast*, October 2022, https://open.spotify.com/episode/6EMJHkeYaEIY5zmp0FQXzM?si=af9bdcbc37d84786.

Soulodre, Alyce and Rhoads, Sean. “‘The volcanoes and the spiders are *one*’: Insect Horror and Vengeful Nature in Syfy’s Monster-Bug Films.” From **Attack of the New B Movies: Essays on SYFY Original Films** © 2023 *Edited by* Justin Wigard *and* Mitch Ploskonka by permission of McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640. www.mcfarlandbooks.com.

Acknowledgements

I am blessed with the fortune of having a wealth of people to thank for the fruition of this project.

First and foremost, my wonderful parents, to whom this portfolio is dedicated. I would like to thank my father, Jean, for his unending and enthusiastic support of all my endeavours. Infinite thanks to my late mother, Mary Anne, who was a constant confidante and supporter of my dreams. I love you both gargantuan amounts.

I would also like to thank my extended family, especially my Grandmaman and late Grandpapa, and my late Nana, for their eager support of my weird and wild projects. Tremendous thanks to you all, for everything.

Many thanks to my partner, Mitchell Crouse, for their incredible support. In addition to editing and providing feedback on innumerable drafts, they have also encouraged me throughout this journey and been an extraordinary support throughout my various ventures. Much love, dearest.

Huge thanks to my bosom companions, David Dunsmuir, Emily Mitchell, Lauren Peddle, and Aimée Wright, for supporting me since my wee undergrad days. I wouldn't be the person I am without you all.

Thank you to my dear friends and peers: Dr. Alicia Alves, Dr. Molly Labenski, Safa Massoud, Dr. Kelly McDevitt, Dr. Jord Mendicino, Emma Plaskett, Benjamin Reid, and Dr. Sean Rhoads. I wouldn't have made it through this journey without your support.

I owe many thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Brooke Cameron, my second reader, Dr. Glenn Wilmott, and to Dr. Maggie Berg, for their belief in and support of my project. Brooke, thank you for your unending understanding and support of my work, both academic and otherwise. Glenn, thank you for your mentorship and support throughout my many projects and pursuits. Maggie, thank you for your confidence in my ideas and for spurring me on to this project in the first place.

Thanks to my many supporters at Brock University, who believed in me and my work even in its early days: Dr. James Allard, Dr. Lynn Arner, Dr. Tim Conley, Dr. Margot Francis, Dr. Neta Gordon, and Dr. Barbara Seeber. Your encouragement and mentorship led me to pursue this path and I am indebted to your support.

Finally, I must thank my beautiful animal companions who have provided immense emotional support throughout this journey. My wonderful cats, Petey, Saoirse, and the late, great, Tommy. My delightful rats, many of whom have unfortunately passed over the course of my journey: Pinky, The Brain, Lord Byron, Timon, Altivo, Roquefort, Gizmo, Spud, and Tater Tot. Lastly, and the newest arrival, my sweet hedgehog, Petunia.

This project is the culmination of years of work, and continuous love and support from this community. Thank you all.

Table of Contents

Dedication ii

Abstract iii

Co-Authorship iv

Acknowledgements v

Table of Contents vii

Introduction 1

Literature Review 2

Part I – Orientalism and the Other 2

Part II – The Animal and Monstrous Other 5

Portfolio Overview 15

Section 1: Monstrous Nature in Fiction and Film 16

Section 2: Madness and Masculinity: Bugs, Entomologists, Haunting 19

Section 3: The Demonic and Identity in Horror Fiction and Film 22

Conclusion 26

Works Cited 27

Section 1: Monstrous Nature in Film and Fiction 30

Chapter 1: "A land of swamps and evil things and dead old shadows": Menacing Mires and Victorian Masculinity in H. Rider Haggard's *She* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* 31

Works Cited 43

Chapter 2: "The volcanoes and the spiders are *one*": Insect Horror and Vengeful Nature in Syfy's Monster-Bug Films 44

Don’t Let the (Big) Bugs Bite....48

Weird Science....55

Victorian Insects and “Other” Bugs....60

People Go Buggy....67

Works Cited and Consulted....74

Chapter 3: Monster Club ™ Podcast Episode 15, Roar / Frogs....78

Introduction....78

Transcript....85

Epilogue....134

Works Cited....137

Section 2: Madness and Masculinity: Bugs, Entomologists, Haunting....138

Chapter 4: “These Creatures Strike Unutterable Terror into Many Minds”: Creepy Crawlies, Masculinity, and Psychological Horror in Late-Victorian Fiction....139

I. Introduction....139

II. Theoretical Framework....141

III. Victorian Natural History....145

IV. Literary Analysis....152

i. Eccentric Entomologists....153

ii. Empire Fiction....154

iii. Parasitic Control....157

iv. Haunting and Psychological Horror....162

V. Conclusion....166

Works Cited....168

Chapter 5: “No one but an entomologist would understand quite what he felt”: Eccentric Entomologists and Insect-Collecting Kinships in Arthur Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells’ Mystery Fiction....170

“The Beetle-Hunter”....173

“The Moth”....176

The Hound of the Baskervilles....182

Works Cited....189

Chapter 6: “She has me, body, soul, and spirit; and she thinks it such a jest!”: Laughter, Haunting, and Madness in Richard Marsh’s *The Goddess: A Demon*....190

Works CIted....202

Section 3: The Demonic and Identity in Horror Fiction and Film....203

Chapter 7: “Fool that you were to confide yourself to a Devil!”: Magic, Demons, and Vice in Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *The Monk*....204

Works Cited....215

Chapter 8: The Unraveling Mind: Satanic Screen Cults and Psychological Instability in 1970s American B-Movies....216

The Satanic Panic: “Save the Children”....218

Cultural Background of Pre- and Early-1970s Anxieties....220

Tropes and Trappings of the Satanic Screen....223

Post-*Rosemary’s Baby* and Pre-*Exorcist* Films and the Cult of the Children....226

Two Post-*Exorcist* Films and Satanic Cult Revenge....230

Approaching the Advent of the 1980s Satanic Panic....236

Works Cited....238

Chapter 9: “We’re Honouring Murderers”: The Small Town and Narratives of Belonging in John Carpenter’s *The Fog* (1980).....240

Works Cited.....250

Conclusion 251

Reflections on the Process 256

Introduction

Centering around monstrosity and how it effects horror by drawing on cultural anxieties, this portfolio is made up of various pieces that are connected in discussing the Other and its prevalence in literature and film. The pieces include partial thesis chapters, conference papers, chapters in edited collections, as well as a podcast episode. Some were adapted for this portfolio, and some are presented as they were written. In Section One, "Monstrous Nature in Fiction and Film," I focus on the ways that nature is portrayed as monstrous (through creatures or through landscape), and how this depiction creates horror. This section progresses from swamps in late-Victorian literature, through bugs in contemporary film, to creature swarms in B-movies. Section Two, "Madness and Masculinity: Bugs, Entomologists, and Haunting" narrows in on madness and psychological instability. I explore anxieties around the stability of masculinity through various examples of late-Victorian horror and mystery fiction through figures including bugs, entomologists, and automatons. The latter transitions into Section Three, "The Demonic and Identity in Horror Fiction and Film," where I trace demonic and ghostly figures from 1790s fiction to films of the 1970s and 1980s. These pieces explore the ways that these figures uncertainty around personal identity and agency, and the sense of a community identity. Overall, this project is concerned with the ways that cultural anxieties are articulated through horror texts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I often focus on often-neglected creatures (such as bugs), or texts (such as B-movies), to draw more scholarly attention to them as well as to articulate how pervasive these fears and anxieties are, in that they can creep up in unexpected places or figures. I take a historical criticism approach by analyzing the cultural and historical context in

which these texts occur and proliferate, focusing on monstrosity and how it invokes anxieties to perpetuate terror.

Literature Review

Part I – Orientalism and the Other

I will begin by providing a brief overview of some touchstone scholarship in postcolonial studies about the concept of the Other (particularly as it pertains to literature), because this concept is foundational to the lens with which I approach the various texts I analyze throughout the portfolio. While I do not explicitly draw attention to Orientalism throughout the portfolio, this theory provides the context with which I frame my analysis. As much of my analysis is foregrounded in nineteenth century texts, or draws on these discourses in discussions of more contemporary works, I will begin by contextualizing Victorian cultural fears of and desires to dominate their fellow humans and other species, as understood through Orientalism. Otherness, as articulated through Orientalist theory, foregrounds my analysis throughout this portfolio.

In his seminal text *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said outlines the scope and permutations of Orientalism. Orientalism is characterized by Othering, or an "us" versus "them" framework, and as Said suggests, it is both pervasive today and traceable to nineteenth-century fiction ("Orientalism" 44). This approach is key to my analysis in many of the pieces that follow. Said notes the division of people (he writes "men") into "'us' (Westerners) and 'they' (Orientals)" ("Orientalism" 45) that gives an ideology "of Western power over the Orient … the status of scientific truth" ("Orientalism" 46). In addition to various scientific discoveries, Said notes the prevalence of Orientalism in

nineteenth-century fiction and nonfiction, describing its prevalence as "a virtual epidemic of Orientalia" ("Orientalism" 51). Said notes a "motif of the Orient as insinuating danger" by undermining rationality through its excesses, and "mysteriously attractive opposites to what seem to be normal values" ("Orientalism" 57). This sense of danger and threat is something I focus on primarily not only in strict terms of Orientalism, but in the general sense of an Other, a "them," that translates to various beings, such as monsters or bugs (or monstrous bugs).[1] Moreover, as Said hints at here, this sense of threat also encompasses a desire for the Other. "The Orient," therefore, is demonized "for lying outside the boundaries of European society, 'our' world" making it "*Orientalized*" ("Orientalism" 67), thus it becomes Othered and perceived as threatening, a theme that will become very apparent in much of the literature this project analyzes. Culture and its products, including literature, produce and reinforce these ideas about a threatening, yet alluring Other. Thus, these imperialist discourses are maintained through cultural, especially media, which establishes and informs concepts of an Other.

For Homi K. Bhabha, boundaries between the self and the Other are much more fluid, and I argue that this proximity is in many ways what is dangerous about the Other: that it is in fact, not so dissimilar to "us," or that "we" may not be able to effectively distance ourselves from it. Rather than impose a distinction between the self and Other, Bhabha argues that "the 'other' is never outside or beyond us," but instead "it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" ("Nation" 4). For Bhabha, "'otherness' … is at once

[1] This differentiation is made overtly literal in the title of *Them!* (1954), a creature feature about monstrous ants that I will return to in more detail in Chapter 2, "'The volcanoes and the spiders are *one*': Insect Horror and Vengeful Nature in Syfy's Monster-Bug Films"

an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity" and that "space of otherness … enables a transgression" of "the boundaries of colonial discourse" ("Other" 96). Bhabha critiques Said for "inadequate attention to representation as a concept that articulates the historical and fantasy (as the scene of desire) in the production of the 'political' effects of discourse" ("Other" 103). This sense of desire will come through in many pieces, especially relating to monster studies literature and in Chapter 8, "The Unraveling Mind: Satanic Screen Cults and Psychological Instability in 1970s American B-Movies," where there is a fascination with and allure in the Other that draws characters in to the occult, often despite themselves.

The concept of degeneration, or the anxiety about individually (and culturally) reverting back to an earlier, more primitive and troubling self comes up in this literature as well. For Bhabha, colonialist discourse "is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences" ("Other" 100) that aims to "construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" ("Other" 101). This definition calls up nineteenth-century concerns about degeneration, popularized in Britain by Max Nordau in the 1890s. Bhabha suggests that "what is denied the colonial subject, *both as colonizer and colonized* [emphasis mine], is that form of negation which gives access to the recognition of difference," and this "possibility of difference … would liberate the signifier of *skin/culture* from the fixations of racial typology, the analytics of blood, ideologies of racial and cultural dominance or degeneration" ("Other" 108). These discourses and ideologies were well entrenched and also reified in the nineteenth-century, in particular with Britain's immense imperialist

expansion. This stereotypical view is of course itself impossible, both for colonizer and colonized. Bhabha writes that the stereotype is "an 'impossible' object" that combines "'the official knowledges' of colonialism – pseudo-scientific, typological, legal – administrative, eugenicist…with the fantasy that dramatizes the impossible desire for a pure, undifferentiated origin" ("Other" 116). Here, desire is for an idealized, yet impossible object, which thus functions as a way to justify negation of the Other.

These ideologies also indicate something about the dominant culture and its fears: as much as they purport to dictate or define "them," they are telling in what they reveal about "us." For Bhabha, "the stereotype is at once a substitute and a shadow": because it accedes "to the wildest fantasies (in the popular sense) of the colonizer, the stereotyped Other reveals something of the 'fantasy' (as desire, defence) of that position of mastery" ("Other" 117). This discourse reveals the dominant culture's own desire, and implicitly articulates its many insecurities. This brief outline of these perspectives on the Other, in an Orientalist sense, provides a foundation with which to analyze Otherness, a key concept for my arguments in all of the following pieces.

Part II – The Animal and Monstrous Other

I will turn now towards the ways that discourses of the Other have been articulated in scholarship around animals and monsters to demonstrate how I will be framing my analysis throughout this project. Much animal studies scholarship explores the ways that animals are Othered in an anthropocentric world, and much of this scholarship focuses on Victorian literature and culture. However, there is an absence of bugs in this scholarship, where I will intervene by exploring the ways that bugs are especially Othered and depicted as even more alien than animals that appear more closely

related to humans. Moreover, these depictions can be quite monstrous, and I will draw on monster studies to further explore the ways that the Other, especially in horror texts, is portrayed as monstrous.

The Animal Other

I will begin with scholarship on the Victorian animal Other, which is where this project began as I initially intended to address the bug-shaped gap in this scholarship, where the insect is the Other of Othered animals. Ivan Kreilkamp critiques the "fundamental anthropocentrism of our understanding of the British Victorian novel" as well as suggesting that anthropocentrism is somewhat integral to the realist novel (1). He argues that considering animals would open us to "other forms of relation, models of personhood, and distinctions" and that "animals proliferate and matter in Victorian fiction in interesting and surprising ways" (Kreilkamp 1). He suggests that reading in this way would also open up possibilities about the ways that both animals and humans are "defined and conceptualized in fiction" (Kreilkamp 1). For Kreilkamp, "in the Victorian period, the three major normative categories of the human, the home, and the novel are all conceptualized in relation to an animal existence that is at once marginal or excluded but symbolically central and always a shaping influence" (1-2). He suggests that "the genre of the realist novel became a key institution of both humanization and animalization" as it "participates in a process of dividing up the world into humans (individuals capable, ideally or supposedly, of becoming protagonists or full-fledged characters) and nonhumans (things and animals that fall below the threshold of the

characterological" (Kreilkamp 2).[2] This division raises the question of who allegedly counts as a subject, amongst and within various species. The human-animal divide becomes a prominent question, as Kreilkamp suggests that even early novels "obsessively returned to the question of human-animal distinction and did so in a thoroughly anthropocentric manner" that most often minoritized animality (3). He notes that Darwin's arguments often suggested "the unsettling potential that the nonhuman might in fact be barely distinguishable from the human" through showing similarities in behavior or in common heritage (Kreilkamp 7). This commonality with the animal was a source of great anxiety in Victorian culture, which was very concerned about maintaining a hierarchy of superiority in humans and in their relation to animals.

While animality can be ambiguous, bugs are in general especially Othered. Kreilkamp notes the ambiguity of the nonhuman animal positioned between civilization "and yet disavowed … allowed within our homes but still not a human … also always minor and marginal, never (within realism) attaining full protagonicity" (15). He writes that nearly "any animal – although certainly some kinds of animals more than others – may potentially be labelled and treated as a friend, as a part of the world and the texts of the human; but any animal may also be turned out, expelled or killed, and redefined as purely animal and fully exterior to the human and its categories" (Kreilkamp 15-16). Here, he focuses on domesticated animals in realist novels, but this argument applies as

[2] In contrast, he indicates that children's and fantasy literature "can be read as a generic space in which a latent desire, within the realist novel, for nonhuman [what Fredric Jameson calls] protagonicity can be freely indulged" (Kreilkamp 3). Brenda Ayres likewise notes that children's literature (including "animal biographies, animal nursery rhymes, animal fables, animal fairy tales, and animals stories") was distinct in its treatment of animals, as they "indoctrinated children with morality, and they were often imbued with political persuasions that spoke to adults as well" (11-12).

well to the broadly negated and ultimately "thing"-like bug. Kreilkamp notes that domestication allows some animals "'in' to human culture" (such as the home), and some protections, while others "are consigned to a purely wild and inhuman status (and thus deemed killable with virtually no limitation)" (16). However, regardless of their category here, the animal "is always creaturely in its ambiguous status in relation to the categories and spaces of the human" (Kreilkamp 16). As I will suggest in several pieces, the home or individual identity can be extended more broadly to the national home, and national identity, suggesting that some animals and humans are welcomed in, while others are attempted to be kept out.

Kreilkamp's valuable analysis can in many ways apply as well to bugs, and I will explore these ideas more thoroughly in various pieces. For Kreilkamp, nineteenth-century fiction reveals a "new category of beings … nonhuman animals who begin to shift further away from 'thing' status towards personhood and the possibility of becoming a subject of novelistic, sympathetic 'fellow feeling'" (22). This suggestion of companionship is nearly always not the case for bugs, who are especially "thing"-like and alien. Moreover, the Victorian novel reinforces the idea that "to count as a sympathetic human character … one must love animals or be capable of loving them – but to love animals *too much* or to love the wrong kind of animals opens one to accusations of eccentricity or pathology" (Kreilkamp 23). This idea of being too interested in an animal will become especially apparent in the strange entomologists discussed in Chapter 5, "'No one but an entomologist would understand quite what he felt': Eccentric Entomologists and Insect-Collecting Kinships in Arthur Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells' Mystery Fiction." Kreilkamp points to "a larger question of individuation: what degree can an animal count or be

recognized as an individual as opposed to an element in a mass of some kind (a herd, a pack, a swarm, etc.)?" suggesting that naming is a powerful tool to this end (23). Bugs are certainly not generally named, and as the notorious biblical plague of locusts suggests, are often depicted as threatening swarms. I will explore swarms in more detail in Chapter 2 on monstrous bugs in Syfy films, and in Chapter 3 on B-movie creature features. On this topic, Kreilkamp suggests that the novel upholds "the state's oversight and regulation of 'life' and the living," where "organic life is conceptually shaped and categorized – into different categories of being and different hierarchies of value – according to biopolitical structures and procedures" (Kreilkamp 24). These discourses and the ways they manifest in various texts will certainly be pervasive in my analysis of monstrosity throughout this project.

These anxieties implicitly reveal Victorian fears about themselves and their connection to an animal Other, which threatens their cultural sense of a hierarchy of beings. As Kreilkamp notes, "the animal within the human can never be finally or permanently excluded … the human person or the human literary form must preserve an (always subordinated and marginal) animality" (Kreilkamp 25), a major source of fear during the Victorian period. According to Brenda Ayres, the prevailing Victorian mindset was that they were near the top of the chain of being, and that "not only did they accept that humans were superior to all other species and thereby had the right to make animals serve them, they – who thought about such things – accepted an obligation to dominate the animal within themselves and others" (11). Ayres contends that "the Victorians were immersed in an animal culture," and that "they conscientiously, hegemonically determined to rule those beneath them and the animal within themselves with varying

degrees of success and failure" (12). Ayres notes that the Victorian fascination with "'uncivilized' peoples and exotic animals" suggests that "by learning about them, the Victorians were reassured that self-control and the British proper ways of doing things were eminently the irreproachable paragon for the modern age" (2-3).[3] Victorian literature invokes and often perpetuates their anxious discourses about maintaining their own alleged superiority in a hierarchy of being, over many various other (and Othered) beings. Ayres notes that nationalism "formed the basis of most activity and attitudes toward animals (and other humans perceived as animals) that prevailed in the nineteenth century," suggesting that so-called "civilized people … were intentional about taming the beasts around them and inside themselves and inside their fellow humans" (8), suggesting a connection between the stability of the individual body (internally and externally), and that of the national body. Meanwhile, in terms of monstrosity and racialized others, Jeffrey Weinstock notes the prevalence of cabinets of curiosities and exhibitions from the sixteenth century onward, that "influenced and inflected public opinion in ways that facilitated imperialist programs and colonialist endeavors" (17).[4] He further notes that in "science fiction, fantasy, and horror" especially, "depictions of monstrous races … has often mapped unsubtly onto real-world terrestrial groups" (Weinstock 17). This mapping is often the case in many horror pieces that portray discourses of imperialism, often through monstrous figures, as we will see throughout this project.

---

[3] See Ritvo: Ayres cites Harriet Ritvo on "the maintenance and study of captive wild animals," who suggests that this practice established "'simultaneous emblems of human mastery over the natural world and of English dominion over remote territories'" [205, 1987] (3).

[4] See Ritvo: Kreilkamp cites Harriet Ritvo [*Platypus* 148] noting that "within nineteenth-century biology and natural history, '[m]onsters were tautologically defined as deviations from established norms,' but, in practice, '[m]onstrosity had to be determined … according to a sliding scale of deviation'" (8).

An example of analyzing these depictions of the animal Other in relation to Victorian cultural anxieties is Maggie Berg's key article on Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* (1847). Beginning with Carol Adams' assertion in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* that "'women and animals are similarly positioned in a patriarchal world, as objects rather than subjects,'" (in Berg 177), Berg argues that in *Agnes Grey*, "the heroine's suffering is contextualized and analyzed as the effect of a patriarchal and class stratified society in which those 'bodies that matter' [according to Judith Butler's sense of the phrase] …depend for their existence upon those that do not, including women and animals" (178). While Agnes Grey is marginalized through her position as governess, Berg asserts that the novel "takes this further by revealing, through Agnes Grey's proximity to animals, that the governess's very humanity is in question in a society which grants viable subject status only to those occupying the upper rungs of the ladder" (Berg 178). In Victorian social hierarchy, "'animal,' synonymous with 'natural' and 'biological,' was a category employed by those at the top of the ladder to justify the exploitation of those at the bottom" (Berg 178). By depicting "the abuse of human and non-human beings," according to Berg, *Agnes Grey* reveals "that 'speciesism' – the assumption that other animals are inferior to humans and do not warrant equal consideration and respect – is inextricably linked to classism and sexism" (178). Thus, these animal depictions also reflect and often reify discourses about marginalized groups and humans as well, raising the question of who allegedly counts as a subject. For Berg, *Agnes Grey*'s depiction of animals critiques and "denaturalize[s] the 'natural' hierarchy, by demonstrating that the supposed inferiority of certain human and animal beings serves the social end of identifying and producing those 'bodies that matter'" (178). *Agnes Grey* reveals that "in

Victorian society the 'bodies that matter' most are those of white middle-class men, whose coherent identities depend upon cruelties exerted on those beneath them," and thus "draws attention to the socially constructed nature of the Victorian chain of beings" (Berg 194). Here, identity is revealed as a construction that must be actively maintained, suggesting that it is in fact unstable and can be disrupted without this careful maintenance (which can occur through literature as well). This sense of identity also depends on subjugation to be fortified in itself. I will expand on this argument and show how it is upheld through horror and mystery fiction, in the Victorian period and beyond.

The Monstrous Other

I have drawn attention to this scholarship around Victorian animals as a jumping off point to discussing these discourses of the Other and will now turn to how they show up in depictions of monstrosity. These depictions are often intertwined, especially in the case of monstrous animals or nature, as I will explore in several pieces in this portfolio. Although this animal studies scholarship focuses on the nineteenth century, these discourses and depictions have permeated broader culture and can be applied to contemporary texts as well, as I will suggest throughout this project. Weinstock defines the monster as "the thing that, from a particular perspective in a given context, shouldn't be, but is," and something that "threatens understandings of the world, the self, and the relations between the two – and these are understandings that vary depending upon time and place" (3). Thus, the monster is perhaps inherently Othered. According to Weinstock, this threat explains "the anxiety that monsters provoke above and beyond any physical threat they present and the hyperbolic response that that which is considered monstrous provokes" (3). The monster's threatening ambiguity "compels two types of responses: to

understand it and find a category to contain it – that is, so assimilate it into an existing or altered epistemological framework – or to stamp it out of existence" (Weinstock 3). Weinstock notes that monstrosity "is frequently correlated with hybridity perceived to be unnatural" and this liminality frequently prompts a violent response (Weinstock 9). As such, the threat of the monster is not necessarily in and of itself, but of what it implies about power structures and dominant discourses, that they could be disrupted. This violent response is to that destabilizing threat, and the anxieties it provokes.

This threatening perception of the Other varies somewhat depending on the manifestation of the monster. Weinstock notes Noël Carroll's definition of monsters as "entities that represent a threat on some level and evoke disgust as a consequence of 'impurity' connected to categorical ambiguity" which may be the result of "fusion," the combination of something "unnatural," (such as Frankenstein's monster), or as Weinstock adds, "fission," which breaks something that was unified (such as werewolves) (19). Weinstock also adds "impurity through magnification," taking a seemingly incongruous animal and making it enormous makes it a monster (19). This threat of magnification will be explored more thoroughly on big bugs in B-movies in Chapter 2, "'The volcanoes and the spiders are *one*': Insect Horror and Vengeful Nature in Syfy's Monster-Bug Films," as well as in Chapter 4, "'These Creatures Strike Unutterable Terror into Many Minds': Creepy Crawlies, Masculinity, and Psychological Horror in Late-Victorian Fiction." Several pieces will also explore the unsettling ambiguity of monstrous figures, such as Rosario/Matilda in M.G. Lewis' *The Monk* (Chapter 7) and the ghosts in John Carpenter's *The Fog* (1980) (Chapter 9). Monsters, being "neither this nor that – or both this and that … frustrate our epistemological strategies for making sense of the world" (Weinstock

19). Here, the destabilizing possibilities that monsters pose constitute a threat to an established (and constructed, therefore disruptable) world order.

However, in addition to fear, the monster effects both disgust and desire. Weinstock argues that the monster "does not just repulse; it simultaneously attracts" as it is "powerful and linked to forbidden desires and practices" (19). Likewise, Jeffrey Cohen argues that "the monster awakens one to the pleasures of the body, to the simple and fleeting joys of being frightened, or frightening – to the experience of mortality and corporality" (17). "This corporal fluidity, this simultaneity of anxiety and desire," for Cohen, "ensures that the monster will always dangerously entice" (19). As Bhabha articulates, this attraction is also the case for the Other, which is often monstrous yet alluring. Weinstock adds that in this way, monsters "may be considered a kind of language, a way to give symbolic shape to and communicate affect and experience": "the body of the monster is a text expressing human fear and desire" (20). Moreover, we are fascinated by the concept that there is more than simple life and death, or what we can perceive in our bodies: monsters "insists that there is more to our world than what we can see and touch" so that "the monster threatens, but also promises liberation – a liberation that itself can seem threatening" (Weinstock 20). In its threat to the stability of various hierarchies and strategies, the monster is dangerous but also offers appealing freedom. This promise is especially apparent pieces on the demonic, such as Rosario/Matilda (Chapter 7); the hauntingly alluring automaton in Chapter 6, "'She has me, body, soul, and spirit; and she thinks it such a jest!': Laughter, Haunting, and Madness in Richard Marsh's *The Goddess: A Demon*"; and the satanic cults discussed in Chapter 8, "The Unraveling Mind: Satanic Screen Cults and Psychological Instability in 1970s American

B-Movies." Whether fascination, disgust, or fear (or an unsettling combination of emotions), the monster often prompts strong affective responses, which are linked to broader cultural anxieties.

Contemporary monster theory underpins much of the discussion of monstrosity throughout this project. Contemporary monster theory generally takes the perspective "that monstrosity is a socially constructed category reflecting culturally specific anxieties and desires, and often deployed – wittingly or not – to achieve particular sociopolitical objectives" (Weinstock 25). Thus, contemporary monster theory is concerned with the ways in which "subjects are 'monsterized' and the implications of this process" (Weinstock 25). This theory analyses "images of and narratives involving monsters (human and nonhuman) to tease out what such images and narratives say about their creators and their cultures" (Weinstock 26). The pieces in this portfolio often center around cultural anxieties as they are portrayed through monsters and monstrosity, analyzing who or what becomes "monsterized" and what that indicates about the fears of those enacting the monsterization, indicating what they fear about the Other and subsequently, about themselves.

Portfolio Overview

Ultimately, this portfolio is an expression of the kind of fandom or community that is inherent to the genre. As Cohen and Weinstock explain, horror is a collective experience, with its conventions and tropes becoming almost a kind of cultural ritual. Telling and retelling stories about monsters binds us together in intermingled fear, desire, and joy. The chapters that follow are themselves expressions of that kind of joy in the genre, perhaps especially Chapter 3 centering on the *Monster Club* ™ podcast, which

exemplifies the happiness that we find in our horror fandom communities. While they are most overtly connected through their generic conventions, the pieces in this portfolio are also illustrative of a sense of joy in shared fandom community.

Section 1: Monstrous Nature in Fiction and Film

The first section takes up natural phenomena as horrific and monstrous through three pieces. Overall, this section explores the ways that nature is portrayed as monstrous through both horrific landscapes and animals. In addition to analyzing nature as horror, this section is also concerned with the ways that horror examines or upholds discourses around race, gender, and class. The first piece focuses on landscapes, specifically swamps, in Victorian literature: "'A land of swamps and evil things and dead old shadows': Menacing Mires and Victorian Masculinity in H. Rider Haggard's *She* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*." This piece traces the correlation between swamps and their characterization in literature as primitive and horrific, with the struggles of white Englishmen and their need to prove their masculinity to uphold a national masculinity. The following piece is concerned with both natural landscape and monstrous bugs: "'The volcanoes and the spiders are *one*': Insect Horror and Vengeful Nature in Syfy's Monster-Bug Films." Here, with my co-author Sean Rhoads, I draw connections between nineteenth-century discourses around bugs and those in contemporary B-movies, and explore the horror of nature as a vengeful force. The final piece takes up 1970s and 1980s B-movie creature features through a podcast episode as an example of public-facing scholarship. With co-hosts Benjamin Reid and Sean Rhoads, the episode "roar / frogs" of our *Monster Club* ™ *Podcast* explores *Roar* (1982) and *Frogs* (1972) as examples of swarming creature features where nature is threatening, and

in some cases, vengeful. The conclusions of these films reify dominant family structures, although they differ in the ways that the creatures constitute as monstrous (or not). These pieces complement each other in the ways that they take up nature as horror and the correlations between terrifying natural phenomena and anxieties about race, gender, and class dating from the nineteenth century to the 1980s.

Originally presented as a conference paper, my piece, "'A land of swamps and evil things and dead old shadows': Menacing Mires and Victorian Masculinity in H. Rider Haggard's *She* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*", explores the ways that landscape is portrayed as horrific. By analyzing the discourses around swamps, I explore the ways that ideas around the landscape shape and are shaped by ideas around race and gender. Characterized as a primitive space, the swamp reflects Victorian anxieties around degeneracy and atavism. White, English, male heroes are faced with the threat of these swamps and must prove their masculinity and racial integrity by rising to the challenge that the environment presents. In *She,* the male band of heroes must navigate dangerous swamps in the ambiguous African wilderness in order to find their way through and conquer the landscape. Meanwhile, *Hound of the Baskervilles* presents a dangerously un-navigable mire in England that acts as a puzzle that must be solved by the white male heroes, led by Sherlock Holmes. In this way, these texts reinforce visions of a stable, white, Victorian masculinity that is able to conquer the disruptive and monstrous lands it encounters.

In "'The volcanoes and the spiders are *one*': Insect Horror and Vengeful Nature in Syfy's Monster-Bug Films," my co-author Sean Rhoads and I explore the trend of monstrous bugs in Syfy channel original films, drawing connections between these

depictions and discourses around bugs as horrific dating from the nineteenth century. We analyze various offerings from Syfy's oeuvre, including the infamous *Lavalantula* (2015) (from which we acquired the article's epigraph), *Black Swarm* (2007), and *Ice Spiders* (2007) as reimaginings of a genre of "big bug" films that arose in the 1950s, as well as through an ecocritical lens of nature as enacting revenge against humans who are harmful towards it under contemporary capitalism. Drawing on Victorian discourses around bugs as Other, we examine how these films reflect and uphold anxieties around race, class, and gender with their roots in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, we suggest a similarity around these discourses although they are separated by a century, and even though they are manifested in differing ways. Tracing the connections between these texts over time reveals the ways that these anxieties have morphed and evolved, although they remain pervasively present.

The next piece is an example of public-facing scholarship, as it consists of a transcript of a podcast episode, "roar / frogs," from the *Monster Club* ™ *Podcast* (co-hosted with myself, Benjamin Reid, and Sean Rhoads), with additional framing material. We discuss *Roar* (1982) and *Frogs* (1972) as examples of the monstrous animal genre, where swarms of big cats and assorted creepy crawlies, respectively, threaten the characters and their sense of an ordered world. In *Frogs* particularly, nature is characterized as vengeful as the eponymous amphibians, as well as a host of reptiles and bugs, terrorize a wealthy white family at their plantation for a holiday celebration. Meanwhile, *Roar* characterizes its horde of big cats as unpredictable and, eventually, cohabitable, with its human characters learning to accept the cats despite the dangers they present. Despite these differences, both films articulate anxieties about a sense of control

over nature, with *Roar* suggesting that it is possible, through the human characters' hubris, while *Frogs* argues that nature is both more monstrous and more powerful. These pieces explore the ways that different forms of monstrous nature can effect horror, and how the human characters respond to these threats and the anxieties they invoke.

Section 2: Madness and Masculinity: Bugs, Entomologists, Haunting

This section focuses on anxieties around madness and masculinity, specifically for the need for men to avoid madness, hysteria, or psychological instability, even when confronted with monstrous creatures such as horrifying bugs or haunting figures. I examine the ways that these anxieties manifest in late-Victorian fiction, during which time fears around degeneration and the stability of a white national male body were rampant. The first piece, "'These Creatures Strike Unutterable Terror into Many Minds': Creepy Crawlies, Masculinity, and Psychological Horror in Late-Victorian Fiction" charts some of the discourses around bugs and entomologists from earlier in the period, to culminate around fiction from the latter part of the century that deals with terrifying bugs and psychologically unstable entomologists. Ultimately, I argue that these figures establish the real horror of the text, the idea that even masculine psychology may not be stable and that various creatures may encroach on or invade a seemingly secure national body. Relatedly, the following piece, "'No one but an entomologist would understand what he felt': Eccentric Entomologists and Insect-Collecting Kinships in Arthur Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells' Mystery Fiction" deals with similar ideas but narrows in on the dynamics between entomologists in late-century fiction. I explore the ways that these entomologist figures are portrayed as psychologically unstable and how their relationships both reflect and require entomological expertise. In these cases, male

madness is portrayed as an eccentricity that is deeply connected to their interest in entomology. The final piece in this section, "'She has me, body, soul, and spirit; and she thinks it such a jest!': Laughter, Haunting, and Madness in Richard Marsh's *The Goddess: A Demon*" explores the ways that the demonic is used to create psychological instability to effect horror. I focus on the idea of the spirit that haunts the main characters, often aurally. Building on the discussions of entomological haunting in this section, I turn to Marsh's haunting figure of a seemingly demonically possessed automaton to explore psychological instability through sound studies as a form of horror. Together, these pieces explore the ways in which late-Victorian literature portrayed madness in relation to masculinity, specifically through the field of entomology and the depiction of haunting figures.

Adapted and expanded from an earlier presentation, "'These Creatures Strike Unutterable Terror into Many Minds': Creepy Crawlies, Masculinity, and Psychological Horror in Late-Victorian Fiction" contextualizes the growing interest in entomology over the nineteenth century and how they effected depictions of bugs and entomologists in horror and mystery fiction. I begin by tracing panics surrounding invasive bug species such as the Colorado potato beetle, and the idea of entomologists as mere hobbyists rather than recognized scientific experts. I explore depictions of bugs in natural history nonfiction, before moving into fictional examples of bugs and entomologists. This analysis includes canonical texts such as Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-1902), as well as less frequently studied examples such as Bertram Mitford's *The Sign of the Spider* (1896), Ernest G. Henham's *Tenebrae* (1898), and several short stories,

including Doyle's "The Beetle-Hunter" (1898), and H.G. Wells' "The Empire of the Ants" (1905), and "The Moth" (1895). I draw attention to the insects and entomologist figures in these texts that are often neglected.[5] Ultimately, I explore how these depictions of bugs and entomologists are used to effect psychological terror in these texts, and the ways the anxieties in these depictions are informed and perpetuated by popular culture and scientific accounts.

In "'No one but an entomologist would understand quite what he felt': Eccentric Entomologists and Insect-Collecting Kinships in Arthur Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells' Mystery Fiction," I examine depictions of entomologists in Doyle's "The Beetle-Hunter" and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and Wells' "The Moth," particularly how they are portrayed as psychologically unstable. This instability is both a reflection of and caused by their interest in entomology. Their kindships with other men are specifically couched in "talk[ing] beetle" ("Beetle" 137): Doyle's eponymous entomologist prefers new acquaintances and houseguests to be thoroughly conversant on entomology, his passion; the villainous entomologist Stapleton in *Hound* meanwhile requires Holmes to think like him and use entomologist language to entrap him; finally, Wells' rival entomologists are so thoroughly connected through their expertise that their interpersonal conflict continues after one of them dies. In these stories, an interest in entomology is often associated with psychological instability or madness, or in *Hound*, cold-blooded murder, suggesting that it is dangerous to be so passionately interested in one subject. Meanwhile, the texts

[5] For example, Kreilkamp makes a compelling analysis of dogs and domestication in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, although like much other scholarship, it does not include the novel's entomological motif (142).

reinforce masculine bonds through these entomological terms, suggesting on the other hand that these interests are an important element of homosocial bonding.

The following piece, "'She has me, body, soul, and spirit; and she thinks it such a jest!': Laughter, Haunting, and Madness in Richard Marsh's *The Goddess: A Demon*," explores a potential haunting and the psychological instability that ensues from this seemingly possessed object. In Marsh's novel, the protagonist witnesses (perhaps in a dream, or through somnambulism), a brutal murder by what he believes to be some sort of creature, and a mysterious woman appears with no memory of how she got to his apartment (he imagines this appearance is also caused by somnambulism). Trying to discover the murderer (or monster), they are haunted by sinister laughter, and find out that the "creature" is in fact an automaton that may be possessed by a malevolent spirit. Although the automaton is equipped with weaponry and quite deadly through its own material devices, the fact that several characters hear this mysterious laughter indicates some sort of spirit and they imagine a demonic figure taking charge of the dummy. I explore the ways that this sense of madness destabilizes the English characters, mostly men, and the racial and psychological anxieties at play in this disruption. This piece also segues into the final section, focusing on the demonic and the concept of retribution in horror fiction and film.

Section 3: The Demonic and Identity in Horror Fiction and Film

The final section is concerned with the demonic and ideas surrounding identity (individually or as a community) in horror fiction and film. I begin in 1790s Britain with "'Fool that you were to confide yourself to a Devil!': Magic, Demons, and Vice in Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*," which explores the ways that an actual demonic

figure is depicted to effect horror. Rosario/Matilda's ambiguity, both around their gender and their demonic identity, is a source of fascination and horror for Ambrosio, a monk who is tempted into vice through magical spectacle and ritual, as well as sexuality, disturbingly suggesting that he is drawn to these elements as part of his own Catholic devotion. The second piece, "The Unraveling Mind: Satanic Screen Cults and Psychological Instability in 1970s American B-Movies" turns across the pond and nearly two centuries later to examine the ways that paranoia around satanic cults in the period were reflected in popular culture. While the foundations of the Satanic Panic were brewing in the 1970s, various films take up the concept of the satanic cult and use it to critique ideas around normalcy and an ideal community. I explore some of this media in the form of B-movies and how they articulate these anxieties. Finally, the last piece, "'We're Honouring Murderers': The Small Town and Narratives of Belonging in John Carpenter's *The Fog* (1980)" continues to pull from these ideas around identity to explore demonic figures and the ways that they create terror. In this film, the ghosts of betrayed sailors seek retribution on the small town whose authority figures sent them to their deaths. Here, the film critiques discourses around belonging and an ideal community through exploring the sailors' retribution. Ultimately, these ideals are revealed as false and the foundation of the community is based on lies, questioning their sense of communal identity and of who truly belongs there. These pieces articulate the ways that demonic figures can invoke or reflect anxieties around community and belonging, whether on an individual level or within a larger group.

Focusing on a keystone example of early British gothic fiction, "'Fool that you were to confide yourself to a Devil!': Magic, Demons, and Vice in Matthew Gregory

Lewis's *The Monk*" explores the ways that the devil is depicted in literature and the anxieties this figure perpetuates. The novel centers on the eponymous monk, Ambrosio, and his descent into evil through consorting with the devil depicted through a mysteriously sensual figure, Rosario/Matilda. I argue that Ambrosio's fascination with his friend and lover Rosario/Matilda, later revealed to be a demon, and their use of magical spectacle creates a mirror for the audience's enchantment and wonder surrounding evil and the demonic as they read the text, as well as Ambrosio's own Catholic rituals. These dynamics reveal the ways that horror can be pleasurable and full of amazement, as well as unsettlingly suggesting that these seemingly Other displays are closer to home than is comfortable. Moreover, his fascination with Rosario/Matilda mirrors the spectacle of his descent into vice, suggesting the audience's fallibility as well as they watch his fall from grace. Ambrosio's fallibility and depravity suggests the instability of rigid moralization and threatens dominant discourses of control.

Originally written for an edited collection on the Satanic Panic (forthcoming from McFarland), "The Unraveling Mind: Satanic Screen Cults and Psychological Instability in 1970s American B-Movies" examines several American B-movies from the 1970s and the ways that they portray satanic cults. Drawing on scholarship surrounding more canonical films like *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), and *The Omen* (1976), I analyze the popular yet less-renown films *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971), *Necromancy* (1972), *Race with the Devil* (1975), and *The Devil's Rain* (1975). I argue that depictions of possession, hypnotism, and coercion in these films blurs the distinctions between the self and the Other to effect horror, and that they act as forerunners to the Satanic Panic in their depictions of threatened children, secret cults, and psychological

instability. The satanic cults in question range in focus and scope from a community of older adults seeking youth; a vast network of mobile communities; to small villages and a seemingly abandoned ghost town. These various satanic cults and societies in the film produce a sense of psychological instability which I argue parallels the instability of a flawed modern America in general. Although often centered on individual characters or small groups, especially in small towns, this instability has a broader application towards contemporary anxieties about the fault lines of an allegedly stable nation.

The final piece, "'We're Honouring Murderers': the Small Town and Narratives of Belonging in John Carpenter's *The Fog* (1980)," examines the small town of Antonio Bay's idealized origin narrative and how it is discovered to be false. This discovery during the town's 100-year anniversary celebrations results in a critique of the town's ideals surrounding community and belonging. The ghosts' retribution reveals the fraudulent origin narratives and sense of communal identity in the town, as these stories conceal its true beginning in betrayal and murder. Moreover, given that this origin consisted of the deliberate murder of people seeking to form a settlement nearby in order to exclude them from the community, the town's sense of identity is one that is carefully constructed according to specific ideals of who belongs there and who does not. While seemingly stable and naturalized, the town's communal identity is critiqued and ultimately destroyed by monstrous, ghostly forces that supernaturally reveal its false construction. This anxiety around constructing and maintaining a particular narrative, and the chaos that ensues when this narrative is disrupted, suggested that identity is artificially created and requires consistent sustenance in order to be preserved. These pieces explore the ways that identity, both individual and communal, is constructed, how

it is maintained, and ultimately, how it is often destabilized and revealed to be, in itself, monstrous and threatening.

Conclusion

Ultimately, these pieces are concerned with the construction and maintenance of dominant discourses, and the ways that these ideals are threatened by a monstrous Other, which reveals the ways that they are in fact unstable and require constant care to perpetuate. The first section explores nature as monstrous, through creatures and landscape, from late-Victorian literature to contemporary films. In the following section, I analyze anxieties around masculinity through madness and psychological instability in late-Victorian horror and mystery fiction. The last section examines demonic and ghostly figures to discuss cultural anxieties around identity in 1790s fiction and 1970s-80s films. I argue that horror is a powerful force for articulating cultural anxieties, both in literature and film, especially in often-neglected forms like B-movies or through generally dismissed figures like bugs. While spanning genres, forms, and time periods, these pieces indicate the ways that horror conveys, perpetuates, and critiques cultural anxieties, using monstrous figures to reveal the monstrosity of these dominant discourses that require violence and terror to maintain.

Works Cited

2 Lava 2 Lantula. Directed by Nick Simon, performances by Steven Guttenberg, Michele Weaver, and Michael Winslow, CineTel Films, 2016.

Ayres, Brenda. "Introduction: Beast on a Leash." *Victorians and Their Animals*, edited by Brenda Ayres, Taylor & Francis, 2019, pp. 1-22.

Berg, Maggie. "'Hapless dependents': Women and Animals in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey*." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2002, pp. 177-197.

Bhabha, Homi K. "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism." *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, 2008, pp. 94-120.

---. "Introduction: Narrating the Nation." *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha, Routledge, 1990, pp. 1-7.

Big Ass Spider! Directed by Mike Mendez, performances by Greg Grunberg, Clare Kramer, Lin Shaye, and Ray Wise, Epic Pictures Group, 2013.

Black Swarm. Directed by David Winning, performances by Sarah Allen, Robert Englund, Jayne Heitmeyer, and Sebastien Roberts, RHI Entertainment, 2007.

Camel Spiders. Directed by Jim Wynorski, performances by Melissa Brasselle, Brian Krause, and C. Thomas Howell, New Horizons Picture Corp., 2011.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, U of Minnesota P, 1996.

Conan Doyle, Arthur. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, edited by Francis O'Gorman, Broadview P, 2006.

Haggard, H. Rider. *She*, edited by Andrew M. Stauffer, Broadview P, 2006.

Henham, Ernest J. *Tenebrae*, edited by Gerald Monsman, Valancourt, 2012.

Ice Spiders. Directed by Tibor Takács, performances by Thomas Calabro, Patrick Muldoon, and Vanessa Williams, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2007.

In the Spider's Web. Directed by Terry Winsor, performances by Emma Catherwood, Lance Henriksen, and Lisa Livingstone, RHI Entertainment, 2007.

Kreilkamp, Ivan. "Home, Animal, Novel." *Minor Creatures: Persons, Animals, and the Victorian Novel*, U of Chicago P, 2018, pp. 1-36.

Lavalantula. Directed by Mike Mendez, performances by Steve Guttenberg, Nia Peeples, Patrick Renna, Michael Winslow, and Ian Ziering, CineTel Films, 2015.

Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*, edited by Howard Anderson, Oxford UP, 2008.

Mansquito. Directed by Tibor Takács, performances by Matt Jordon, Corin Nemec, and Musetta Vander, Nu Image Films, 2005.

Marsh, Richard. *The Beetle*, edited by Minna Vuohelainen, Valancourt, 2008.

---. *The Goddess: A Demon*, edited by Minna Vuohelainen, Valancourt, 2010.

Mitford, Bertram. *The Sign of the Spider*, edited by Gerald Monsman, Valancourt, 2008.

Necromancy. Directed by Bert I. Gordon, performances by Pamela Franklin, and Orson Welles. Cinerama Releasing Co., 1972.

Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*, Heinemann, 1895.

Race with the Devil. Directed by Jack Starrett, performances by Peter Fonda, Warren Oates, Lara Parker, and Loretta Swit, 20th Century Fox, 1975.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage (Random House), 1994.

---. "Knowing the Oriental." *Orientalism* (1978), Random House Inc., 1994, pp. 31-72.

Soulodre, Alyce, and Rhoads, Sean. "'The volcanoes and the spiders are *one*': Insect Horror and Vengeful Nature in Syfy's Monster-Bug Films." *Attack of the New B Movies: Essays on SYFY Original Films*, edited by Justin Wigard and Mitch Ploskonka, McFarland, 2023, pp. 167-189.

---. "Literature." *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 112–97.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*, edited by Roger Luckhurst, Oxford UP, 2011.

The Brotherhood of Satan. Directed by Bernard McEveety, performances by Charles Bateman, Ahna Capri, and Strother Martin, Columbia Pictures, 1971.

The Devil's Rain. Directed by Robert Fuest, performances by Ernest Borgnine, Ida Lupino, William Shatner, and John Travolta, Bryanston Distributing Co., 1975.

The Fog. Directed by John Carpenter, performances by Adrienne Barbauld, Jamie Lee Curtis, John Houseman, and Janet Leigh, AVCO Embassy Pictures, 1980.

The Hive. Directed by Peter Manus, performances by Elizabeth Healey, Kal Weber, and Tom Wopat, RHI Entertainment, 2008.

Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. "Introduction: A Genealogy of Monster Theory." *The Monster Theory Reader*, U of Minnesota P, 2020, pp. 1-36.

SECTION 1: MONSTROUS NATURE IN FILM AND FICTION

"'A land of swamps and evil things and dead old shadows'": Menacing Mires and Victorian Masculinity in H. Rider Haggard's *She* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

Although they are each quite different examples of Victorian genre fiction, H. Rider Haggard's imperial gothic novel *She* (1886-1887) and Arthur Conan Doyle's classic detective story *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-1902) contain similarly sinister depictions of swamps. In both cases, several urban Englishmen travel to a foreign or desolate environment where they encounter a threatening bog that they must overcome: the travelers in *She* must journey through a "death-breeding swamp" (80) along the ambiguous east African coast to find the mysterious land of Leo Vincey's ancestors. Meanwhile, Watson and the new Sir Henry Baskerville (formerly of Canada) travel to the estate in the wilderness of Dartmoor and encounter the mysterious and treacherous Grimpen Mire. I aim to examine these depictions of swamps as monstrous, foreign, and ancient to explore discourses around race, masculinity, and Englishness. Examining these texts together illuminates Victorian conceptions of the environment in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and how swamps function as liminal spaces and are inflected by and contribute to pervasive discourses of Otherness.

Despite these different spaces, both environments host real and imagined dangers: the heroes in *She* believe that they are going into the depths of "undiscovered" Africa to find a lost kingdom, while the Baskerville heir appears to be plagued by a spectral hound (actually a real dog hidden in the Mire). Haggard's Englishmen navigate a seemingly "boundless" swamp and are wary of being exposed to its sickly air (78). In *Hound,* the local entomologist Stapleton warns Watson that the Mire is "impassable," yet Stapleton

has learned to navigate it through his bug-collecting hobby, and he keeps the hound there (117). The swamp is thus unknowable to outsiders, making it an especially mysterious and dangerous space. Both these bogs and those who live nearby are Othered by the protagonists and portrayed as primitive or in a space of the past. They are both liminal in terms of space (as a swamp combines various natural elements and must be passed *through*), and in time, as not fully in the present. Some scholarship has noted the primitivism associated with the landscape and the local people in both texts, but has focused on the ambiguously-east-African wilderness itself and the moors of Dartmoor more generally, rather than on the significance of the swamps specifically. While Othering the inhabitants of these spaces, in both cases this primitivism is very much associated with the landscape itself, which is threatening to both locals and newcomers. Haggard's Englishmen must pass through the perilous swamp on their quest, while Holmes and Watson have to pursue the hound in the Mire. Although they feel that the landscape takes them into the past, they eventually triumph over it as modern, urban Englishmen.

Thus, these novels emphasize the journey of white Englishmen to a place that is distant in both space and time. As Nils Clausson points out, the fin-de-siècle gothic revival popularized stories of "journeys to remote, primitive places (in space and/or time)" (64). Clausson connects these journeys to those in *Hound*, given that "the ancient curse of the Baskervilles returns to threaten the present inhabitants of Baskerville Hall" and Watson and Holmes travel from "'civilized' London to 'primitive' Dartmoor" (65). More explicitly, Clausson also links "Watson's and Sir Henry's journey from London to Baskerville Hall" to "Marlow's up the Congo River," suggesting that it is represented as a

regressive journey into a primitive space and time, according to the discourses of empire (72). I would of course add that *She* is an even earlier (rather than contemporary to the fin-de-siècle) example of this trope. As James Krasner points out, the novel's Dartmoor is "empty and primordial" (344), while Robert Mighall argues that it employs the "primitive" landscape of the body, both outwards and inwards, to convey atavism (137) and Jesse Oak Taylor-Ide notes that Conan Doyle's moor is analogous to precivilized Britain and "the dark regions of the globe" (61). In his first report back to Holmes, Watson writes that he is in the "most God-forsaken corner of the world," and that out on the moor "you have left all traces of modern England behind you, but, on the other hand, you are conscious everywhere of the homes and the work of the prehistoric people" (Doyle 124). These remarks suggest the ancient atmosphere of the moor and removal from Watson's current time and usual space of contemporary London. He expresses his confusion with the place early in his stay at Baskerville Hall, writing that: "life has become like that great Grimpen Mire, with little green patches everywhere into which one may sink and with no guide to point the track" (Doyle 123). Thus, he is both bewildered by the landscape and the atmosphere of suspicion he finds himself in, correlating both with what is, to him, an unfathomable mystery.

Likewise, in *She*, Horace Holly describes the sense of going back in time as they encounter the African marshes (Haggard 78, 81), evoking the ancient past surrounding the legend of the Sherd of Amenartas (the artefact prompting their quest), and of English ideas about African societies as primitive and undeveloped. The treacherous swamps are referenced early on in the discovery of the Sherd, which is accompanied by letters describing the "*beautiful white woman*" who rules over her people in a mysterious land

surrounded by swamps, and Leo's father's travelling companion "died of fever contracted in crossing the swamps" (Haggard 57). Later, when the contemporary heroes are on their journey, Holly points out the, to him, depressing contrast between the "wide stretches of lonely death-breeding swamp" (Haggard 80) and the travelers themselves, "three modern Englishmen in a modern English boat" (81). Haggard's Englishmen feel that they are navigating an "endless waste" and are wary of being exposed to its "thin sickly looking clouds of poisonous vapour" (Haggard 79), those "malarious exhalations" that they are "of course obliged to breathe" though they dose up on quinine preventatively (122). They also repeatedly refer to battling swarms of aggressive mosquitoes (Haggard 81), which are of course the actual transmitters of malaria; while Haggard and his characters are unaware of this fact,[6] the swamp is still portrayed as a den of disease. The swamp itself is also treacherous, given the dangers of falling in, as demonstrated by Holly saving the elder Billali (Haggard 127), showing that the bog will even betray local people, so there is certainly no sympathy for the newcomers. This vast expanse protects the Amahagger and Ayesha's kingdom, as no one is "able to thread the vast swamps," which are "absolutely impassable except to those who knew the paths" (Haggard 101). Here, the liminal swamp space is established as a threateningly mysterious environment that serves to ensnare outsiders to the secret kingdom.

The land itself is associated with savagery and danger, as is the life it contains. The band follows a "network of canals leading inland through pestilent swamps" and Leo postulates that the "impressive canal system" and the presence of what seems to be a

[6] Ronald Ross was able to transmit malaria between sparrows via mosquito bites in 1898 (Clark 197).

former wharf implies that "'perhaps it was not always marsh, and perhaps the people were not always savage'" (Haggard 77) thus correlating the supposedly "savage" peoples with a "savage," primitive swamp landscape. Holly reflects that "to the west loomed the huge red ball of the sinking sun, now vanishing down the vapoury horizon" like "the lurid stain of blood" in "measureless desolation" (Haggard 80-81), here suggesting that the swamp is a wasteland with no life in it, and affirming its connection to danger. Indicating that the land behind them is "'all swamp … and full of snakes,'" where no man lives, Leo also notes dismissively that "'there is a belt of swamp all along the East African coast, so that does not go for much'" (Haggard 67), but Holly disagrees that "'it does – it goes for malaria'" (67-68). Here, in addition to making a sweeping generalization about the continent and its landscape, emphasizing its dangers (such as snakes, and implying that men had better avoid it), the threat is enhanced by the additional risk of malaria. The epigraph of this piece is a quotation from Ayesha when she meets the troop of Englishmen, and asks them, "'how came ye hither to this land of the dwellers among the caves – a land of swamps and evil things and dead old shadows of the dead?'" (Haggard 144). Here, she describes her own people and lands as menacing, and emphasizes the association between swamps and danger.

The novel indicates the area's immense biodiversity, although generally through the English characters lamenting about its associated dangers and discomforts. At one point they remain in the boat in a lagoon, rather than going ashore for the night, "greatly fearing the poisonous exhalations from the marsh" (Haggard 81). However, they are instead "attacked by tens of thousands of the most blood-thirsty, pertinacious, and huge mosquitoes that [Holly] ever saw or read of" (Haggard 81). Holly also wonders if they

are attracted "by the unaccustomed smell of a white man for which they had been waiting for the last thousand years or so" (Haggard 81). The swamp is quite lively, teeming with lions, "cranes and wildfowl" (Haggard 81); crocodiles, hippopotamuses (79); snakes, lizards, frogs (122); and of course the ubiquitous mosquitoes. The Englishmen are, when they notice these creatures at all, patently disturbed by them, even the birds who sometimes make it "difficult to see the sky" (Haggard 79), creating an encroaching effect of nature against the intrepid, allegedly modern Englishmen. Holly describes their journey as "one monotonous record of heavy labour, heat, misery, and mosquitoes … through a region of almost endless swamp" and perpetually dosing themselves with quinine to prevent fevers (Haggard 87). While describing a vibrant, lush, biodiverse landscape, the narration depicts these elements as unpleasant and in fact hazardous.

This sense of danger in the landscape is paralleled and mirrored by the threatening depictions of the local human populations, which do exist despite the English characters' sense of isolation. Holly personifies the swamp itself, in describing his fear of its "malarious exhalations" (Haggard 122).[7] When Holly and his companions are found by a party of native people, they order the white men not to be slain and instead guide them through the swamp, in fact bearing them on litters (Haggard 88-90). Holly admires their beauty, yet feels that he "had never seen a more evil-looking set of faces," noting "an aspect of cold and sullen cruelty stamped upon them that revolted [him], and which in some cases was almost uncanny in its intensity" (Haggard 90). The local people are depicted as especially cruel, like the landscape in which they live. Ayesha's people are

[7] Looking down on the swamps from a height, Holly describes seeing "a dim sea of marsh, over which the foul vapours hung like smoke about a city" (Haggard 121). Here, he may be thinking of London and its fog, and making an interesting parallels between the swamp and the city.

entirely isolated from surrounding lands and people, themselves suffering from fevers from crossing the swamps, which help to keep the population down, and also protect them from attacks: once, another group attempted to attack them, but half were drowned in the swamp, and the rest "died of fever and starvation" (Haggard 101). Ayesha claims that the marshes are "absolutely impassable except to those who knew the paths," so that Holly and his companions would never have reached her "had [they] not been brought there" (Haggard 101).[8] Here, the local people are associated with cruelty and savagery, a sense of primitivism that correlates with the depiction of the swamps. Through their expert knowledge of the landscape, the local population is connected to the swamp and its dangers, as Stapleton becomes associated with the Grimpen Mire.

As some scholarship has pointed out, the more nefarious characters in *Hound* are linked with the land itself, associating both with degeneration and criminality. As Clausson notes, *Hound* explains crime through regression to primitivism by linking the moor and its great Grimpen Mire, along with "Stapleton and his hound, and Selden the escaped convict through the contemporary discourse of degeneration and atavism" (73). When Sir Henry and Watson glimpse Selden's face by candlelight, he is "foul with mire, with a bristling beard" (Doyle 143), and Watson thinks his features "might well have belonged to one of those old savages who dwelt in the burrows on the hillsides" (144). This description indicates Selden's association with the land, specifically the Mire, and also with a more criminal past, suggesting his degeneration. Likewise, Clausson suggests that Stapleton and Selden are "doubles," both associated with "the primitive moor and

[8] They are indeed travelling with a guide, and their fourth companion, Mahomed, succumbs to cannibals, as "*She-who-must-be-obeyed*" orders that the white men be "saved alive" and neglects to give such orders about people of colour (Haggard 113).

great Grimpen Mire," that they each know intimately (71). However, Stapleton is more the criminal mastermind according to the text, and it is he specifically who can navigate the treacherous and complex Mire. As per discourses of degeneration and atavism, Clausson argues that "Selden's criminality is explained as regression to savagery" (73), and Mighall also notes that the landscape is associated with the past, and deflected to Seldon (161), who is portrayed as atavistic, animalistic, and associated with the hound who kills him (162). Stapleton appears as a reversion to his criminal ancestry, as Holmes calls him a "throwback," which for Mighall suggests "hereditary determinism" (163-164). Stapleton evokes his ancestors, who also lived on the moor and perhaps navigated the Mire, indicating a "throw-back" to an earlier, more primitive age that is, importantly, still very much alive and well on the moor and in the Mire.

However, some scholarship suggests a link between Holmes and the land as well, and I would emphasize that the heroes do travel through the Mire specifically in addition to the moor. Taylor-Ide points out the similarities between Selden and Holmes when the latter conceals himself and lives on the moor, both in "the abodes of pre-civilized humanity in this world of darkness" (64). Taylor-Ide argues that this correlation points to the liminal space as the "'dark' foreign spaces of the empire" that alter the individual in transition, and that Holmes occupying this space allows him to solve the mystery (57). For Taylor-Ide, Holmes "lets the moor permeate his own being," living in the ancient dwellings, and breathing "the air tainted by Grimpen Mire" (62). I suggest that rather than weakening himself by this deception, Holmes reinforces the strength of his stable white masculinity by both occupying this space *and* returning home unscathed. Additionally, the poor air of the swamp that Taylor-Ide alludes to is referenced

throughout the text, suggesting that all are permeable by the marsh, even without having to go in, and the protagonists eventually do just that. The night of the planned attack to catch the hound, the Mire is covered in "a dense, white fog" walling them in (Doyle 190), literally obscuring their movements and adding an air of mystery, and, unfortunately for Stapleton, concealing his way through the Mire. The following day, Mrs. Stapleton leads them through the swamp in order to track Stapleton through the "odour of decay and a heavy miasmatic vapour," where the Mire seems to pull them in: "as if some malignant hand was tugging us down into those obscene depths, so grim and purposeful was the clutch in which it held us" (Doyle 198). While difficult to navigate, our band of heroes makes it out alive, though permeated by the air and soaked by the swamp, while Stapleton falls victim to the fog and subsequently the Mire itself. Their ability to enter this space and emerge safely (with Mrs. Stapleton as a guide) reinforces the strength of their upright British masculinity as opposed to Stapleton's improper criminality.

The endings of both these novels appear to neatly close the mystery of the swamp, especially in *Hound* where Holmes solves the case. As Maria Beville argues, horror, in transcending the "margins of the acceptable," results in affirming them perhaps even moreso than before (120); during the fin de siècle, she suggests that horror is used to "reinforce societal conventions," especially "those upheld by the ideologies of patriarchy and empire" (120). I argue that this is the case in *Hound* and *She*: Taylor-Ide suggests that Holmes' ability to pass through the liminal space of the moor and imbue the apparently supernatural elements with rational explanation, "is connected to the 'civilizing mission' of colonialism" (56), yet this work of eliminating Stapleton occurs in the swamp space, where Stapleton becomes literally enveloped in the Mire due to Holmes' plot. These

characters are permeated by their environment, literally according to the discourses of dangerous vapours, yet escape, unlike Stapleton and Selden. However, both Taylor-Ide and Clausson point out the recurring threat of further "Stapletons": despite Holmes' reintegration into society after the novel's events, there is the "threat that Hugo Baskerville will reappear" in Henry's potential offspring (Taylor-Ide 66) and "the Baskerville family is just as likely to produce a Stapleton as a Sir Henry, and so to degenerate into beastliness" (Clausson 80). Thus, these boundaries are more permeable than the novel's neatly solved ending might suggest. However, Holmes escapes and returns to tranquility and rational, contemporary order in London, suggesting that the moor's liminal space permanently affects only those who live there. Stapleton is, after all, never "pinned into the Baker Street collection" as Holmes plans, but is consumed by the Grimpen Mire that previously aided him in his criminal pursuits.

Meanwhile, although they are affected by their journey through the swamps and to the secret kingdom, the Englishmen survive and successfully master this landscape. On their journey home, "across those awful seas of swamps … through stench and mire, and the all-prevailing flavour of fear," Holly reflects that "three weeks or so before four men had entered the marshes of Kor, and now two of [them] were dead, and the other two had gone through adventures and experiences so strange and terrible that Death himself hath not a more fearful countenance" (Haggard 278). Although altered by their journey (and some killed), the two primary characters Holly and Leo survive and triumph over the allegedly evil swamps. Shawn Malley suggests that Holly and Leo "discover their own cultural roots … as they explore the ruins of the proto-Egyptian civilization of Kor," thus allowing them to "materially consolidate their English heritage" (275). For Malley, the

"Sherd of Amenartas" that prompts their adventure connects Leo's family to ancient Egypt, thus prompting the expedition to find the Vincey family origins "in the interior of southeastern Africa" (278). As Leo is the reincarnation of Kallikrates, "the study of the past for these Englishmen is a profound act of self-discovery," and Leo as a "nineteenth-century English explorer represents the culmination of culture diffused from the dawn of civilization," given that Egypt a parent of civilization, even to Britain (Malley 281). In a way, he is then a part of the place itself, although his whiteness and association with modern civilization allows him to move through the landscape and return to England. As interlopers, the journey allows for learning and self-discovery, while Othering those they encounter and the landscape they inhabit.

In both cases, the English travellers' transience and strength of their masculine identity allows them to pass through unscathed, while those who attempt to reside there become one with the atavistic and degenerate environment. Through their depiction of primitive, dangerous swamps (associated also with portrayals of the people that reside there), these texts are inflected by and contribute to anxieties around the Other and the threat of degeneration. Ultimately, white English masculinity triumphs over this threat, but its perceived anxieties and dangers continue, especially in the instability of the Baskerville line. Both cases present an intermingled ancestry, in the cases of Stapleton and Leo: in the first instance, Stapleton is associated largely with the primitivism of his locale (over which Holmes triumphs), and in the latter, Leo is connected with an imposing historical line that reifies his masculine strength and virility. Ultimately, the novels portray a reassuring vision of white masculinity and intellectuality that maintains power over an atavistic landscape. I have situated the environment in these mystery and

adventure texts in the latter part of the nineteenth century, but delving into the particularities of these genres and the distinct ways they portray landscape would be intriguing. Emerging scholarship on ecology or climate change and the Victorians may provide another lens for further study as well, and consider the anxieties about air pollution or “vapours” in these texts.

Works Cited

Beville, Maria. "The Macabre on the Margins: A Study of the Fantastic Terrors of the *Fin de Siècle.*" *Text Matters,* vol. 2, no. 2, 2012, pp. 115-129.

Clark, J.F.M. *Bugs and the Victorians.* Yale UP, 2009.

Clausson, Nils. "Degeneration, *Fin-de-Siècle* Gothic, and the Science of Detection: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the Emergence of the Modern Detective Story." *Journal of Narrative Theory,* vol. 35, no. 1, 2005, pp. 60-87.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, edited by Francis O'Gorman, Broadview P, 2006.

Haggard, H. Rider. *She*, edited by Andrew M. Stauffer, Broadview P, 2006.

Krasner, James. "Stealing History in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2016, pp. 344-361.

Malley, Shawn. "'Time Hath No Power Against Identity': Historical Continuity and Archaeological Adventure in H. Rider Haggard's *She*." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1997, pp. 275-297.

Mighall, Robert. *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares,* Oxford UP, 1999.

Taylor-Ide, Jesse Oak. "Ritual and the Liminality of Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920,* vol. 48, no. 1, 2005, pp. 55-70.

"The volcanoes and the spiders are *one*":

Insect Horror and Vengeful Nature in Syfy's Monster-Bug Films[9]

Alyce Soulodre and Sean Rhoads

A staple of the monster-attack genre is the "big bug" or swarm film, featuring massive or multitudinous (and usually bloodthirsty) insects, often genetically modified, irradiated, or altered in some way. Popular bugs include ants, bees or wasps, mosquitoes, and especially spiders. As May R. Berenbaum and Richard J. Leskosky point out, classification is often irrelevant in these big bug films; anything remotely bug-like will be called an insect, and in discussing these films we will follow their lead.[10] This bit of entomological legerdemain hints at a core concept of the monster-bug genre dating from Victorian-era literature through the eclosion of big bug films in the 1950s to Syfy's contemporary offerings: the true identity of the Other is irrelevant, and what matters most is simply that they are different and alien (often in several senses of the word). Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann also argue that insect horror films often "suggest that the real monsters are the humans […] rather than the bugs themselves."[11] Syfy films parody and develop this genre and boast a popular cult following despite (or because of) their generally low-budget, made-for-TV production values. Scholarship has yet to consider

---

[9] From **Attack of the New B Movies: Essays on SYFY Original Films** © 2023 *Edited by* Justin Wigard *and* Mitch Ploskonka by permission of McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640. www.mcfarlandbooks.com.

[10] May R. Berenbaum and Richard J. Leskosky, "Movies, Insects in," in *Encyclopedia of Insects*, ed. Vincent H. Resh, et al. (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science and Technology, 2009), 668. Of course, spiders (and scorpions) are arachnids, not insects at all, but this fact is rarely acknowledged in these films (or if so, simply in a throwaway line). The term "bugs" is also used more easily as a catchall for arachnids, insects, and creepy crawlies generally.

[11] Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann, *Monstrous Nature: Environment and Horror on the Big Screen* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), xviii.

these films in general, much less their substantial contribution to the monster-bug genre. In this chapter, we show that Syfy's bug films not only draw from a long history of insect horror dating back to Victorian literature, but that in doing so these films contribute to ongoing discussions of human societal and ecological issues through the lens of the over-the-top and absurd. By offering an ecocritical assessment of several popular Syfy bug films and connecting them to their historical forebears, we help elucidate Barry Keith Grant's suggestion that "insects are wholly other, inscrutable participants of a selfless collectivity we can neither know nor understand," and how this understanding affects social and environmental concerns in the contemporary world.[12]

Many Syfy big bug films are self-referential to the genre's conventions, especially ecological threats. *Lavalantula* (2015), directed by Mike Mendez, embraces its Los Angeles setting with many cameo appearances (led by Steve Guttenberg as character Colton West) and metatextual, campy nods to Hollywood, the history and generic conceits of big bug films, and Syfy's other works.[13] Similarly, *Ice Spiders* (2007) comments on the genre itself: hiding from the mutated giant spider rampage, one of the film's young athletes remarks: "it's like in the movies with the bugs and the radiation and stuff!" Here, he evokes 1950s classics like *Them!* (1954)—the first big bug film, wherein irradiated giant ants overrun Los Angeles—as well as generally referencing the more recent swarm of Syfy bug pictures. Likewise, the narrative of *Ice Spiders* also gestures to more recent science fictional monsters-run-amok films like Steven Spielberg's hit

---

[12] Barry Keith Grant, *Monster Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 82.
[13] Moreover, the film links itself to Syfy's earlier *Sharknado* (2013) franchise via character Fin Shepard (Ian Ziering). His cameo (another star most relevant in the 1990s) puts these animal-attack films in the same cinematic universe, emphasizing a shared storyworld with a broader animal-related ecological panic.

Jurassic Park (1993) and its numerous sequels.[14] Through intertextual, metatextual, and historical allusions, Syfy big bug films develop and perpetuate popular discourses around science, technology, and the environment on screen. Their self-referential nature and parody of these genre conventions allow them to explore and reinforce ecological discourses in new and regenerative ways. By invoking more problematic aspects of the monster-bug genre of earlier literature and cinema, Syfy's films provide a new and unexpected lens through which to view contemporary societal and environmental issues, albeit one that sometimes reinforces rather than repudiates some of the genre's more troubling themes.

Dating back to at least the literature of the Victorian period, bugs have been associated with horror and nature biting back at human society. Early bug narratives like H.G. Wells's "Empire of the Ants" (1905) and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897) also tend to racialize these concerns, often making the insect fiends "foreign" and thus more threatening. Such elements appearing in Victorian literature have tended to pupate and metamorphose over time, re-emerging in the classic monster-bug cinema of the 1950s and Syfy's oeuvre, among others. William M. Tsutsui argues that the silver screen classics represented not only metaphorical atomic anxiety and communist fears, but "a widespread unease about insect infestation and humankind's ability to control it […] refracted, in Hollywood's hands, through a cultural lens colored by the Cold War, nuclear proliferation, and ambivalent attitudes toward the promise of science and the

[14] Like the dinosaurs revived in that series through biotechnology and de-extinction, the titular spiders of the Syfy film are mutated and altered through scientific experimentation and genetic engineering and the human constraints placed on the enlarged spiders similarly fail.

trustworthiness of elite expertise."[15] This Othering of the insect, use of existential dread, and also fear of the foreign (both people and places) is particularly evident in Syfy pictures like *In the Spider's Web* (2007), wherein American travelers are threatened by a variety of venomous spiders in India, and *Camel Spiders* (2011), which begins in Afghanistan before shifting the narrative (and the bugs) to the United States. However, foreign settings are certainly not required for this kind of racist ideology, which is present "at home" in these and other Syfy films.[16] We examine these historical and environmental connections to illuminate the ongoing anxiety around insects and their perennial horror iterations in Syfy's productions, and the ways that these discourses of the Other have (and have not) changed.

An ecocritical view of Syfy's bug films reveals that one shared commonality among many examples is a tendency for the monster-bugs and swarms to manifest or represent nature's wrath and revenge on humankind. In the same way that Victorian literature often embodied a fear of the colonial Other and the 1950s classics perceived a communist threat, Syfy's films examine contemporary concerns relevant to the twenty-first century, from societal fears like terrorism and shifting gender and sexuality norms to environmental concerns linked to climate change, pollution, renewed nuclear anxieties,

---

[15] William M. Tsutsui, "Looking Straight at *Them!*: Understanding the Big Bug Movies of the 1950s," *Environmental History* vol. 12, no. 2 (Apr. 2007): 246.

[16] Foundational texts on Victorian colonial and imperial structures include Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness* (1988) and Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather* (1995). Brantlinger analyzes the ways that imperialist ideology emerged and shifted over the course of the Victorian period (especially chauvinism and the "civilizing mission"), arguing that these discourses permeated all elements of Victorian culture. McClintock explores imperial contestation and how power structures emerged during this time, especially via racist spectacles in both Victorian spaces and colonies abroad. See Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 8; and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 16-17.

and even literal bug fears drawn from invasive insect species and diseases. Syfy bug movies are situated in this history and often perpetuate the generic trends of scientists or governments tampering with nature, weaponizing non-human animal life, or of general, human-induced environmental collapse. *Lavalantula*'s Dr. Eric Von Struble (Time Winters), a lavalantula expert, claims that "the volcanoes and the spiders are *one*," explicitly linking a destructive natural force with the monstrous arachnids. Von Struble explains that the film's emergent Los Angeles volcano is warming way too rapidly—to the scale of one billion years of heating in a single night—and its patterns mimic those of "an insect colony."[17] Here, the film invokes the threat of climate change through the revenge of the creature, linking destructive nature, rising temperatures, horrifying spiders, and widespread chaos. Although campy and low-budget, Syfy's bug films draw from and comment on the long history of insect horror to critique not only the genre itself but human hubris and arrogance in the face of an uncaring and uncompromising nature.

Don't Let the (Big) Bugs Bite

While many of the bug films of the 1950s were very popular, some touchstones (then and now) include: *Them!* (1954), *Tarantula!* (1955), *Beginning of the End* (1957), *The Deadly Mantis* (1957), *Earth vs. the Spider* (1958), and *Horrors of Spider Island* (1960).[18] Few scholars focus on recent films in the big bug canon, and made-for-TV and Syfy films are heretofore utterly neglected. Richard J. Leskosky notes that big bug films

[17] A fine example of these films' tendencies to confuse arachnids and insects: spiders of course, are neither insects nor in the habit of existing in colonies, but lavalantulas allegedly do so.
[18] Several of these offerings (*Beginning of the End*, *the Deadly Mantis*, *Earth vs. the Spider* and *Horrors of Spider Island*) also found new life and gained a cult following when they were lampooned on the popular television series *Mystery Science Theater 3000* during the 1990s, another Syfy production.

are the most easily recognized subgenre of "insect fear films," which includes swarming insects of a usual size and those created or mutated as a consequence of bad or ill-advised science.[19] A consistent source of fear in these films over the decades is the utter alienness of insects to the human experience, making them an easy shortcut for filmmakers to represent the Other.[20] This parallel manifests in the tendency of science fiction to blur the boundary between alien and insect, as in Syfy's *Alien Apocalypse* (2005), wherein termite-like alien invaders enslave humans to harvest wood for their consumption.[21] Despite the popularity of big bug films and low budget B-movies (especially with Syfy and the availability and affordability of CGI), Leskosky's work is one of the only scholarly examples that considers these films in this millennium.

However, other authors have analyzed earlier monster-bug cinema, including several movies from an ecocritical angle, most notably Murray and Heumann in *Monstrous Nature*, wherein they examine the "complex ways in which nature becomes monstrous" in eco-horror films.[22] On the other hand, Maurice Yacowar posits that disaster films use spectacle to feed a "fascination with the vision of massive doom," and most frequently with a destructive force of nature, such as an animal (altered or otherwise).[23] David J. Skal points out the "nascent environmentalism" in the 1950s classics wherein

---

[19] Richard J. Leskosky, "Size Matters: Big Bugs on the Big Screen," in *Insect Poetics*, ed. Eric C. Brown (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 320.
[20] Leskosky, 332.
[21] Other popular examples of this trend include: *Alien* (1979) and its sequel *Aliens* (1986), *Starship Troopers* (1997), *Men in Black* (1997), *Ender's Game* (2013), and *Color Out of Space* (2019). *Starship Troopers* was based on the 1959 novel by Robert A. Heinlein, *Ender's Game* on the 1985 novel by Orson Scott Card, and *Color Out of Space* on H.P. Lovecraft's 1927 short story.
[22] Murray and Heumann, xviii.
[23] Maurice Yacowar, "The Bug in the Rug: Notes on the Disaster Genre," in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 277.

"polluted worlds that strike back at their polluters" appears as a common theme.[24] Cynthia A. Freeland argues that movies like *Them!* constitute an "awakening of environmentalist consciousness."[25] The cinema of the 1950s frequently depicts atomic disasters where humans face the results of their own technology gone awry, and animal foes incorporate an element of the familiar that becomes unfamiliar, as they reverse the chain of being.[26] Often, the bugs in these early films are paired blatantly with unrelated elements of the natural world.[27] Drawing on these earlier considerations, an ecocritical analysis of Syfy's bug films reveals the ways in which they both perceive and embody new threats—ecological and otherwise—for the twenty-first century. For instance, Syfy's rapidly warming lavalantula volcano hints at the pervasive threat posed by climate change, enlarged ice spiders embody concerns regarding biotechnology and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and the appearance of exotic camel spiders in North America warns against biological invasion and the proliferation of invasive species. Many bug films of the twenty-first century parallel the tropes of the 1950s—while the specter of nuclear war and radioactive terror was transferred to insect antagonists then, contemporary environmental concerns infuse monster-bug narratives today. In this way,

---

[24] David J. Skal, *Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 191. Skal further observes the familiarity of these worlds and their monsters—the usual cast of backyard bugs that have been affected by radiation and turned into horrifying monsters (and often also turned into predators even when their real-life counterparts are not). See Skal 191-192.

[25] Cynthia A. Freeland, *The Naked and the Undead* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 71.

[26] Yacowar, 278; Patrick Lucanio writes that *Tarantula!* (1955) and other scientifically altered bug invasion films present the giant bug as both known and unknown, earthly but far too large and thus alien. See Patrick Lucanio, *Them or Us: Archetypal Interpretations of Fifties Alien Invasion Films* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 17.

[27] For example, Joshua David Bellin notes the popularity of alien invasion narratives and insect invasion in 1950s big bug films, while Grant suggests that these creepy crawlies embodied nuclear fears. See Joshua David Bellin, "Us or *Them!*: *Silent Spring* and the 'Big Bug' Films of the 1950s," *Extrapolation* vol. 50, no. 1 (2009): 146; Grant, 73.

Syfy's films build on and reinterpret the classic big bug narrative—often, climate change replaces nuclear warfare and terrorism stands in for communism, though the bugs embodying these terrors remain eerily similar.

Films are shaped by current fears and perceived threats, on a variety of levels. According to Berenbaum and Leskosky, the revival of "insect fear films" in the 1980s and 1990s, beginning with *The Nest* (1987), as well as *Arachnophobia* (1990) and *Mimic* (1997), was prompted by the first reported insect to be genetically transformed in 1983.[28] Likewise, they suggest that the prevalence of bee and wasp films in the late twentieth century was influenced by 1974 reports of "African 'killer' bees" on a San Francisco container ship.[29] Furthermore, they argue that films featuring massive amounts of small insects are often concerned with ecological upheavals, including biomagnification, concerns with toxins (*Kingdom of the Spiders*, 1977), pollution affecting food production, and "radioactive and/or toxic waste" (*Empire of the Ants*, 1977).[30] These films also invoke and perpetuate real-life concerns with biological invasions and threats to endemic species.[31] Such concerns remain relevant for audiences and viewers in the present-day, as the problems tied to invasive species and loss of biodiversity have only become more acute in the twenty-first century.[32] Syfy's bug films draw from these earlier tropes of

---

[28] Berenbaum and Leskosky, 671.

[29] Berenbaum and Leskosky, 671. Bees are useful from a filmmaking perspective in "insect fear films," according to Berenbaum and Leskosky, because they can be manipulated and controlled in swarms for the camera and large populations are easy to achieve; also, they are very familiar to the audience (as are wasps and ants).

[30] Berebaum and Leskosky, 671; Despite sharing a title, the 1977 film bears little resemblance to H.G. Wells's 1905 short story.

[31] Berenbaum and Leskosky, 671.

[32] Throughout different regions of North America, for instance, invasive insects like the emerald ash borer (which appeared in Michigan and Ontario in 2002), the spotted lanternfly (Pennsylvania in 2014), and the Asian giant "murder hornet" (British Columbia in 2019, Washington State in 2020) have continued to garner headlines and breed anxieties. Author Sean Rhoads was forced to fell nearly a dozen ash trees on his property in 2021 alone due to ash borer infestations.

monster-bug cinema, linking them with contemporary concerns, to offer a smorgasbord of dread tied to multiple possibilities in various installments over the years. In many ways, Syfy's films, like their bug subjects, multiply and morph the genre itself—they are extraordinarily fecund, and the variability and adaptability of the studio and the genre flourish in the wide array and range of their many offerings. Consequently, Syfy's bug films draw on the rich history of monster-bug and insect invasion literature and cinema, while at the same time redeploying the genre to focus on salient or problematic contemporary human and environmental concerns through the absurdity of B-movie spectacle.

The precise nature of the bug's monstrosity depends on how it manifests on screen, whether in an immensely unnatural size, as an unnaturally vast swarm or, often for Syfy, both. As Berenbaum and Leskosky suggest, many monster-bug films have either one solitary bug or an unprecedented population growth.[33] According to Charlotte Sleigh, bug films must choose between giant size and mass formation—she opines that only B-movies would try to enact both size and number in their monsters because the impact would be overdone.[34] However, the latter method is exactly what Syfy is prone to do, taking advantage of the humor and spectacle involved in going beyond ordinary limits. Sleigh argues that insects are most threatening due to their immense numbers (notorious since the Biblical plagues) and that enlarging insects is simply another variation of multiplication because both involve humanity being overwhelmed by the Other—whether

[33] Berenbaum and Leskosky, 669.
[34] Charlotte Sleigh, "Empire of the Ants: H.G. Wells and Tropical Entomology," *Science as Culture* vol. 10, no. 1 (2001): 50.

it is gargantuan in scale or massive in number.[35] While Syfy uses both to excess, often in the same film, there are some distinctions in the fears invoked at different points; we borrow from Leskosky's scale to show these differences. At what he calls the "poodle size level," the mechanics are similar to normally sized swarming insects—the monsters are threatening as individuals as well as in a swarm.[36] When human-sized, the bugs invoke the idea of fighting hand-to-hand (or perhaps hand-to-pincer) combat, thus conflating the human and the insect. Finally, the "behemoth category" for Leskosky shows "the perfect confrontation with the Other, with the completely alien."[37] This last level firmly places humankind at the bottom of the food chain, denying a supposed natural order.[38] Syfy films take advantage of the varying types of fear connected to these different size categories: in *Big Ass Spider!* (2013), for example, the eponymous arachnid grows over the course of the picture, beginning at (toy) poodle size and concluding well into the behemoth category (thus fulfilling the title's promise).[39] Syfy's spider films outnumber other bug selections, and spiders stand as the only behemoth-sized bugs (as well as those most likely to be larger-than-life) among Syfy productions.[40] This trend draws on arachnophobia, a common human fear, as well as the prevalence of exceedingly

---

[35] Sleigh, 44, 52.
[36] Leskosky, 333.
[37] Leskosky, 333.
[38] Leskosky, 333.
[39] Leskosky, 336-337. Additionally, Leskosky points out that these behemoths are almost always spiders and suggests that they are particularly effective as big bugs because they are already feared due to arachnophobia in popular culture, and their webs allow humans to see them capturing and exsanguinating their prey. From a production perspective, spiders are large enough to use as live models or initial shots, making them very useful for filmmakers with low budgets.
[40] Spiders also feature in *Lavalantula* and its sequel *2 Lava 2 Lantula!*, the imago series of the Syfy bug canon. Unsurprisingly, the sequel follows the same formula but raises the stakes: Colton West is now an A-list star who must leave a film set to battle the lavalantulas in Florida and eventually face-off against the ultimate Gargantulantula.

large arachnids in nature.[41] Syfy parodies these conventions around enormity on a grander scale than is typical of the genre.

The varying sizes of big bugs gesture toward the different anxieties connected to confronting the Other and are especially evident in *Big Ass Spider!*'s monster's growth. Rosi Braidotti argues that technology and advanced capitalism depend on blurring definitions of divides between categories of the Self and the Other, and the hybridization of "animals, monsters, insects, aliens, and machines" to posthuman subjectivity.[42] In *Big Ass Spider!*, exterminator Alex Mathis (Greg Grunberg) accuses the film's military forces of creating the spider, and Maj. Tanner (Ray Wise) responds that they did not do so; Dr. Lucas (Patrick Bauchau) explains that it is "an aberration from several unusual technologies," with "alien biology, not terrestrial," the result of "DNA cross-breeding from microbial fossil[s] found on Martian soil." For Braidotti, insects constitute a "radical form of otherness that we cannot perceive," and she notes that many ideas of them in popular culture depict them as objects of anxiety (such as mutants, vermin, or a plague).[43] She describes insects' "inbetweenness" as a result of their status as monstrous, sacred, and alien, with responses of "simultaneous attraction and repulsion, disgust and desire."[44] As Braidotti points out, insects appear to mix organic beings with machinery, and insectoid or arachnoid language is often used in popular culture to describe robots.[45]

---

[41] For instance, the most massive spider is the Goliath birdeater tarantula, while the widest leg-span belongs to the giant huntsman spider. The "puppy-sized" Goliath bird eater can have a body length of around five inches—its leg-span of approximately eleven inches is only outdone by the giant huntsman spider. See Tanya Lewis, "Goliath Encounter: Puppy-Sized Spider Surprises Scientist in Rainforest," *Live Science*, October 17, 2014, https://www.livescience.com/48340-goliath-birdeater-surprises-scientist.html.
[42] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 100-101.
[43] Braidotti, 102-103.
[44] Braidotti, 104.
[45] Braidotti, 104.

This correlation of the insect and machine is evident as early as H.G. Wells's 1905 short story "Empire of the Ants," depicting an ant army and their machinic reproduction. Throughout *Big Ass Spider!*, the military and Dr. Lucas emphasize the necessity of preventing the spider from reaching "stage five" at all costs, without telling Alex what this level means; finally, Dr. Lucas reveals that this stage is simply her reproductive phase. While visually horrifying as she increases in size, the main threat of the spider is that she will ultimately reproduce (apparently asexually) and generate further monstrosities. Much like their literary and cinematic precursors, Syfy productions like *Big Ass Spider!* play with these layers of terror, adapting the variability and malleability of bug antagonists to highlight contemporary concerns. *Big Ass Spider!* is especially adroit at using the shifting size of its mysteriously Other spider-monster to manifest the varying levels of anxiety connected to Leskosky's size categories—the spider begins as a threat to the individual, but as it grows it comes to embody societal fears of existential Otherness.

Weird Science

In the tradition of their monster-bug film predecessors, Syfy's selections play fast and loose with science, often featuring either "mad" or "bad" scientists (in skill, morality, or both). Scholars like Grant point out the trope of overachieving scientists in monster films, tracing them back to early examples like *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Island of Lost Souls* (1932).[46] These films emerged from nineteenth-century literature, particularly Mary Shelley's 1818 tale of science fiction's most famous mad scientist. Grant argues that these

[46] Grant, 44.

"'mad' doctors" are themselves monstrous because they go beyond the "proper" or "known" boundaries of science to convey anxieties about the scientific and technological and are often punished by being killed by their own creation.[47] This question of hubris in the face of nature, dating to Shelley's novel, was seen in Victorian society as a negative example of overreaching à la Faustus.[48] If the scientist is morally suspect, Syfy tends to uphold this generic tradition, while good-hearted scientists are much more likely to be spared. *Ice Spiders* serves as a particularly useful example of this trope—the ethically troubled Prof. Marks (David Millbern) serves as the "bad" scientist and is eventually killed by his spider creation, whereas his colleague Dr. April Sommers (Vanessa Estelle Williams) opposes him and thus redeems herself, and survives the film's conclusion.[49]

The frequently suspect depiction of "evil" science in Syfy's bug films also leads to a general suspicion of science itself, a common trope of the big bug classics of the 1950s.[50] While the connection between science and nuclear anxiety in the 1950s was especially relevant to films like *Them!*, contemporary scientific concerns like

---

[47] Grant, 44.

[48] Gary Westfahl, ed., *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy: Themes, Works, and Wonders* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005), 397.

[49] Skal suggests that the rhetoric of environmentalism is also inspired in part by "mad science conceits: the evils of technology and technological thinking, science-created horrors […] that rise up to destroy their makers." See Skal, 192. These differences between scientific overreach and dangerous nature are intentionally gendered according to what Freeland calls the "'women-and-bugs' phenomenon," where heroines often face off against "female monsters or 'queen bugs.'" She illuminates the "echoes of *Frankenstein*" in the *Alien* series, where science is made evil when used at the behest of "a vast capitalist military-technical machine" that aims (wrongly) to "control or use a monstrous nature" at the risk of humanity. See Freeland, 55. The xenomorphs of the *Alien* franchise are inherently bug-like, both in appearance but also in social structure, and Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) iconically battles an egg-laying "queen bug" in *Aliens* (1986). Furthermore, *Big Ass Spider!* both parallels and evokes the *Alien* films—when the ever-growing spider is the size of the "facehugger" phase of the alien, it attacks a hospitalized human in a similar way to the xenomorph's attack on Kane (John Hurt).

[50] Bellin argues that films like *Them!* "delegitimize scientific authority" in various ways by representing scientists as either well-meaning but ineffective bumblers, or as ruthlessly fascinated by their subject at the expense of humanity. See Bellin, 154.

biotechnology and the impact of humankind on Earth's climate appear frequently in Syfy's recent films. In Syfy pictures, the scientist(s) often cause the problem directly (again, as in *Ice Spiders*), or are entirely unhelpful (as in *Lavalantula*).[51] Syfy films also tend to offer a clear link between science and warfare, particularly the appearance of military scientists (or at least those co-opted or employed by the military). For Joshua David Bellin, in movies like *Them!*, science is inherently structured within "industrial, political, and military" systems of power that reveal the illusion of allegedly "pure" science (in *Them!* due to the government's atomic weaponry).[52] This concept is perhaps even more illustrated in films where one or more of these authorities instigate the mutation or modification of bugs for some nefarious purpose, with or without the full support of the scientists involved. In Syfy's *Black Swarm* (2007), the alleged purpose of meddling with nature is to defend Americans against the Other: scientist Eli Giles (Robert Englund) weaponizes wasps at the behest of the government, because "we need to defend ourselves" (against what specifically is left unsaid), and the modified wasps become uncontrollable.[53] The film suggests that science and weaponization have gone too far and

---

[51] In *Big Ass Spider!*, the spider is created by accident following an experiment intending to generate massive tomatoes to feed more people; however, one of the tomato plants brought in to test the growth formula contained a concealed spider's nest. While monitoring the spider's growth, Dr. Lucas and his military entourage are mostly interested in determining how it will grow for the purposes of science and care more about the project than collateral damage (until it affects them personally). Meanwhile, *Lavalantula*'s Dr. Von Struble, the only character who knows anything about said lavalantulas, appears only to exist for exposition and does nothing to prevent the catastrophe he has been monitoring for years.

[52] Bellin, 155.

[53] Actor Robert Englund's appearance is an excellent illustration of Syfy's use of metatextual cameos in their films—not only is Englund well past his cinematic prime, but genre fans are undoubtedly familiar with his appearance in the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* franchise. See also *In the Spider's Web*'s inclusion of actor Lance Henriksen (known for several films in the *Alien* franchise), and *Ice Spiders*'s Patrick Muldoon of *Starship Troopers* fame. The film's mutated uber-wasps both sting people to death and turn humans into zombie-like "drones" by crawling into their brains. Here, the film evokes another renowned science fiction bug, the alien insectoid "Ceti eel," used by Khan (Ricardo Montalbán) to control Terrell and Chekhov in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), as well as anticipating a similar instance of hymenopteran-takeover in Syfy's *The Hive* (2008).

condemns the government in particular.[54] By realizing he cannot control the wasps and trying to reverse his mistake, Eli regains his morality, thereby redeeming science for the greater good. Bellin argues that humanity is made monstrous in big bug films through its misguided attempts to control Earth, reflecting a concern with militarization and "the rightfulness of technological warfare, against invading insects or against our own kind."[55] Syfy films tend to instead reinforce at least one of these authorities, often at the expense of the other (and the Other).[56] In this way, Syfy emphasizes the destructive power of some institutions, while upholding others, and changing alliances in various films (likely to avoid being too divisive for popular TV-movies). While still containing serious critique (despite the seeming incongruity of the medium), Syfy productions seem to consciously avoid being too overtly "political."

For instance, *Mansquito* (2005) draws on the longstanding anxiety of mosquitoes spreading diseases. In *Mansquito*, the "Guilin virus" allegedly has a death-rate a thousand times that of West Nile, and scientists attempt to develop immune mosquitoes so that the virus will die out.[57] However noble this purpose, spearheaded by Dr. Jennifer Allen

---

[54] *Black Swarm* is also critical of the government's own corrupt scientists, represented by entomologist Katherine Randell (Jayne Heitmeyer), who is called in after the first wasp-related death and replaces Eli on the project as he tries to reverse what he has done to the wasps (something she is entirely uninterested in doing).

[55] Bellin, 156.

[56] If the military or government are at fault, then scientific pursuits are morally innocent, and vice versa, though some Syfy characters question these assumptions in films like *Camel Spiders*, *Ice Spiders*, and *Big Ass Spider!*.

[57] The West Nile virus most broadly emerged in the Western zeitgeist during the 2002 major outbreak in the U.S. (although it was discovered in Uganda in 1937 and outbreaks occurred in the U.S. in 1999). However, Victorians discovered that mosquitoes were responsible for carrying malaria in 1877 and malaria is still a cause of many deaths globally. See J.F.M. Clark, *Bugs and the Victorians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 196. Such concerns may prove reinvigorated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as some have questioned whether mosquitoes can transmit the virus—only time will tell if such trends re-emerge in Syfy's bug films. See Shane Gibson, "Can mosquitoes carry coronavirus? People, not skeeters, transmit COVID-19, says Manitoba researcher," *Global News*, April 8, 2020, https://globalnews.ca/news/6793894/coronavirus-mosquitoes-manitoba/.

(Musetta Vander), it is compromised because her boss Dr. Aaron Michaels (Jay Benedict) only wants to find a cure for financial gain. Here, *Mansquito* gestures to contemporary concerns surrounding bugs, disease, and "Big Pharma." Likewise, *Ice Spiders* suggests that science can be used for good, but the wealthy white patriarchy cannot be trusted to consider the interests of humankind or the planet beyond their own personal concerns. Here, a government lab genetically modifies spiders, not as weapons but to develop spider silk into defense materials like bulletproof vests. However, obsessed with weaponizing his creations, Prof. Marks alters their intended growth rates, resulting in spiders larger than humans.[58] Furthermore, Marks wants the facility's military guards to help him capture the spiders instead of killing them and to maintain the utmost secrecy so that he can continue the project (rather than warning the civilians at the nearby ski resort, which Dr. Sommers sensibly tries to do). The film ends ominously—although Marks is killed by the last of his creations, a mysterious government bigwig (a rich white man wearing a cowboy hat) abruptly arrives in a snowcat with extra soldiers to take the final spider away. Similar in theme to earlier blockbusters like *Jurassic Park* and its progeny, Syfy films reinvigorate trepidations surrounding genetic engineering, the military-industrial complex, shady government and corporate interests, and gigantic creatures for twenty-first century concerns. Thus, Syfy films continue to adapt these genre characteristics with the ongoing influences of science and technology in discourses of ecology, gender, and race, sometimes critiquing while also perpetuating these ideas. Furthermore, just as films (and novels) like *Jurassic Park* pull from earlier literary

[58] Even the film's scientists are unable to explain the spiders' metabolic rate and how the spiders are able to tolerate the cold winter weather of the film's mountain setting. By tampering with nature in one specific way (size), the film suggests that other varied and unpredictable consequences will inevitably arise.

inspiration like Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912), so too do Syfy bug films draw from Victorian-era antecedents.

Victorian Insects and "Other" Bugs

During the Victorian period, the increasing popularity of terrifying bugs in horror fiction was influenced by natural historians' depictions of insects and arachnids as especially horrifying or unnatural creatures in the chain of being. These depictions are often racialized in literature of the era, where "foreign" or dangerous bugs threaten white, Western characters.[59] J.F.M. Clark suggests that this language threatens Darwinian ideals of colonization by displacing "civilized" European plants and animals with foreign, "savage" usurpers.[60] In Wells's "Empire of the Ants," Holroyd discovers an ant species along the Amazon that has developed sentience and grown larger than their usual state (though not up to a big bug film's standards).[61] These ants are systematically infiltrating the area and eating all humans in their path. Most worrisomely, they are not destroyed at the story's conclusion: instead, the narrator predicts the date of their arrival in Europe and the inevitable destruction of humankind.[62] Wells and his contemporaries were much

---

[59] For instance, Clark describes England's "Colorado beetle scare" during the 1870s, where potato crops were perceived to be in imminent danger and warnings about this voracious, invasive bug included many discourses around the "alien insect pest." Although in this case the invading bug was of American origin, there are many other examples of foreign, racialized insect invasions as well. See Clark, 135.

[60] Clark, 140.

[61] H.G. Wells, "The Empire of the Ants," in *The Short Stories of H.G. Wells* (London: Ernest Benn, 1927), 94-95.

[62] Wells, 106; As Sleigh notes, Wells also wrote much larger ant-like creatures with the Selenites in *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), where he uses ant characteristics to evoke repulsion towards these aliens and human-like size to emphasize the horror of the familiar, while "Empire" uses mass swarms of near-normal-sized ants. The protagonist, Bedford, is horrified by these aliens and refers to them derogatively as "insect-men" and "ants," while the scientist Cavor is in awe of their technology and social organization. This depiction emphasizes ants and insects as creatures most alien from humans, as well as the longevity of this idea emerging with Victorian literature (and early examples of science fiction, including the spider-like technology in *The War of the Worlds*, 1898). In some cases, the aliens can be bug-like, and in others the bugs can be

concerned with the intelligence of nonhuman creatures, including ants, and Sleigh notes that rationality was perceived to be the realm of white men over both invertebrates and so-called "uncivilized man."[63] Bellin, meanwhile, points to Wells's "Empire" to argue that terrifying insects are tethered to the emergence of science fiction as a genre, and that their methodical invasion and colonization reflects anxiety around "the random and untamable forces of Nature" and "the underlying savagery of Western civilization."[64] While monster-ants may evoke *Them!*, these methodical swarms also influenced another alien bug film, Syfy's *The Hive* (2008), wherein an alien spacecraft arrives on Earth and massive swarms of ants emerge to devour humans at an incredibly rapid rate.[65] Over a century after Wells's story, these issues and concerns still appear frequently in Syfy's films, showing the remarkable staying power of insect horror.

Although nineteenth-century authors were often informed by actual science, they also engaged in prejudices (including scientific discourse) that perceived bugs as violent

---

alien (often in more contemporary works and films). See H.G. Wells, *The First Men in the Moon*, ed. Leon Stover (Jefferson: McFarland, 1998), 163, 175, 182.

[63] Nineteenth-century natural historians and entomologists hotly debated whether insects and other creatures were capable of intelligence and whether that could be defined as logical reason or mere instinct. Socially organized insects, such as ants, bees, and wasps, were a particular locus of this debate, as they appeared to have a purposefully structured society and complex communication methods. As Sleigh argues, in the early 1900s the reassuring boundaries between humans and ants (in this case) became indistinct. See Clark, 34-36, and Sleigh, 62; Wells used two behavior types from actual species that are commonly known as "army ants." In reality, such army ants could (and did) bite people to death, and as Sleigh points out, this is indeed what happens to the lieutenant character in "Empire." See Sleigh, 57.

[64] Bellin, 147.

[65] Like the ants in *Them!*, those in *The Hive* are actually aliens, and the film emphasizes their Otherness through their supernatural capabilities. Although none of these ants are winged, their swarms float and create giant tentacle-like shapes in the air (for instance, giant hands to grab at people). These features make them seem more aligned with the alien machines of Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898) or the sentinels of *The Matrix* (1999), except that they are living bugs. They also use these shapes to send messages, for instance by forming DNA strands of molecules, suggesting very intelligent life (of much concern to Wells). As Sleigh points out, suggesting the threat of swarming insects, Wells emphasizes the horror produced by sheer numbers when Holroyd is affected by the idea that "in a few miles of this forest there must be more ants than there are men in the whole world!" See Sleigh, 44, and Wells, "Empire," 97.

or threatening, especially spiders. Naturalist Phillip Henry Gosse, writing in 1857, generally praises insects for their skill and adaptability, but is not so kind to arachnids.[66] He argues that humanity has generally agreed to view them "with revulsion and abhorrence," and that naturalists have confirmed in them "the stigma of a bad character,—decidedly, undeniably *bad*."[67] He elaborates that they are "bloodthirsty and vindictive," as well as "treacherous and cruel even to their own kind" and "bold and prompt in warfare."[68] Bugs are often viewed as the nonhuman animal that is most different from humans, the most alien and hardest with whom to empathize. Moreover, these evil and foreign associations play out in imperial adventures, both in Victorian literature and modern film. One of the more flagrant examples of racial Othering in a Syfy production appears in *In the Spider's Web* (2007), where American travelers in India encounter venomous spiders and an illegal organ-harvesting ring. The travelers are forced to seek help from the (white) American Dr. Lecorpus (Lance Henriksen), who lives in the village when one of their party is bitten by a spider and needs medical attention quickly. The village appears as mysterious, sinister, and seemingly home to a spider-worshipping cult, but Dr. Lecorpus also leads the organ-harvesting ring with his mysterious "brother" (an Indian doctor who disappeared years earlier).[69] Various members of the party are

---

[66] Gosse writes that insects have the "highest point of comparative perfection among invertebrate animals," either by "condensation of their organs, the solidity of their skeleton, the consequent vigour and precision of their movements, the concentration of their nervous system, or the manifold intelligence which they display." He praises these attributes as amazingly apt with the purpose of admiring the wonder of God's creation, but his description here gives the impression of perfect killing machines from the perspective of horror. See Philip Henry Gosse, *Life in Its Lower, Intermediate, and Higher Forms* (London: James Nisbet, 1857), 170.

[67] Gosse, 184.

[68] Gosse, 184. Nor was Gosse alone regarding these sentiments: Victorian naturalists such as Alfred Russel Wallace and the esteemed Charles Darwin offer similar thoughts in their accounts of various bugs in their respective travel narratives, *The Malay Archipelago* (1869) and *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839).

[69] It is to Lecorpus's advantage to garner the spiders' attention because the paralytic properties of their venom aids in keeping the organs in good shape during transportation, so the doctor

either killed, ensnared by the spiders, or captured by the organ-harvesters. Compounding these dangers, the film juxtaposes hyper-modern medicine with the trope of the Othered and ostensibly ancient, superstitious village with a "witch doctor." Rather than relying on modified or mutated spiders to add to the fear, *In the Spider's Web* draws on imperialist discourses to emphasize the sinister, cult-worship aspects of the locals.[70] In this Syfy selection, various spider species made to seem natural within the "dark" wilderness are in line with many Victorian adventure stories, evoking mystical and imperialist ideas that conflate foreign places, people, and cultures with a primitive, threatening Otherness.[71]

Like *In the Spider's Web*, *Camel Spiders* (2011) opens abroad, this time in Afghanistan, during a battle between Taliban and American forces. The former are killed by the titular camel spiders—visible to the audience but unbeknownst to the Americans. A medic (Hugh Mun) in their unit examines the human bodies afterwards and claims that it was the "beshbesh . . . my people call them devils of the sand." Notably, the camel spiders are not modified or experimented on at all. They are portrayed as natural, deadly features of this Other environment that then infiltrate the United States. The medic explains further that they are "extremely deadly" and take only days to reproduce; Capt. Mike Sturges (Michael Krause) replies that "they were angels for us today" (by killing the Taliban fighters). However, he unwittingly brings a small "beshbesh" to America

---

encourages the village's spider-cult tendencies (which are not elaborated on and merely left as a racist stereotype).

[70] All villagers (including Dr. Lecorpus) have the same spider tattoo, and there is a sacrificial feast scene where the villagers (sans Dr. Lecorpus) yell and gyrate around a bonfire while performing generically "creepy" acts like eating spiders.

[71] See Brantlinger, McClintock, and many others on the Victorian imperialist project. These adventure stories typically involved white English men travelling to foreign places and encountering the wilderness and native peoples, both of which were portrayed as similarly primitive and dangerous according to imperial ideologies. Popular examples include: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), and H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1887).

when it hitches a ride in a body bag.[72] In America, Sturges and Sheriff Ken Beaumont (C. Thomas Howell) witness the spiders attack a local restaurant, and the movie generally follows this group of diners as they escape. When his friend succumbs to the camel spider onslaught, Jeff (Michael Bernardi) exclaims: "what the hell are they? Some military experiment gone wrong?", but Sturges responds that they are "a freak of nature" from Afghanistan. The spiders are not a military or government experiment gone awry; they are only explained as a natural, dangerous feature of Middle Eastern and Central Asian deserts. In the same way that the ants in *Them!* embody the anti-communist fears of a socialized hive in the 1950s, so do the camel spiders manifest contemporary Islamophobia and fears of terrorism. But, as Tsutsui notes, "the symbolism, metaphors, codes, and allegories cherished by generations of critics and scholars are all present in the fifties big bug classics, but we should never lose sight of those great, huge, and murderous creepy crawlies."[73] Tsutsui's observation holds equally true for Syfy productions as well.

The creatures commonly known as "camel spiders" are in fact neither spiders nor scorpions (nor camels), but members of an arachnid group known as solifuges (though the film persistently refers to them as spiders).[74] When Sgt. Shelly Underwood (Rocky DeMarco) asks Capt. Sturges, "what's worse, the Taliban or these spiders?," he responds:

---

[72] Savvy readers will realize that this plotline bears uncanny resemblance to that of *Arachnophobia*, wherein mysterious South American spiders catch a ride in a casket with a body being repatriated to California.

[73] Tsutsui, 246.

[74] Solifugae are part of the arachnida class (as are spiders and scorpions). The largest solifuges only reach a length of about six inches, though many urban legends exaggerate their size and threat to humans—the arachnids came into the popular American mindset following a viral 2004 photo by an American soldier in Iraq. A synopsis of *Camel Spiders* claims that solifuges "have tormented our armed forces in the Middle East for years," which is not the case in the film or real life.

"technically they're not spiders, they only have six legs, so . . . I hate spiders." Here, and throughout the film, the solifuges are characterized as "foreign" and "bad" like their source, Afghanistan. Sleigh argues that in Victorian texts like "Empire," ants were a synecdoche for "the threat of savage lands" in conveying anxieties around the stability of the British Empire.[75] The threat of dangerous insects was partially responsible for the "cultural myth of the 'white man's grave,'" and Sleigh argues that colonial mastery required fighting human and bug forces.[76] Later, the monster-bug films of the 1950s portray their monsters as an alien enemy intent on "national or global domination"; in these films, fears around scientific excess call into question which side was the worse threat to Earth's stability.[77] Contemporary Syfy films draw on these Victorian and Cold War tropes and sympathies, although the exact foreignness of the bugs and the way they are combated has changed to represent twenty-first century anxieties and sensibilities. Patrick Lucanio writes of the 1950s big bug films' comforting displays of the spectacle of "massive military hardware" to conquer the monster, which reassures the audience as well as characters, who all rally with the military forces.[78] Peter Biskind likewise notes: "where science caused the problem, science often solved it too."[79] In *Camel Spiders*, "college guy" Jeff periodically questions the presence of the spiders and the military authority in their survival situation, but he is consistently dismissed by other characters (military or otherwise). In the final showdown, he rallies and uses a gun against the spiders (after previously refusing and claiming to be a pacifist). Likewise, in *Ice Spiders*,

---

[75] Sleigh, 34-35.
[76] Sleigh, 40.
[77] Bellin, 146-147.
[78] Lucanio, 72-73.
[79] Peter Biskind, *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 104.

the military proves relatively effective, although Capt. Baker (Thomas Calabro) is more willing to work with the nefarious Prof. Marks for the sake of his knowledge of the spiders, while protagonists skier Dan "Dash" Dashiell (Patrick Muldoon) and Dr. Sommers collaborate to save civilians rather than work with the corrupt scientist.[80]

Similarly, the spiders of *Ice Spiders* are allegedly developed from fossil matter found in Afghanistan, then spliced with genes from six different types of modern spiders from around the world. Specifying the fossil's origins in Afghanistan characterizes the arachnids as both atavistic and foreign.[81] *In the Spider's Web* also depicts various spider species from different continents and climates in one place. They weave enormous webs but otherwise appear unmodified, as in *Camel Spiders*, yet their danger is still associated with the Indian village locale that portrays them as "scary" and "foreign." Sleigh points out that entomology developed in the Victorian period partially due to the need to understand and regulate insects in the "colonies" because they threatened the "colonial project"; in this way, they were also anthropomorphized, especially because many insects appear militaristic, such as the "army ants" in Wells's story.[82] Freeland suggests that new issues were presented in 1990s monster-bug iterations in film, such as in *Mimic* (1997), where the antagonists represent disease and social concerns, as the bugs first destroy marginalized populations, such as "unnamed and unnoticed homeless people."[83] Similar

---

[80] It is revealed that Professor Marks is ex-military, but his faults are associated more with his scientific pursuits and the film suggests that the military itself is a cohesive force, while Marks has simply gone rogue.
[81] The film does not specify all six species, but the black widow is verbally and visibly identified (also named are a "spitting spider" and an indeterminate jumping spider). Each of the six are reputed to have the associated "personalities" and traits of these spiders, yet they have also become so modified that this perceived stability is uncertain. However, the black widow is conniving and remains in the lab to prey on the workers while the other spiders escape quickly (whether these are authentic traits of real black widows is debatable).
[82] Sleigh, 36.
[83] Freeland, 80.

depictions are presented (perhaps less sympathetically) in many Syfy films like *Mansquito*, *Camel Spiders*, *Big Ass Spider!*, and *In the Spider's Web*, where marginalized populations are targeted earliest and used as collateral damage.[84] Bugs are associated with Other, foreign, and unknown forces in many Syfy films.[85] By commenting on serious issues through an often absurd lens, Syfy pictures open a space where many contemporary concerns can be examined and critiqued in an unlikely medium, perhaps even aligning absurd plots and effects with equally absurd anxieties as a form of cultural critique.

People Go Buggy

Many Syfy bug films emphasize the dangers of insect reproduction because their colonies and swarms can easily grow beyond any possibility of control. In these dangerous situations, there is often some anxiety around gender and reproduction also imposed on the human characters (either through possession or some attempt at control on the insects' part), making the distinctions between human and bug uncomfortably blurry. These disquieting elements have been used in horror fiction since at least the Victorian era as well, notably in Richard Marsh's novel *The Beetle* (1897).[86] The

---

[84] In *Mansquito*, for example, Dr. Michaels wants to use convicted murderer Ray Erikson to test their cures for the "Guilin virus" in humans; however, Erikson is exposed to radiation and starts to become the mansquito. Here, the issue is tied to contemporary concerns around West Nile, making the mosquitoes more overtly dangerous than simply annoying.

[85] For instance, Dr. Von Struble claims that the term "lavalantula" was originally coined by the ancient Mayans—the film does not expand on this odd *non sequitur*, but it nevertheless contributes to an Othering of the spiders in both space and time. On a smaller scale, Chris (Patrick Renna) claims that there are "big wasps" in China with eight-inch wings, making the oversized volcanic spiders seem more realistic to these characters.

[86] Additionally, Sleigh writes that insect reproduction was also threateningly vast in nonfictional Victorian accounts. She cites the following statistic from the period as an example: "if a pair of houseflies was allowed to breed unchecked for a season, it was calculated that they would produce 5,598,720,000,000 progeny." See Sleigh, 47.

eponymous villain from Egypt (a British colonial possession at the time), seeks revenge against Paul Lessingham, an Englishman who escaped the Beetle's sacrificial cult years earlier.[87] While sometimes appearing human, sometimes as an approximately miniature-poodle-sized beetle, the Beetle attacks several victims and possesses the unfortunate Robert Holt upon its arrival in London, using him as a vehicle to access Paul.[88] Part of the Beetle's threat is sexualized, hypnotic control, and it is characterized as a predator on white Englishness, compounding these anxieties around the stability of white English masculinity especially and the potential for an individual to become a mere puppet.[89] Several Syfy selections invoke these unstable distinctions between human and insect to perpetuate terror. In *Mansquito*, as he mutates into the titular creature, Ray Erikson (Matt Jordan) seeks out old acquaintances then stabs them with his phallic proboscis tube to drain their blood.[90] Dr. Allen is exposed to radiation in the lab and starts to transform as well, although this change allows her to develop an apparent understanding of the mansquito's plans—she believes that he is aware of her unstable human-mosquito state and will seek to mate with her.[91] As she says, "he's more mosquito than man now," thus

---

[87] Richard Marsh, *The Beetle*, ed. Minna Vuohelainen (Richmond: Valancourt Books, 2008), 214-215. *The Mummy* (1999) is a more recent canonical example of this phenomenon—drawing on similar anxieties to those of *The Beetle*, as well as tropes of Victorian adventure fiction, the film centers around British and American adventurers in Egypt. It features some very tenacious scarab beetles that mechanically attack en masse and appear to be nigh-indestructible. Its sequel, *The Mummy Returns* (2001), features Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson as a half-human half-scorpion demigod, who also stars in his own spinoff, *The Scorpion King* (2002). Quasi-supernatural, these bugs appear atavistically associated with the land itself and enact punishment on behalf of the gods of the underworld.

[88] Marsh, 17-18, 34-35.

[89] Marsh's novel shares many similarities with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (also published in 1897), notably the exoticized, mysterious figure arriving in London and terrorizing the local English population.

[90] In reality, only female mosquitoes prey on people and carry blood, using it to nourish their young, but here the film flips the gender roles (likely without realizing it). Additionally, Erickson does not develop six legs, but his limbs become elongated and his hands pointed, while his bloodsucking proboscis is visually disturbing and phallic.

[91] Alas, they miss the opportunity to use the counterpart phrase, "womansquito."

his only purpose is to eat and mate. Similarly, when the Thorax Company sets out to exterminate the island's carnivorous ants in *The Hive* (brought in by the government and working with the army), an ant crawls into the ear of one soldier, Bill (Tom Wopat), who consequently becomes increasingly erratic.[92] In these ways, some Syfy pictures blur the border between human and insect, to terrifying effect.

These distinctions between human and insect also invoke the bug's alien or machine-like status, which is strongly tied to threats of its endless reproduction, perhaps most evident in the ultimate danger of the spider's "stage five" reproduction in *Big Ass Spider!*. Braidotti suggests that insects appear machinic in part because of their very generative and relentless reproduction, and their varied sexual and reproductive systems.[93] These fears of relentless and in some ways alien (to a heteropatriarchal sexual framework) reproduction influence horror representations. In *Camel Spiders*, restaurant server Patty (Diana Terranova) asks how they can eliminate the spiders, and cook Joe (Kurt Yaeger) immediately responds, "kill the queen, right?" Although Jeff correctly reminds them that "spiders don't have queens," Joe's strategy is typical of these films, utilizing the horror that Freeland describes when she argues that big bug films are primarily terrifying because of these queens who can reproduce rapidly.[94] Unsurprisingly, the center of the lava network in *Lavalantula* is the "queen's chamber," and Dr. Von

---

[92] The Thorax Company is aptly named, given that the thorax is part of an insect's anatomy. Bill, suffering from his strange co-existence with an ant, argues throughout the movie that they should simply nuke the ant population. However, these suggestions alternate with periodic shots of his inner brain where the ant appears to snip a little vein and he becomes more unstable (though not quite to the extent of *Black Swarm*'s mindless human drones). Aside from the biological difficulties of this scenario, the partnership is portrayed as invasive and harmful to Bill, who begins to lose his sense of self.

[93] Braidotti, 110-111. She also suggests that insects' "polymorphous antiphallic sexuality" feeds anxieties around "unnatural copulation and births."

[94] Freeland, 70.

Struble helpfully instructs: “if you kill the mamalantula, you kill them all.” Neither colonies of this kind nor any kind of queen is typical behavior for arachnids, but they offer a straightforward goal for these films and gender an ultimate antagonist based on reproductive power. Bellin suggests that the emphasis on rescuing the children in *Them!* presents children as vulnerable as well as the promise of humanity’s future.[95] By saving them, the film reinstates heteropatriarchal reproduction in lieu of the threateningly Other reproduction of the queen ants.[96] These earlier films tend to put children at risk, and Syfy carries on this tradition to emphasize the threat to the reproduction of the species. In *The Hive*, the ants are prevented from taking over the island by a bomb (triggered by Bill in a moment of clarity and self-sacrifice), while the child hostage and adult couple escape to presumed heteropatriarchal happiness.[97] These films place humanity at risk from the ultimate threat of endless reproduction of an Othered enemy.

Couched in antagonistic militarist language, the horror of *Them!* lies partly in the implication “that the insect menace is already there,” building an empire unknown to humans but using their own “advanced structures to launch an invasion” against humanity.[98] This phenomenon (and its imperialist overtones) is also present in stories like “Empire of the Ants,” as well as many Syfy films. Overall, these films are quite pessimistic about humankind’s chances of surviving these natural (albeit sometimes

---

[95] Bellin, 153.
[96] Freeland, 75.
[97] This pattern of defeating the threatening insect reproduction is taken further in several Syfy films that explore the threat of a human being involved in this abnormal reproduction. In *Black Swarm*, the protagonist’s young daughter Kelsey Kozik (Rebecca Windheim) eats a pheromone-coated peach that improbably results in the wasps believing she is their designated “queen.” Katherine Randell finds her and takes her to their massive nest inside a granary, where Kelsey is meant to act as a host. Similarly, the ants of *The Hive* hold the young girl Ying (Elizabeth Bodner) hostage in order to negotiate with their human antagonists.
[98] Bellin, 153.

modified) disaster monsters, and they seem to reflect Earth's current state of climate change and ecological peril. Ultimately, Syfy's movies often show the bugs prevailing in some form or another, even after their apparent destruction. After all, as the old saying goes, when humanity is gone the cockroaches will still be around. Although perhaps also seeking to make a sequel, Syfy films perpetuate the genre convention of ending with the possibility of the insect rampage being renewed.[99] *Them!* also ends with the threat of continued horror in the future, which Bellin argues is a device that reminds audiences that they must be constantly vigilant against the insect (or communist) threat.[100] Here and elsewhere, any triumph for the protagonists becomes suspect and leaves the impression that further monsters are either already here or just around the corner.

Interestingly, what appear to be serious and earnest societal concerns in earlier narratives—fears of the colonial Other in Victorian texts or "red scare" communist anxieties in the 1950s—tends to become absurd in Syfy's pictures, although the films do not totally avoid or forsake some of the more problematic Othering of earlier texts and

---

[99] Many of these films simply show a new nest (*Black Swarm*) or a return of the same nest (*The Hive*). Others reinvent this traditional ending with a metatextual twist, such as *Camel Spiders*, which introduces a new scene of a drive-in theatre where a horror film is playing (at a moment where a young woman is screaming, of course). The shot pans around to show that the projector operator, as well as all the moviegoers have been fatally attacked, while the film fizzles out and only shows shadows of the rampant camel spiders on the screen. This scene, in addition to calling attention to movie audiences watching Syfy's offerings, references the infamous film *The Tingler* (1959), including creator William Castle's "Percepto!" gimmick of "releasing" a tingler into the theater through the use of electric buzzers. *Big Ass Spider!* also mocks this convention by having Maj. Tanner call Alex and ask, "what's the biggest cockroach you've ever seen?", before showing a giant roach climbing the Statue of Liberty (and nearly her size). As might be expected from the film's title, no cockroach has been present until this small scene during the credits, indicating their parody of the "it isn't over yet" trope. These ambiguous and often threatening endings where the bugs return or continue to appear occur in many other offerings from Syfy: *Bugs* (2003), *Locusts: The 8th Plague* (2005), *Swarmed* (2005), and *Infestation* (2009).

[100] Bellin, 154.

pictures. Unlike the somewhat somber tones taken in earlier narratives, Syfy instead dabbles and perhaps even specializes in making their films absurd, over-the-top, and tongue-in-cheek. In this way, Syfy's films can be understood as a critique on contemporary concerns ranging from Islamophobia, changing sexuality and gender norms, militarism, racial equality, and a host of other issues. By presenting fears in films that prove more comical and absurd than serious and somber, the underlying issues are themselves trivialized, although often without their more problematic aspects being directly confronted. Whereas Marsh's *The Beetle* likely contained a true fear of the colonial Other, for example, it is hard to take *Camel Spiders* as a serious fear of Middle Eastern terrorists (or a literal solifuge biological invasion), although it nevertheless reproduces some of the more troubling aspects of militarism and colonialism. In this case, the Syfy picture can be read as a critique of Islamophobia rather than an endorsement of it.

Ecological concerns in Syfy pictures are similarly without a clear appeal to conservation and environmental action, leaving them with no obvious message. In *Mansquito*, for example, it is not the danger of biotechnology itself that is portrayed as a concern, but the evil intentions and greed of one character, as is the case in *Ice Spiders*. Returning to Syfy's tour de force *Lavalantula*, the underlying message is certainly not that humanity should expect an eruption of giant spiders from a volcano in Los Angeles, but rather that it is humanity's hubris in the face of nature that must be modified. In the end, the wide range of Syfy's big bug oeuvre offers little in the way of commonalities and recurring features, and perhaps there lies the key. Bugs are perceived as horrific in part because of their multitudinous populations and varieties, including their abilities to

metamorphize or molt into new forms. In this way, they are aptly suited to continue to morph in a genre that contains many allusions to historical and cinematic precursors but is also continually developing. Additionally, bugs are suited to cater to a wide variety of anxieties, especially around science, technology, and the environment, in order to establish terror. They can embody fear of the Other, as well as fears around climate change and vengeful nature simultaneously. These varied and numerous bugs and the complex anxieties they invoke are explored by and lend themselves to Syfy's extensive oeuvre. While seemingly inconsequential, the popularity of these films and the ways they draw on the existing genre indicates their role in shaping cultural perceptions of bugs and the anxieties they perpetuate.

Works Cited and Consulted

Bellin, Joshua David. "Us or *Them!*: *Silent Spring* and the 'Big Bug' Films of the 1950s." *Extrapolation* vol. 50, no. 1 (2009): 145-168.

Berenbaum, May R. and Richard J. Leskosky. "Movies, Insects in." In *Encyclopedia of Insects*, edited by Vincent H. Resh, et al., 668-674. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science and Technology, 2009.

Biskind, Peter. *Seeing is Believing: How Hollywood Taught Us to Stop Worrying and Love the Fifties*. New York: Pantheon, 1983.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Brantlinger, Patrick. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Clark, J.F.M. *Bugs and the Victorians*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species*. London: John Murray, 1859.

---. *The Voyage of the Beagle*. London: Henry Colburn, 1839.

Davis, Blair and Kial Natale. "'The Pound of Flesh Which I Demand': American Horror in Cinema, Gore, and the Box Office, 1998-2007." In *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium*, edited by Steffen Hantke, 35-57. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010.

Freeland, Cynthia A. *The Naked and the Undead*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2000.

Gibson, Shane. “Can mosquitoes carry coronavirus? People, not skeeters, transmit COVID-19, says Manitoba researcher.” *Global News*. April 8, 2020. https://globalnews.ca/news/6793894/coronavirus-mosquitoes-manitoba/.

Glassy, Mark C. *The Biology of Science Fiction Cinema*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2001.

Gosse, Philip Henry. *Life in Its Lower, Intermediate, and Higher Forms*. London: James Nisbet, 1857.

Grant, Barry Keith. *Monster Cinema*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018.

Leskosky, Richard J. “Size Matters: Big Bugs on the Big Screen.” In *Insect Poetics*, edited by Eric C. Brown, 318-341. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Lewis, Tanya. “Goliath Encounter: Puppy-Sized Spider Surprises Scientist in Rainforest.” *Live Science*. October 17, 2014. https://www.livescience.com/48340-goliath-birdeater-surprises-scientist.html.

Lucanio, Patrick. *Them or Us: Archetypal Interpretations of Fifties Alien Invasion Films*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Manus, Peter, dir. *The Hive*. 2008; Los Angeles: RHI Entertainment. DVD.

Marsh, Richard. *The Beetle*. Edited by Minna Vuohelainen. Richmond: Valancourt Books, 2008.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. London: Routledge, 1995.

McKechnie, Claire Charlotte. “Spiders, Horror, and Animal Others in Late Victorian Empire Fiction.” *Journal of Victorian Culture* vol. 17, no. 4 (2012): 505-516.

Mendez, Mike, dir. *Big Ass Spider!* 2013. Hollywood: Epic Pictures Group.

---. *Lavalantula*. 2015; West Hollywood: CineTel Films. DVD.

Murray, Robin L. and Joseph K. Heumann. *Monstrous Nature: Environment and Horror on the Big Screen*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

Schmitt, Cannon. “Victorian Beetlemania.” In *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, edited by Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay, 35-52. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2007.

Simon, Nick, dir. *2 Lava 2 Lantula!* 2016; West Hollywood: CineTel Films. DVD.

Skal, David J. *Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998.

Sleigh, Charlotte. “Empire of the Ants: H.G. Wells and Tropical Entomology.” *Science as Culture* vol. 10, no. 1 (2001): 33-71.

Soulodre, Alyce, and Rhoads, Sean. “‘The volcanoes and the spiders are *one*’: Insect Horror and Vengeful Nature in Syfy’s Monster-Bug Films.” *Attack of the New B Movies: Essays on SYFY Original Films*, edited by Justin Wigard and Mitch Ploskonka, McFarland, 2023, pp. 167-189.

Takács, Tibor, dir. *Ice Spiders*. 2007; Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. DVD.

---. *Mansquito*. 2005; Los Angeles: Nu Image Films. DVD.

Tsutsui, William M. “Looking Straight at *Them!*: Understanding the Big Bug Movies of the 1950s.” *Environmental History* vol. 12, no. 2 (Apr. 2007): 237-253.

Wallace, Alfred Russel. *The Malay Archipelago*. London: Macmillan, 1869.

Wells, H.G. “The Empire of the Ants.” In *The Short Stories of H.G. Wells*, 92-108. London: Ernest Benn, 1927.

---. *The First Men in the Moon*. Edited by Leon Stover. Jefferson: McFarland, 1998.

---. “The Valley of the Spiders.” In *The Short Stories of H.G. Wells*, 860-871. London: Ernest Benn, 1927.

Westfahl, Gary, edit. *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy: Themes, Works, and Wonders*. Greenwood Press, 2005.

Winning, David, dir. *Black Swarm*. 2007; Los Angeles: RHI Entertainment. DVD.

Winsor, Terry, dir. *In the Spider's Web*. 2007; Los Angeles: RHI Entertainment. DVD.

Wynorski, Jim, dir. *Camel Spiders*. 2011; Los Angeles: New Horizons Picture Corp. DVD.

Yacowar, Maurice. “The Bug in the Rug: Notes on the Disaster Genre.” In *Film Genre Reader III*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, 277-295. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003.

Monster Club ™ Podcast, Episode 15: "roar / frogs"

Hosted by Benjamin Reid, Sean Rhoads, and Alyce Soulodre

Released October 2022

Introduction

Monster Club ™ Podcast[101] is created and hosted by Benjamin Reid, Sean Rhoads, and Alyce Soulodre, as a spin-off of their in-person Monster Movie Club established during their time together as English Literature graduate students at Queen's University. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, they gathered remotely to revitalize their B-movie-watching club at a distance, and subsequently started the podcast during the summer of 2021 to share their thoughts on the movies they watched. The podcast focuses on B-movies about monsters (somewhat loosely defined, especially during "noncanonical" holiday special episodes), analyzing what makes them frightening or appealing, or just plain bad. The hosts often take on different nicknames based on the episode's topics or themes, to lampoon the genre. The following transcript is from Episode 15, "roar / frogs," in which we discuss Noel Marshall's 1982 film *Roar* and George McCowan's *Frogs* (1972). We decided to watch *Roar* for its bombastic and ambitious attempts at depicting what life would be like while living with dozens of big, wild cats, where the real-life and fictional hubris of the filmmakers and characters mirror each other. I suggested pairing the film with *Frogs* because of a tenuous connection with Tippi Hedren, who stars in and helped make *Roar*, and is perhaps most famous for her

[101] We are not actually trademarked, it's a riff to distinguish ourselves from other monster podcasts.

starring role in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), an infamous monstrous nature film, that I saw *Frogs* as descending from.

As evident in the following transcript, these movies are monstrous based on their animals who often take on a villainous role. *Roar* is the brainchild of Tippi Hedren and Noel Marshall, taking eleven years to make. In the film, the married couple (played by Hedren and Marshall, who were married at the time) are estranged, implicitly because Marshall's character Hank is determined to prove through living it day-by-day that living with dozens of large, wild cats of various species and native climates is possible and that these cats can co-exist happily together. His family is left alone to defend themselves against the wild cats, but eventually develop a mutual understanding in time for Hank's triumphant return, at which they rejoice and celebrate together in harmony with the cats. In *Frogs*, outsider Pickett Smith (Sam Elliott), encounters a wealthy family in the midst of a Fourth of July holiday and birthday celebration at their family plantation. Meanwhile, a plague of frogs (and snakes, and other reptiles, and arthropods) descends upon them, seemingly to take revenge against their presence in the swamp land. The Crockett family, led by patriarch Jason, seek to poison the frogs who are allegedly spoiling their holiday, and Pickett attempts to defend the wildlife and the area's biodiversity against their destruction. Subsequently, the wildlife takes its revenge upon the family, gradually destroying them one by one. Pickett and Jason's daughter Karen escape (although their freedom is ambiguous), while Jason refuses to leave his estate and is overwhelmed by the vengeful wildlife.

Both films, of course, share in common a plethora of wildlife, with swarms of creatures encroaching on their human animal counterparts, for better or for worse. They

are monster movies wherein seemingly innocuous (or at least, not super-powered or otherwise unusual) wildlife becomes monstrous through sheer volume, the same phenomena where the harmless locust becomes harmful as a plague. Hank's house in *Roar* is packed to the brim with big cats, ranging in species and origin, while *Frogs* claims an excessive number of the eponymous amphibian, as well as a variety of reptiles and arthropods. Both films center around a household consisting of a traditional white family: Hank's family arrives at his home while he is away, and without a patriarch (who is also keeper of the cats), chaos ensues; meanwhile the Crocketts gather to celebrate patriarch Jason on his birthday, as well as the alleged birth of their nation, but their festivities are interrupted by the wildlife.

While Hank welcomes and cultivates his brood of cats in his own home, the Crocketts are annoyed and seek to destroy the frogs on their property. As discussed in the episode, they feel that their holiday is being ruined by the frogs' noisome croaking and want to poison the creatures, which only outsider Pickett Smith objects to as it would have repercussions on all the area's wildlife. In response, the creatures murder the Crocketts one by one, leaving only Karen and the youngest boy left. Writing on insects in film, May R. Berenbaum and Richard J. Leskosky note that monstrous bugs or swarms tend to represent nature taking revenge on humanity (669), while Charlotte Sleigh, writing on H.G. Wells' man-eating ants in "Empire of the Ants" suggests that the swarming ants are nature's retribution against colonial destruction (50). These themes are somewhat heavy-handed in *Frogs*, with the assorted creepy crawlies taking their revenge against the plantation-owning family.

Hank has, of course, created this swarm of cats, many of which are displaced and not native to the continent of Africa at all,[102] and aspires to live harmoniously among them. However, they remain wild animals, and the household's peace is rather fraught, as they roughhouse amongst each other and the humans they encounter.[103] In addition to their sheer numbers being overwhelming, the cats are individually dangerous, especially the allegedly villainous Togar. Hank's determination to establish a relationship with these cats, and to encourage their co-habitation with each other has led to his estrangement from his family, but during the course of the film they visit his house in order to attempt a reconciliation. However, they arrive while he is away (having left for the airport to pick them up way too late, and missed them), and encounter the cats without his expertise (such as it is). Finding themselves quite literally in the lions' den, they struggle against a nature that while not exactly vengeful, is decidedly wild and unpredictable.

Both films, too, end by reaffirming traditional family structures, although *Frogs* does so in a much more sinister fashion. Despite their struggles against the cats (including in real life), *Roar* ends with unprecedented peace. Even before Hank returns to help, his family learns to trust the cats, so that by the time they are reunited, all are ready to live in harmony with the cats and each other without so much as a conversation about this abrupt turn of events. This saccharine conclusion is, to say the least, somewhat unexpected given the events of the film and its making. The film instates order amongst chaos, while affirming a nuclear family structure with their happy reunion. Their reconciliation attempts to obscure the carnage effected by the lion Togar on one of Hank's

[102] Moreover, the movie was filmed entirely in California, so that all the cats (except the cougars) were displaced from their natural habitats.
[103] As mentioned in the episode, this film was quite dangerous to make, and led to dozens of injuries amongst the cast and crew.

critics, who sought to shut down his feline operation. While Hank disapproves of Togar and regrets the death of his enemy, he hides the evidence and attempts to move past it. With a bit more nuance, the film might highlight this contradiction in his character and mar the allegedly happy ending, or at least suggest that the cats might continue to be unpredictable, but instead it opts for simplicity. Perhaps because the filmmakers mirror their characters, their hubris is affirmed as logical and correct, suggesting that, while nature cannot be tamed, it can be subjected to human constraints.

Frogs meanwhile, with its more straightforward monstrous nature storyline, ends on a sinister note, yet also reaffirms a traditional family structure. When most of the Crocketts are killed, some suggest that they ought to leave the house, but Jason refuses to abandon his home and the festivities. Pickett and Karen leave with her nephew, creating a new family structure amongst themselves and suggesting that the Crockett line might continue with this youngest heir. However, after battling various reptiles across the river, they are picked up by a family of tourists, whose child shows off a frog he caught while on their trip. This final image of the frog suggests the continuation of this threat and implies that nowhere is truly safe for them (a classic monster movie move). Meanwhile back at the plantation, Jason, having refused to leave, sits alone with his dog (aptly named Colonel), not moving while a positive plague of frogs encroaches and seems to consume him. In their final (for now) stroke of revenge, the monstrous frogs overcome the patriarch who remains in his home, underscoring who truly belongs and rules there – the frogs were there first, they seem to say, and will be there long after any Crockett.

This episode, like much of the podcast, is intertextual and referential, both generally and with subjects and themes relating to other pieces in this portfolio.

Monstrous nature movies are perhaps inherently centered around a fear of the Other, and often portray nature as vengeful (sometimes justified in the film, and sometimes apparently without provocation). I take up these ideas more thoroughly in Chapter 2 on Syfy monster bug films (notably also written with Sean Rhoads), and the notion of the Other is pervasive throughout this portfolio. Monstrous animals, specifically bugs, are also discussed in Chapter 4 on Creepy Crawlies, Masculinity, and Psychological Horror. The episode also mentions Noel Marshall's connection with *The Exorcist* (1973), and the curse associated with that film. I discuss the demonic and curses throughout the third section of this portfolio, and specifically the seeds of the satanic panic as emerging in 1970s B-movies in Chapter 8. *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* is a show that we reference frequently in the podcast, unsurprisingly as it is also about a band of nerds chatting through movies, and is something that we watched together often from the beginning of our Monster Movie Club. This episode is no exception: when referring to Togar the lion, we noted that his name resembles Torgo, a character in *Manos: The Hands of Fate*,[104] a 1966 schlockfest that infamously features in MST3K Season 4, Episode 24 (1993). In the episode, Torgo's theme music plays when we reference Togar the lion. While to some extent merely a tongue-in-cheek in-joke for those of our listeners who are also fans of MST3K (of which we assume are a sizeable demographic), this reference is also self-referential as we are watching these B-movies and mirroring MST3K characters watching B-movies (who are also inherently mirrored by their audience, watching them watching B-movies).

[104] Also, arguably, a pre-Satanic Panic movie.

Of course, we are also working within an entire genre of monster movies (especially the bad ones), specifically monstrous animal movies in this episode. As my co-host Sean mentions, there are many horror movies with animals that are, like *Frogs*, set in the American South. He references some featured in MST3K, including *The Blood Waters of Doctor Z* (1971; airing season 10, episode 5, 1999), and *Boggy Creek II: the Legend Continues* (1983; airing season 10, episode 6, 1999), and the show includes even more examples, such as *Attack of the Giant Leeches* (1959; airing season 4, episode 6, 1992), *Revenge of the Creature* (1955; airing season 8, episode 1, 1997), *Devil Fish* (1984; airing season 9, episode 11, 1998), and *Squirm* (1976; airing season 10, episode 12, 1999). More mainstream classics include *Piranha* (1978), *The Beyond* (1981), *The Evil Dead* (1981), *Cat People* (1982),[105] *Swamp Thing* (1982), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Pumpkinhead* (1988), *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), and *Jeepers Creepers* (2001).[106] While this subject is an article in itself, the conflation of Southern horror, Southern Gothic, and monster films is strong. Rural isolation, combined with long roots with the land (and all the racial dynamics that implies), as well as the power of the wilderness combine to make a compelling setting for horror. Although not set in the American South, or America at all, *Roar* explores the threatening aspects of rural isolation. However, *Frogs* has the more sinister take on monstrous nature, making it more emphatically horrific. In our episode, we explore the ways that these movies make it or break it as examples of the monstrous animal genre.

---

[105] Also featured in *Monster Club ™ Podcast*, Episode 5 (September 2021)
[106] As evident in this list, zombies make up a strong contingent of monsters in Southern horror films. Another notable, all-ages example is *Scooby-Doo on Zombie Island* (1998).

Transcript

[ambient music]

00:00:35 [distorted mysterious voice] *Monster Club* ™ Lunch Break Hot Takes, Episode 15: *Roar*, directed by Noel Marshall and *Frogs*, directed by George McCowan.

00:00:46 Benjamin

So, what about *Dragon's Den*?

[discussion about *Dragon's Den*]

00:05:10 Sean

Speaking of dangerous animals, though, dragons, sharks, and this week, lions…

00:05:16 Benjamin

Bad movies?

00:05:18 Sean

Lions, tigers, there's other large cats in the film *Roar*—

00:05:22 Alyce

Oh my.

00:05:24 Sean

Yes, yes.

00:05:26 Alyce

And frogs.

00:05:28 Benjamin

And *Frogs*.

00:05:31 Benjamin

Did you did you end up watching *Frogs*?

00:05:34 Sean

No. [all laugh] But don't worry, I will pretend when we get to that point of the—

00:05:37 Alyce

When we get there?

00:05:38 Benjamin

I was already going to be shooting from the hip when we talk about *Frogs*, like, I saw it.

00:05:42 Alyce

I *liked* it!

00:05:44 Benjamin

I feel like I should have liked *Frogs* because *Frogs* had some like good themes in it, but it was so, so boring except for the—

00:05:51 Alyce

I liked it.

00:05:54 Benjamin

—scenes where the animals killed people, those were actually pretty entertaining. If you were able to make like a two-minute montage of just the animals killing people and maybe a few scenes of like, the rich old guy complaining, then it would have been a fantastic little YouTube video that would have made me want to watch the movie, but unfortunately, I watched it on YouTube at maximum speed, because I was so bored. I'm sorry.

00:06:16 Sean

It's okay, this week was kind of a rough week because I don't think, uh, I really enjoyed *Roar* either.

00:06:24 Alyce

Yeah, I didn't like—I wasn't into *Roar*.

00:06:25 Sean

I watched it with my friend Timon [Alyce].

00:06:30 Alyce

Yes.

00:06:31 Sean

And I'm Pumbaa.

00:06:33 Benjamin

Okay.

00:06:34 Alyce

Is that what we're doing?

00:06:36 Sean

I don't know. I just came up with them. Now I'm going to be—I'm Pumbaa, though.

00:06:39 Alyce

Okay, you're Pumbaa. Am I Timon?

00:06:40 Sean

Yeah, yeah. And other cohost can be Grub.

00:06:44 Alyce

Oh no, we might eat them.

00:06:51 Benjamin

That's okay, I wouldn't mind being eaten. Having to avoid talking about these movies that I barely remember.

00:06:58 Sean

Lion King humor.

00:07:00 Benjamin

Okay, so I guess we should preface this by saying that it's been like a month and half or something since we last recorded an episode.

00:07:06 Alyce

Our last one was the Denise Richards Double Feature which is some time ago.

00:07:11 Sean

Yes.

00:07:12 Benjamin

Yeah.

00:07:12 Sean

Well, we were on a well-deserved summer hiatus.

00:07:14 Alyce

Yes, we were enjoying our summer and now it's past Labour Day and we're back to—back to business.

00:07:23 Sean

Back to not enjoying *Roar* and *Frogs*.

00:07:25 Alyce

Yeah, I liked *Frogs*. I'll stand by that, I liked *Frogs*.

00:07:27 Sean

Okay that's fair.

00:07:28 Benjamin

It's good that I don't have my webcam on because I'm wearing white after Labour Day.

00:07:35 Alyce

Oh major, *faux pas*. Oh.

00:07:38 Benjamin

Living life on the edge.

00:07:39 Alyce

I used to—I used to not understand that concept as a kid because I was like since the first Labour Day, we're always after Labour Day, like time moves in a linear—I didn't understand until that it was like until the end of the calendar year. I was like, but we're always after Labour Day. Like technically since Labour Day, we've always been after Labour Day like—I was very—I was very precise. I really wanted like, specific parameters as a kid.

00:08:10 Sean

Yeah.

00:08:13 Alyce

Like I really needed to understand.

00:08:14 Benjamin

I would—I would really hope that there is like a slasher movie that has the really stupid premise of just some guy killing people after Labour Day—

00:08:23 Alyce

Who wear white? Yes. Except it has to be like a Stepford Wife or something like it has to be like, like yes.

00:08:29 Sean

Someone really obsessed with, like, the rules of etiquette.

00:08:31 Alyce

Yes, I'm so into that.

00:08:35 Benjamin

Yeah. Instead, though, there's a movie called *Labour Day* that's directed by Jason Reitman, who's the son of Ivan Reitman, the guy who did *Ghostbusters*, and it—the only thing I know about it is that there's a really erotic pie-making scene with Josh Brolin and Kate Winslet.

00:08:50 Alyce

Wow.

00:08:51 Benjamin

And that the whole movie is just a laugh.

00:08:52 Sean

All right.

00:08:52 Benjamin

Yeah.

00:08:54 Sean

It sounds interesting, actually.

00:08:56 Alyce

Yeah.

00:08:57 Benjamin

It’s not a comedy.

00:09:00 Sean

Now there's several things with erotic pies in them, really.

00:09:03 Alyce

You thinking of *American Pie*?

00:09:05 Benjamin

Yeah, let's not. Let's—

00:09:06 Sean

Yeah there’s *American Pie*. There's the one we watched last summer. There's *Midsommar*.

00:09:06 Benjamin

Oh yeah—

00:09:11 Alyce

I forgot about that.

00:09:13 Sean

Where the pie is used as an erotic love potion of some sort.

00:09:16 Alyce

Yeah, some sort of—yeah.

00:09:19 Benjamin

Well, she, like, puts her pubic hair, doesn't she?

00:09:20 Alyce

Yeah, yeah.

00:09:21 Sean

Yeah, I was—I was not going to go full detail, but—

00:09:23 Benjamin

You know, you were—You were, you were beating around the bush.

[all groan and laugh]

00:09:31 Sean

See, we finally earned our mature rating on SoundCloud.

00:09:33 Alyce

Yes, yes.

00:09:36 Benjamin

Get our explicit E for everyone.

00:09:39 Sean

All right.

00:09:40 Benjamin

Okay, so let's actually talk about the movies if we can.

00:09:42 Sean

Yeah, enough, enough about pies.

00:09:46 Benjamin

Okay, so I mean, like, the plot of *Roar* is nonexistent.

00:09:52 Sean

Yeah, it has a very interesting like, backstory and making of to it.

00:09:55 Benjamin

Of course. Yeah. Okay. Well, Tippi Hedren's in it. Who we all know from *The Birds*.

00:10:03 Alyce

Yes, which is why—that's why I suggested *Frogs*, because *Frogs* is like *The Birds*, but frogs, and bad. So I was like—

00:10:10 Sean

So they to pair together well, yeah.

00:10:11 Alyce

They pair. There was some logic beyond that they're killer animals, but also that so, yeah, that is why—that's why—it's all coming together, yeah.

00:10:23 Benjamin

Yup. Well, the movie was directed by Noel Marshall, who was Tippi Hedren's husband.

00:10:29 Sean

Then also the star.

00:10:30 Benjamin

Yeah and also the star. The movie came out in 1981 and they were divorced in 1982.

[all groan]

00:10:37 Sean

But also like, they filmed it throughout, like the latter half of the 1970s too, right? I think it took like 6 years to actually make.

00:10:44 Benjamin

Yeah, I think so. It was like basically an expensive home movie. But also a snuff film. And that's kind of the vibe of the film, is that it has these weird moments that you're supposed to assume are heartwarming and—or really cute, like a I mean obviously, like, there's tons of exploitation behind it, but like, really same vibe is like those like Disney nature documentaries. Like you can tell that that's kind of the vibe that they're going for, but there are also just really vicious violence, bloody scenes, people that get attacked by the lions. It's like, who is this movie for? I don't think it was for the family who were involved in making it because it was just like rewatching your trauma, I imagine for them.

00:11:27 Sean

Them I think the only one who really wanted to do it was the main guy whose name I've already forgotten.

00:11:32 Benjamin

Yeah, Noel Marhsall.

00:11:34 Sean

Noel Marshall.

00:11:35 Benjamin

He played a character named Hank, which, I mean this seems like a very white-trash, Hank Hill sort of thing.

00:11:41 Sean

He also gets this shit beaten out of him repeatedly throughout the film.

00:11:43 Benjamin

He does, yeah. It's kind of like *Jackass*.

00:11:47 Alyce

But with lions.

00:11:48 Sean

Except not funny. Although I've actually never seen *Jackass*, that might not be funny either.

00:11:55 Benjamin

Jackass could be funny. I mean, it's incredibly stupid, but it could be funny now and then.

00:11:59 Sean

When I lived, when I lived in Philadelphia, I temporarily lived in the same building as Bam Margera when he was when he was displaced for a while, and then after he got divorced from Missy.

00:12:05 Benjamin

Oh really?

00:12:11 Sean

She lived in the building for a while, and I once rode up the elevator with her when she had a Christmas tree with her, so that connects us back to our earlier discussion of Christmas trees.

00:12:20 Alyce

Wow.

00:12:21 Benjamin

I don't—I don't think that got on the recording.

00:12:24 Sean

Well, the Christmas trees of *Dragon's Den* did.

00:12:26 Alyce

Yes, the *Dragon's Den* Christmas.

00:12:27 Benjamin

Oh sorry I'm like half asleep.

00:12:31 Sean

Yeah that’s okay, the persona—the half-person, half-Christmas tree.

00:12:34 Alyce

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:12:36 Sean

Okay, sorry I took us down the tangent there.

00:12:37 Benjamin

Okay yeah, okay, so Melanie Griffith’s in the movie as well, who is the daughter of Tippi Hedren.

00:12:42 Alyce

Playing Melanie.

00:12:46 Benjamin

Yup, playing Melanie, very original. Melanie Griffith, famous for movies like *Body Double*. *Night Moves*. Someone that—oh, she's in *Cecil B. Demented*, which is a really great John Waters movie. If you've never seen it, highly recommend.

00:12:58 Sean

I like the name though.

00:13:00 Benjamin

Oh, it's so good. It's really, really funny. I would highly recommend it. Like if you, even if you've never seen a John Waters movie, I'd say it's like one of his, like, most accessible movies that you can like, really get the vibe of—

00:13:02 Alyce

I really need to see it.

00:13:12 Benjamin

Who he is without having to watch somebody like eat, poop or something. So also, what is it? *Something Wild*, that's the other one that I know her from. And for our Gen Z listeners, if there are any, she's the mom of Dakota Johnson from *Fifty Shades of Grey* and the *Suspiria* remake. Yeah, so it's a—it's a dynasty. It's one of those Hollywood dynasties, and they're all connected to this movie *Roar*, which is like their skeleton in the closet. Okay. Are we going to try to explain the plot?

00:13:55 Sean

Sure. Let me, I'll, I'll wing it as best as I can remember, Timon and I watched it together, I think five or six weeks ago now.

00:14:03 Alyce

Yeah, some time ago now.

00:14:06 Sean

So, first off, the film is set in Africa, but from what I believe I read, filmed entirely in California, uh, and it starts off with our hero, such as he is, Hank, who lives with an incredibly insane amount of large wild cats in a big house with a pond around it, uh where he claims his goal is to see if all these cats can live in harmony with each other, even though they're from all over the world. So, he doesn't just have African cats like leopards and lions, he also has, you know, tigers from India, he's got pumas from the Americas, he's got, some others in there as well. I don't quite remember. Also, there's I think there's some elephants wandering around. Yeah. So, you know, he's like a nut case who lives in this house with—

00:14:58 Benjamin

He's like the Colonel Kurtz of the story.

00:14:59 Sean

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. With like a hundred and some, you know, just rampaging around the house all the time, wild, big cats. So that's his ostensible goal is to prove that they could live in harmony, which I'm not sure what the point of that is, cuz they're not ever going to live in harmony together naturally because they're they don't live in the same place, so it doesn't make any sense. But anyway, his family is—

00:15:22 Benjamin

I mean most small, domestic cats don't live in harmony with each other.

0015:24 Alyce

Yeah!

00:15:25 Sean

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So then his family is coming to visit him because he's been estranged from them for like, six months or something while he deals with all these wild cats, because he, remember he's supposedly living in Africa. And then these townsfolk come by to tell him they don't like these big cats wandering all over. Uh, who would—who would imagine why?

00:15:46 Alyce

Very unreasonable.

00:15:46 Sean

Yeah, yeah. And then a whole bunch of people just get randomly injured in these first few scenes, like, Hank almost gets his hand ripped off, and then he, like—literally, this actually happens, these aren't special effects—and he's got, like, a bloody wrapped-up hand for a while. One of the other townsfolk that comes gets like, mauled by a lion.

00:16:07 Sean

Nobody was actually killed making the movie that we know of, but I think the Wikipedia page says several dozen people were harmed during the making of the movie, which tells you—

00:16:15 Alyce

I think 70 had injuries, yes.

00:16:18 Sean

70? 70. Yeah, okay yeah. So quite, quite a few, one might say, yeah. So, the movie has a very simple plot that takes, you know, it's very, very long time to get where it's going. So, he's supposed to go pick up his family at the airport, but for some reason he doesn't bother going.

00:16:35 Alyce

He just doesn't go. He just doesn't go.

00:16:38 Sean

He doesn’t go. And then the family starts like wandering through the African bush to head to his house, where they're like again, almost killed by wild animals. Then eventually he decides it's time to go to the airport, much later than he should have, and he and his one friend take a boat, which ends up getting sunk. Then his family arrives at the house. If this doesn't sound too exciting, to those of you listening, it’s because it’s not.

00:17:04 Alyce

It’s not, and it takes forever, like it takes forever.

00:17:06 Sean

So, then the family finally gets to the house, but Hank is away because he left for the airport very late, and then his boat sank. So, then they get to the house and like, well, this house, it's kind of weird. And then all of a sudden, like dozens and dozens of lions and tigers and pumas and leopards and everything else, and jaguars—

00:17:22 Alyce

Oh my.

00:17:22 Benjamin

No bears.

00:17:25 Sean

No bears.

00:17:26 Alyce

No bears.

00:17:28 Sean

They just start rampaging around the house, like knocking walls down—

00:17:32 Benjamin

They, like they like, fall from the rafters. They like, they're all hiding, just waiting to jump out and surprise—

00:17:38 Alyce

Like cats.

00:17:39 Benjamin

Like cats.

00:17:36 Sean

Yeah, like, like, there's an absurd amount of these—like, even if these were domestic cats, the place would be overrun with them, and you'd be like, well, this guy's a hoarder, but these are, like, hundreds of pounds, dozens and dozens of these animals—So, like the

family's terrified. And you can see that they probably were actually terrified filming it. More people get injured. Hank finally gets to the airport to pick them up. And lo and behold—

00:18:01 Alyce

Ages later.

00:18:03 Sean

They've been—they've been gone for hours, or days, who knows. So, he borrows or perhaps steals a car from one of the locals, which he then wrecks on the way rushing back to the house and then the film ends with him getting back to the house, and he and his family all have a big hug. Oh, along the way the uh—the tigers and lions kill some of the villagers that had decided to set out to hunt them down and kill them, and then I think he like, buries their bodies so nobody will ever find them and the film—the film ends.

00:18:35 Benjamin

He should've just fed them to the lions.

00:18:37 Sean

Yeah, yeah. Imagine how much—imagine how much meat he goes through every day.

00:18:40 Alyce

Yes!

00:18:42 Benjamin

Okay, I was going to ask, I'm amazed he hasn’t died from like toxoplasmosis. You know, like the parasite from, like cat poop. Yeah, just like those—he has so many of those cats. They must shit a lot.

00:18:46 Alyce

Yes!

00:18:52 Sean

Yeah, yeah. He must have like a giant litter box outside. Yeah. So, and then the movie just kind of whimpers to a conclusion and that's the end.

00:19:03 Alyce

Yes, cuz his family like forgives him because they—exhausted, they find this, like sort of shed at the back. They've been like fighting off all of these cats and they find this kind of shed and they finally shut the door—just like shut the doors, like not lock them or secure them in any way, but they have a little nap. They take a little cat nap. And then all of these cats come in while they're sleeping and just nap with them and they're just chill, and then they wake up and they're like, oh, the cats must not be so bad cuz they, if they really want to kill us, they could have done it while we slept and nothing in this tiny building was secure. So, then they start like petting them, and they start warming up to them, and then finally, *finally*, Hank meets his family at the *eleventh hour of the film*, and they just, there's no conflict at all! They just say nothing, and they forgive him and they're a happy family, and there's a big montage of them petting the cats and the film ends. It's nuts. Because you would think that the entire—

00:19:58 Benjamin

Really heartwarming.

00:20:03 Alyce

The entire time I was like, oh, there, he's going to finally meet them and there's going to be this big conflict because he's been estranged, these cats have been rampaging around, like there's going to be like a *long* conflict, like we're going to finally get some sort of plot here, and then it just doesn't happen. Like it just—it just doesn't happen. It's like the one thing—the one thing the film had going for it, and it just doesn't happen. It doesn't come to pass.

00:20:26 Benjamin

Yup. Yeah, I would say if you want to feel some anxiety, you can watch *Roar* and be satisfied. But it is somehow both a really high anxiety film and a very boring film at the same time.

00:20:42 Sean

Yes, yes.

00:20:42 Benjamin

I feel like that is a complete paradox, but no, it's totally the truth. The movie took eleven years to make, and I think it was eleven years poorly spent.

00:20:52 Alyce

Yeah. Okay so actually it started—they started making it at the same time like *Frogs* came out. So, there's another link there, they were filmed approximately at the same time.

00:21:05 Benjamin

Some fun facts from the movie. Apparently, there was a scene where Tippi Hedren had her face covered in honey—

00:21:11 Alyce

Yes. Oh my God.

00:21:12 Benjamin

And she had, like, one of the leopards lick her face. And this was considered by her to be the most dangerous that she had to do in the film. And though there were handlers, they were like eight feet away from her and they wouldn't have been able to stop her—stop the leopard—

00:21:31 Sean

From killing her?

00:21:32 Benjamin

Yeah, if it ate her face.

00:21:37 Sean

Yeah, well, it doesn't seem like any of the handlers involved were particularly competent anyway.

00:21:44 Benjamin

I think the handlers were like, Tippi Hedren and Noel Marshall. Yeah, Hank, I was going to say Noel Howard. Noël Coward.

00:21:57 Alyce

We forgot. Oh, sorry.

00:22:00 Sean

What? What did we forget, Timon?

00:22:01 Alyce

We forgot—we forgot Togar! [Torgo's theme from *Manos: The Hands of Fate* plays]

00:22:05 Alyce

[mimicking the theme] Di-di-di-di-di-di-di!

00:22:10 Sean

Oh yes, Togar. Yes, they—they try and make one of the lions kind of an antagonist but it's not, it doesn't really work.

00:22:16 Alyce

A big boss lion.

00:22:19 Benjamin

I mean it works because his face is always covered in blood and that's the only way that you could tell him apart from all the other cats.

00:22:23 Alyce

Yeah. And he's not, because he's not, because there's—there's, like, essentially like, an alpha lion already established. And then there's Togar, [Torgo's theme plays] the outsider lion, who's like trying to be the big boss boy. And Hank is constantly like, [grumpy voice] "Oh, Togar, get out of here!" Like—

00:22:41 Sean

Yeah, he's constantly like, oh, [faux serious voice] "Well, come on, Togar!"

00:22:42 Alyce

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, he's really mean to him, and Togar is covered in blood always, so you know he's like the "evil lion." [Torgo's theme plays]

00:22:53 Benjamin

He's like, he's like, what is it—the gremlin with the Mohawk.

00:22:57 Alyce

Yes, yes, yes. So you know, he's like the "evil one," and he's like, causing mischief and everything and—yeah, yeah, yeah. Poor Togar. [mimicking again] Di-di-di-di-di-di-di. [Torgo's theme plays]

00:23:13 Benjamin

So, eventually, while making this film, by 1979 they had seventy-one lions, a ligon, twenty-six tigers, nine black panthers, ten cougars, two jaguars, four leopards, two elephants, six black swans, four cranes, two peacocks, seven flamingos, a marabou stork… But they had four of one animal that is more vicious than any of these animals. Are you able to make a guess at which animal it was?

00:23:43 Alyce

Oh, is it like a snake or something?

00:23:45 Benjamin

No, way more vicious.

00:23:48 Sean

Is it a baboon?

00:23:48 Benjamin

One of the most—no, one of the most dangerous animals of all time.

00:23:51 Alyce

Oh, a hippo!

00:23:53 Benjamin

No, they—actually that was one thing that they turned down, they wouldn't—they were smart enough to not—

00:23:57 Sean

To not get a hippo?

00:23:59 Benjamin

Yeah, but they were not smart enough to avoid getting… *four Canadian geese*.

00:24:01 Alyce

[gasps]

00:24:01 Sean

No!

00:24:05 Alyce

No! No, that was their first mistake.

00:24:09 Sean

That's right.

00:24:10 Benjamin

Godless killing machines.

00:24:14 Sean

So you can kind of see like, I'm pretty sure in California at least you could no longer privately own these kinds of wild animals, which watching this movie I think is a good example of why you shouldn't be allowed to do this.

00:24:26 Alyce

Yeah, this is why, yeah.

00:24:29 Benjamin

Do you wanna hear a really good piece of superstition, magic, bullshit that people thought about the movie? So apparently the director—we'll just call him Noël Coward—he was involved in the production of *The Exorcist*. He was like one of the executive producers and people thought that like all of the problems that were happening on set were because it was the curse of *The Exorcist*.

00:24:53 Alyce

Wow, the curse of *The Exorcist* rises again. Wow.

00:24:59 Benjamin

Yeah, the devil works in mysterious ways.

00:25:03 Alyce

He sure does. Hail Satan.

00:25:05 Benjamin

Yeah, but yeah, this movie—I would not recommend it to be honest.

00:25:07 Alyce

No.

00:25:08 Sean

No, no.

00:25:12 Benjamin

It's—look it up on Wikipedia, that might be more interesting. I mean, we probably covered a lot of the best stuff in this episode, but honestly, pretty boring aside from, I don't know, if you really just want to see people attacked by lions.

00:25:28 Alyce

Yeah, I think you know, I think this might be my new worst. I think this is the worst one. It might be the new one.

00:25:32 Benjamin

Yeah, I would say it's close for me, but I think *Frogs* is way worse.

00:25:39 Alyce

I liked *Frogs*.

00:25:41 Benjamin

Should we talk about *Frogs* now?

00:25:42 Sean

Sure, yeah. Let's—I have nothing else to say about *Roar* to either of you.

00:25:49 Alyce

Okay. Moving on. Bye, Togar.

00:25:51 Benjamin

Alright. Bye, Togar. [mimicking theme] Boop-boop-boop-boop-boop-boop-boop.

00:25:52 Alyce

[also mimicking] Do-do-do-do-do-do-do

00:25:59 Benjamin

Okay, so like *Frogs*. I'm going to try to tell you what I remember from this movie and you can tell me—

00:26:04 Alyce

Yeah, okay.

00:26:07 Benjamin

If it’s like, right.

00:26:08 Sean

Yeah, you're, you're in charge of this one, Timon, if he makes mistakes.

00:26:12 Alyce

I'm the Frog Arbiter.

00:26:15 Benjamin

Okay, there's like—is it like a, is it a herpetologist? When you're like a studier of reptiles?

00:26:22 Alyce

Yes, I believe so.

00:26:23 Sean

Yes. But frogs are amphibians.

00:26:24 Alyce

That’s right.

00:26:24 Benjamin

Yes, but they make no differentiation.

00:26:27 Alyce

Yeah, there are all kinds of reptilian—

00:26:27 Sean

Alright, fair enough, okay, a herpetologist.

00:26:30 Alyce

There are spiders, there's scorpions—

00:26:34 Benjamin

The frogs are barely in the movie.

00:26:36 Sean

Oh, Sam Elliott's in it, interesting.

00:26:39 Alyce

Sam Elliott's in at a very young, a very young Sam Elliot.

00:26:41 Benjamin

Yeah, very young Sam Elliott.

00:26:44 Alyce

A very cute Sam Elliott.

00:26:46 Benjamin

Which—which character is Sam Elliot though, cuz—

00:26:49 Sean

He's Pickett Smith.

00:26:50 Alyce

Pickett Smith. He's the outsider boy.

00:26:53 Benjamin

OK, he's the herpetologist?

00:26:54 Alyce

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:26:56 Sean

I have the Wikipedia page up.

00:26:58 Alyce

Yeah, me too.

00:27:00 Benjamin

Sam Elliott’s out on his boat.

00:27:03 Alyce

His little canoe.

00:27:03 Benjamin

Yeah, his little canoe. He's like looking at every single reptile imaginable in our opening scene. And I had to keep looking away because I have a very strong fear of snakes.

00:27:13 Alyce

Yes, I'm so sorry. I forgot there was so many snakes. I apologize.

00:27:16 Benjamin

This movie should have just been called *Snakes and Other Reptiles, and Occasional Amphibians*.

00:27:21 Alyce

Yes, *Assorted Reptiles*.

00:27:23 Benjamin

Oh, also just one quick fact about *Roar*, the one of the original titles for *Roar* was, *Lions, Lions and More Lions*.

00:27:30 Alyce

That's accurate! That’s right there. That's what it says on the tin.

00:27:32 Sean

Yeah, yeah, it is, it is.

00:27:34 Alyce

Yeah, yeah.

00:27:36 Benjamin

Okay, so anyways, Rich Guy and his Trophy Wife are out on their new speedboat and like, I think they crash into—

00:27:46 Alyce

Oh, it is his sister. It is his sister.

00:27:48 Benjamin

Okay, I really wouldn't have known—they had a weird relationship.

00:27:49 Sean

Well, they are in the American South in the ‘70s.

00:27:59 Benjamin

That explains the homoerotic relationship between Rich Guy and Sam Elliott a little bit more.

00:28:01 Alyce

Yes. Yeah, there we go.

00:28:02 Benjamin

Maybe it was a little bit more pure, because he wasn't cheating because it was his sister and it was wrong for him to be married to his sister anyways. But in the South? I don't know. I guess it's like okay to be married to your sister, but not okay to be gay.

00:28:22 Alyce

Yeah, that's right.

00:28:23 Benjamin

I guess—god, sounds fucked up. Anyways, so like yeah they crashed into his boat or something—

00:28:32 Alyce

Yeah, they crash it! They flip over his little canoe!

00:28:35 Benjamin

Yeah. And then they, like, take him over to their plantation where there's their rich patriarch who like, is he in a wheelchair or like, he just, like, never gets up to walk? Or I'm completely imagining that?

00:28:50 Alyce

Yeah, I think he's in a chair. No, he's yeah, yeah.

00:28:54 Benjamin

And yeah, he's just like your stereotypical grumpy old dude. There are lots of scenes of Sam Elliott and the other guy, the rich guy who's married to his sister shirtless at the beginning of the movie. The sister-slash-trophy-wife gets angry at her brother because he's spending too much time with the stranger played by Sam Elliott.

00:29:21 Alyce

Yeah. So there's—he does have a trophy wife. He does have a trophy wife, but they're both blonde, and yeah. Yeah.

00:29:28 Benjamin

Okay, okay. So there are two characters, okay.

00:29:32 Alyce

There are two characters. Yeah, no, I like the conflation, though. It's fun.

00:29:37 Benjamin

Yeah. Okay. So yeah, the trophy wife gets angry because he's spending too much time with Sam Elliott. And meanwhile, everybody's getting upset because the frogs are being too loud late at night.

00:29:50 Alyce

Yeah, they're ribbiting too loud. Too much croaking.

00:29:52 Benjamin

And isn't there like some sort of like plan to exterminate them or something?

00:29:58 Alyce

Yeah, yeah, big—big, big wig, Rich Boy—like the old man, not the younger ones—wants to poison them or something, and Sam Elliott, little Sam Elliott is like, “no, you'll hurt all of the wildlife,” like, “don't do that!” And he's like, [deep serious voice] “no, I'm gonna do it, I'm an old patriarch, man and I can do what I want!”

00:30:20 Sean

Yeah, I've never, I've never heard of anyone complaining about frogs being too noisy.

00:30:24 Alyce

Yes, they're like, bougie-ass people ad they're like, “we can't sleep, the frogs are so loud, we can't sleep, we're trying to have a nice family vacation at our plantation and we can’t—we're disturbed by the frogs!” There are a lot of frogs though. There are. They're everywhere, sort of.

00:30:44 Sean

You sound like you're defending them.

00:30:45 Alyce

No, I'm not. I'm not. I'm not. I'm like—they do show footage of a lot of frogs. There's supposed to be like, an unprecedented number of frogs this year, a bumper crop.

00:30:53 Sean

Okay, like a plague of frogs? Like a biblical-level frog plague?

00:30:53 Alyce

Yeah, yeah. So, allegedly, there are many frogs, but we don't really see that.

00:31:03 Benjamin

There's an unprecedented amount of stock footage used in this movie.

00:31:06 Alyce

Yes, it's true.

00:31:12 Benjamin

Yeah. So, eventually the animals take revenge.

00:31:13 Alyce

Yeah!

00:31:18 Benjamin

The scenes that I remember is there's a scene in a greenhouse where the—it's a snake, right? It knocks over like this like thing of poison. But that means that it's like a suicide mission because, like, it's like poison gas.

00:31:36 Alyce

Yeah, yeah.

00:31:37 Benjamin

The snake is sacrificing himself to kill the guy as well.

00:31:39 Alyce

But yeah, yeah, but it seems—like, like we don't see the snake dying or anything like it's as if the reptiles are just, like chilling, like, bopping around, and then this guy is like, in his death throes, like, because of the gas. But they're like, [cheerful, nonchalant voice] “do-do-do-do-do!”

00:31:56 Sean

Maybe the snake’s immune?

00:31:57 Benjamin

Yeah, I mean, they were smart enough to, like, organize a mass animal uprising. Maybe they were smart enough to also create an antidote.

00:32:07 Sean

Maybe they got that poison from the James Bond movie *Moonraker* that only kills human life, but no plant or animal life.

00:32:14 Alyce

Yes, yes.

00:32:15 Sean

It's a very selective poison.

00:32:16 Alyce

That's right. Yeah. And then there's one—there's a similar death scene with like tarantulas and like one scorpion and it's like, isn't this—this movie is called *Frogs*. Like, you do know the premise of your own film, right?

00:32:31 Sean

Yes, yes. Where are the frogs?

00:32:35 Alyce

Yeah, but they're just these—they're these people like arguing about the frogs and having their little family drama, blah blah blah, and cut with these like scenes of like each of them, the family members like slowly being picked off by the animals. It's great.

00:32:51 Sean

Hmm, very good.

00:32:54 Benjamin

Yeah, I was honestly pretty bored. But like the scenes where the animals killed people are pretty funny. Like, I'm gonna skip to the end cuz I don't really remember too many of the other deaths—

00:33:04 Alyce

Yeah, they're not—yeah.

00:33:06 Benjamin

Is it Sam Elliott that escapes with like the children and the trophy wife at the end?

00:33:10 Alyce

With the sister, because there's a little like, a little like, romance maybe between them.

00:33:16 Benjamin

All the characters look the same, so that was why I couldn't tell the difference. Yeah. So like, they escape on a boat, but not before they are chased by a snake in the water that Sam Elliott keeps shooting with a gun. And isn't it like when he shoots it with a gun like it makes like these like really unprecedented, like water, like explosions that would just not happen with like, shooting a bullet into water?

00:33:45 Alyce

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like there's like there's—

00:33:48 Sean

Like waterspouts shoot up?

00:33:50 Benjamin

There's like, that would be funny, it’s more like as if they have like some like mini explosives that they were throwing.

00:33:54 Alyce

Yeah. Yeah, like something like, going off.

00:33:57 Sean

Yeah, I don't think a normal bullet wouldn’t do that.

00:34:00 Benjamin

No.

00:34:03 Alyce

It's very exciting.

00:34:03 Benjamin

But yeah, they're really scared of that snake. Like, it's like a small snake. I mean, I would be that—I'd be that afraid—

00:34:08 Alyce

Yeah, it's a little guy.

00:34:10 Benjamin

But I would not think that like shooting it would be the right way to go about it.

00:34:15 Sean

Yeah, yeah.

00:34:15 Benjamin

Also, like, that snake probably wouldn't kill you. I mean, it might poison you with its venom, but like, it was like almost about to crash into another boat. But it was a snake crashing into a boat. Yeah, but they escape. They get picked up by this family of tourists—are they from, like Germany? I can't remember.

00:34:37 Alyce

Yeah, they're from—I can't remember. Yeah.

00:34:39 Benjamin

They're like foreign, I think. Like European. And they're like, “oh, we love America!” And their son had found, like, a frog on the side of the road. And it scares Sam Elliott and the children.

00:34:56 Alyce

Yeah, and then we see, and then we see the final-final scene is Old Patriarch Man, who refused to leave his house, he was like, [deep voice] “I'm not leaving, this is my house,” like, “you can't tell me—" they were all like, “we should leave, like the animals are clearly picking us off, like we should maybe just go,” like, “our family vacation is not that important,” and Patriarch Man is like, “no! I'm staying in my house!” So he stays in his house and he has like a couple drinks and he's just like sitting there, like grumping by himself. And then the frogs, like—I'm doing like hand gestures here, but you can't tell on the podcast—but like, they, like, encroach on him like they all like swarm, and there's like—this is, this is where all the frogs have been hiding this whole film. They were just waiting for this one scene at the end. And they're, like, covering everything. And then the film ends.

00:35:46 Benjamin

They should have just called it, *There Will Be Frogs*.

00:35:49 Alyce

Yeah. Yeah, *There Will Be Frogs, at the End, One Time*.

00:35:54 Sean

According to Wikipedia, there is a deleted scene where Holly Irving's character Iris was originally killed in the film by being pulled into quicksand by a giant butterfly. And apparently you can still see parts of this cut scene in the trailer for the film.

00:36:14 Benjamin

It's like Mothra, but a butterfly.

00:36:17 Alyce

Yeah, she's so cute. She goes off chasing bugs and stuff. She's like, "oh, I'm going to go after the butterflies." And then she like, falls and like the reptiles swarm her and she dies. Yeah.

00:36:32 Sean

There's a lot of—there's a lot of horror movies with animals set in the American South in like swamp country.

00:36:38 Benjamin

Yeah.

00:36:39 Sean

It seems to be a recurring—I don't know. There's that whole like Southern Gothic vibe too that they use that comes up in these but like, even in *Mystery Science Theatre* there's like, *The Blood Waters of Doctor Z*, there's *The Legend of the Boggy Creek Monster*… There's something about the American South and like the bayous that has this like, horror-animal vibe going on.

00:37:07 Benjamin

Well, apparently *Frogs* was like a series of movies that were kind of catapulted into existence because of the popularity of *Willard*. You know *Willard*?

00:37:18 Alyce

Oh, I haven't seen *Willard*, but I do know *Willard*.

00:37:20 Benjamin

I want to watch *Willard*. *Willard* is like a movie about a guy who has a bunch of rats that kill people. And they made a sequel to it that was called *Benjamin*, because that was the name of one of the main rats. And it's mostly just known right now because there was a Michael Jackson song that was made for the movie called *Benjamin*. But there was a remake of *Willard* with Famous Creepy Guy, Crispin Glover starring, and the trailer they have Smashing Pumpkins' "Bullet with Butterfly Wings"—

00:37:53 Alyce

Oh my god.

00:37:54 Benjamin

“Despite all my rage, I'm still just a rat in a cage.” And it's just great. Like I would recommend everybody go and watch the trailer to 2003’s *Willard* after listening to this because it is one of the greatest pieces of schlock—I've not seen this movie, but I feel it's—it's probably fun and stupid, but like you can't beat how great this movie trailer is—just swarms of rats killing Arlie Irby. Apparently, according to IMDb trivia, the dog of Rich Southern Guy stays loyal because dogs are man's best friend. But like the dog is essentially like the union scab to all the other animals, they’re uprising.

00:38:42 Alyce

Yes! Yeah. I think the dog's name is Colonel.

00:38:43 Benjamin

It's a fucking traitor. Oh yeah, that's not good.

00:38:47 Alyce

No, no, no. But he's a beautiful like setter or something, like a beautiful—a very cute dog. Yeah, but he stays. Yeah, that's true, that's true. I was wrong, Rich Patriarch Man is not alone, his dog is with him. Poor pup.

00:39:02 Benjamin

Poor pup, yeah. The dog needs to get radicalized.

00:39:08 Alyce

Yeah, yeah, maybe—okay, our new headcanon is that the frogs chitchat with the dog, and then he turns to their side. He’s their—he sees the light, at the end.

00:39:16 Benjamin

Ah yeah, he was just sorely uninformed.

00:39:20 Alyce

Yes. Yeah. He didn't know. He's been living all by himself in his fancy house, he didn’t know.

00:39:25 Sean

Yeah, he's been brainwashed, conditioned.

00:39:25 Alyce

Yes, yes. By The Man. Yeah, yeah, okay, he comes around at the end.

00:39:37 Benjamin

Was there anything else we wanted to say about *Frogs*?

00:39:40 Sean

No.

00:39:41 Benjamin

You didn’t watch it.

00:39:42 Alyce

I liked it.

00:39:44 Benjamin

I know, you liked it.

00:39:46 Sean

I don't know, I think it got a pretty good gist of what it was from this discussion right now, so.

00:39:51 Benjamin

Like I feel this is a movie where we all three of us have a completely different opinion. Yeah. So, *maybe* watch *Frogs*. I mean, it's on YouTube, so you can watch.

00:40:01 Alyce

Yeah, you can try it.

00:40:03 Sean

If you're looking for a freebie.

00:40:06 Alyce

It's pretty, it's—it is slow. It like, plods along but it's got Sam Elliott in it, and it's got some cute little reptiles occasionally. You know, I'd watch it again.

00:40:17 Sean

Yeah. Sam Elliott alone makes it worth the price of admission.

00:40:22 Benjamin

Oh, I don't know. You got to look at recent articles of Sam Elliott, he's been cancelled.

00:40:27 Alyce

Oh, no. Has he been cancelled?!

00:40:28 Benjamin

Yeah, within the time of we of us watching the movie and doing the episode, I think.

00:40:32 Sean

No, *Sam*!

00:40:37 Alyce

Damn it, Sam! Shit. Shit. Dare I ask why?

00:40:44 Benjamin

Sam Elliott said that he thought that the movie *Power of the Dog* was “too gay” because it's the gay cowboy movie, and Sam Elliott's a cowboy. But Sam, look at what—look at your movie *Frogs*. It was also pretty gay.

00:40:56 Alyce

Yeah, the homoeroticism! Oh, damn it.

00:41:01 Benjamin

Yeah, he got like—so I think he gave like a half-apology or something in the end. Oh, he also like said that he thought that the TV series *Yellowstone* was kind of stupid too. I think basically his whole thing is like, “I'm a classic Western actor and all new westerns suck. But you should watch my show on Netflix with Ashton Kutcher and that guy who was from Scientology, who turned out to be a creep.”

00:41:28 Sean

Yeah, I'm pretty sure that everybody that comes from Scientology turns out to be a creep.

00:41:32 Benjamin

Yeah, Daniel Marsterson, the guy from *That 70s Show*.

00:41:35 Alyce

Yeah, that guy from *That 70s Show*. Yeah.

00:41:38 Sean

Yeah, he got really cancelled, like imprisoned-level-cancelled. The problem is we're really going to have to start rushing through a lot of our older films because everybody's just going to get cancelled at some point—

00:41:51 Benjamin

We just caught every single scene where they show up.

00:41:52 Sean

And we're going to have—we're going to have no films left to analyze.

00:41:56 Benjamin

I wonder what like the most cancelled movie is of all time. Like most cancelable actors.

00:42:02 Sean

We could do that one next!

00:42:03 Alyce

Oh, jeez.

00:42:07 Benjamin

Okay. Well, what are we watching next? What vibe are we looking for, for our next?

00:42:15 Alyce

Is it—is it, I say with my Christmas tree—is it too early for Halloween?

00:42:19 Benjamin

I mean, we could do more than one kind of Halloween movie, but I mean, we're a monster—we're a monster podcast, so.

00:42:22 Alyce

Yeah, we could do a Halloween. Every day is Halloween.

[discussion about next episode]

Epilogue

Throughout this piece, and our podcast in general, is the sense of joy and fun that we have watching and discussing these films, even if they are arguably "bad." Here, I will offer some discussion of the delight in watching what may be regarded as bad or otherwise horrific material. One of Jeffrey Cohen's seven Monster Theses is that "fear of the monster is really a kind of desire" (16). He suggests that "we watch the monstrous spectacle of the horror film because we know that the cinema is a temporary place, that the jolting sensuousness of the celluloid images will be followed by reentry [sic] into the world of comfort and light" (Cohen 17). Certainly, horror media can provide a delightful escapist fantasy from real life (and its own horrors), although these texts do not always resolve the monster's threat so neatly, as we mention in the podcast. Often, these films provide a (sometimes metatextual or tongue-in-cheek) reference to the continuation of the

horrors that the protagonists have seemingly just overcome. Moreover, the B-movie genre adds an additional element of schlock and camp to these spectacles, which may otherwise have been horrific. For example, we watch B-movie horror for the fun of it (which led to the creation of the podcast in the first place). These "bad" movies can be a form of delight on their own, although related to the idea of escapist horror. Rather than prompting fear, they effect laughter and groans all intermingled in the painfully comical spectacle. For Cohen, "escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy or deconstruct the thin walls of category and culture" (17). Although not all horror or monstrous B-movies close the threat so completely, they do indeed have a finite run-time and are contained within the power of technology (the "pause" or "skip" buttons are usually available, except in the movie theatre). This closure makes their threat inherently contained, regardless of the ending of the text. Cohen adds that "no matter how unsettling the description of the giant, no matter how many unbaptized children and hapless knights he devours, King Arthur will ultimately destroy him. The audience knows how the genre works" (17). While the hero may not necessarily fully destroy the villain, the knowing audience knows how the genre works, and there is comfort in that predictable knowledge. Even the predictability of the medium itself (of pressing "play" and being transported for a brief time before the illusion ends), provides a sense of inherent comfort.

In addition, this knowing informs a sense of delight in viewing as well. Unsurprisingly, as co-hosts of a movie podcast, we are informed by our knowledge of the many films we have already watched, in our approach to new ones (or sometimes in revisiting old haunts). Like the hosts and contributors of *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*

(and very likely most of its fans), we bring knowledge of the medium and genre to the table that informs our viewing lens. Our discussion of the films is often couched in comparing and contrasting them with what we have already seen or heard of, which is different (though usually overlapping) for each of us. We are movie fans, and our fandom is evident throughout the podcast material. Fandom is centred around joy, and this sense of joy motivates our work even when we are discussing what might be otherwise negated (the bad, or horrific). This sense of fascination and delight comes through perhaps especially for such texts. We are also perhaps catered to a knowing audience – an occasional film viewer might find us boring or incomprehensible, for example. Genre is in many ways based on repetition, which provides comfort and a sense of delight, even when texts play with generic conventions. As fans of the monster movie genre, especially B-movies, we delight in picking these films apart even if (or perhaps especially if) watching them was somewhat painful because of their quality. This delight in fantastical spectacle permeates fandom, which is itself a celebration of media (even when critiquing or analyzing it). I draw attention to delight here to emphasize its prominent role in the making of the podcast, and fandom in general, as well as the comfort in escapism that this media can provide. More scholarship might attend to fandom and joy, even catharsis, especially in more neglected genres like B-movie media.

Works Cited

Berenbaum, May R., and Leskosky, Richard J. "Movies, Insects in." *Encyclopedia of Insects*, edited by Vincent H. Resh et al., Elsevier Science and Technology, 2009.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, U of Minnesota P, 1996.

Frogs. Directed by George McCowan, performances by Sam Elliott, Ray Milland, Adam Roarke, and Joan Van Ark. American International Pictures, 1972.

"roar / frogs." *Monster Club ™ Podcast*, October 2022, https://open.spotify.com/episode/6EMJHkeYaEIY5zmp0FQXzM?si=af9bdcbc37d84786.

Roar. Directed by Noel Marshall, performances by Melanie Griffith, Tippi Hedren, Noel Marshall, and Kyalo Mativo. Filmways Pictures, 1981.

Sleigh, Charlotte. "Empire of the Ants: H.G. Wells and Tropical Entomology," *Science as Culture*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2001.

SECTION 2: MADNESS AND MASCULINITY:

BUGS, ENTOMOLOGISTS, HAUNTING

"These Creatures Strike Unutterable Terror into Many Minds":

Creepy Crawlies, Masculinity, and Psychological Horror in Late-Victorian Fiction

I. Introduction

The rise of Victorian popular fiction and interest in the supernatural led to a plethora of uncanny circumstances and monstrous creatures, who are often depicted as encroaching on England, or being discovered in other locales. This piece focuses on the ways in which "creepy crawlies"[107] evoke terror by causing mental instability and loss of control, such as though hypnosis, in the main characters and the associations that these figures often have with anxieties around empire, gender, and sexuality. I draw on popular discourses around insects in natural history, as well as in late-Victorian novels, including Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-1902). In addition to these canonical novels, this paper explores texts that have not yet received much scholarly attention, like Bertram Mitford's *The Sign of the Spider* (1896), Ernest G. Henham's *Tenebrae* (1898), and several short stories featuring insects or entomologists, including Doyle's "The Beetle-Hunter" (1898), and H.G. Wells' "The Empire of the Ants" (1905), and "The Moth" (1895). These texts draw on earlier discourses in their use of insects as horror, and their monstrosity invokes scientific and popular interest in the mind, especially hypnotism and mesmerism. I aim to draw connections between the terrifying presence of these creatures and the psychological instability that they promote. Here, I explore insects and human-animal relations; insects as catalysts for or indicators of madness; insects and

[107] I use this term to encompass a vast array of arthropods such as insects and arachnids, but I will also use "bugs" and "insects" somewhat interchangeably throughout this piece to refer to these creatures.

hypnotism or mental control; insects in relation to the discourses of empire; and depictions of insects invoking anxieties around masculinity. My aim is to draw attention to and give some analysis of this often-neglected area of animal studies.

The Victorian popularization of scientific discourses also resulted in an interest in psychological theories, especially madness, which promoted ideas around hypnosis and mesmerism. In horror fiction, insects create an affective sense of terror (the feeling of "creepy crawlies"), as well as indicating psychological disturbance by haunting various characters. In addition, the use of hypnotism to effect control over others is pervasive and often couched in animalistic language, especially involving insects. These efforts of control and power struggles permeate Victorian horror fiction, even when no physically monstrous creature is depicted. I aim to explore the connections between these haunting monsters, psychological turmoil, and scientific discourses. I will explore the ways in which these creatures cause, promote, or act as manifestations of mental instability. Additionally, I will examine how insects function as both animal and "thing," and how this ambiguity alters affective responses in these texts, especially when these creatures are supernatural. Likewise, Gothic monsters, even when humanoid or mostly so, tend to fall into a similar classification of "thing," and blur the distinctions between the human and animal.

This paper explores the ways that bugs or various "creepy crawlies" are represented in Victorian fiction, especially in horror as a materialization or cause of madness and psychological disturbance. Victorian interest in natural history was pervasive, and the idea of the insect as a collector's item or curiosity appears in many texts. Moreover, there is often a strong affective response to portrayals of bugs, and the

growing interest in natural history during the period made them a useful key to tap into social discourses. An early example of both affect and the trend for collecting insects as curios occurs in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), when Mary's bug-collecting friend Job Legh's pastime accidentally leads to a "horrid scorpion" scuttling around their Manchester drawing room to great horror (before it is captured and boiled to death) (75-76). This example demonstrates the ubiquitousness of insect collecting in Victorian culture, as it appears even in this social realist novel without an overt entomologist character. I am interested in the blurring division between the human and animal, as well as an emphasis on masculinity and the threat of madness or liminal states (such as hypnosis). Many of the contextual historical accounts of natural history and insects point to the opportunity to do related work with literary examples, but this area as yet seems to be unexplored by scholarship. Moreover, so much of these representations are horrific or otherwise mysterious that it seems apt to focus on genre fiction and how bugs are depicted as alien or monstrous, especially in such a way as to invoke social anxieties.

II. Theoretical Framework

While limited, some animal studies scholarship refers to the importance of bugs or analyzes their representation, often noting their distinction from both humans and other animals. For instance, J.F.M. Clark notes that insects were viewed as even more separate from other nonhuman animal, and therefore even more nonhuman (12), while Cannon Schmitt similarly points out that insects made the evolutionary consequences in the continuity of species more disturbing, as it is more difficult to recognize kinship with a bug than something like an ape (39). In their anthology *Victorian Animal Dreams,* Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin Danahay note the "vertebrate/invertebrate split,"

and suggest that there are a multitude of different discourses and ways of considering animals, one of which is through the lens of "curiosity/natural history" (2- 3), which might apply most of all to bugs. Schmitt explores the ways that insects or bugs are different from other animals, and suggests that here, the "beetles" are a synecdoche for "the whole inhuman array of barnacles, fish, spiders, wasps, earthworms, and so on" (38). The use of this term as a catch-all is a useful way to discuss these very different, but still not-quite-animal-enough creatures, and similar to what I have been and will continue to do in this paper by using terms like "bugs" or "creepy crawlies" to include the vast array of insects as well as creatures like spiders.

Animal studies has largely ignored bugs and this neglect itself denotes the distinction between bugs and other animals, particularly in how they are perceived as thing-like and alien, which I explore by drawing on Rosi Braidotti's work. Braidotti considers the distinctions between the human and nonhuman, suggesting that the insect is more different still than each of these groups, and sometimes defined as neither. She finds insects significant to recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings because of the symbiotic relationship that they often have (either between each other, or as in a parasitic relationship), and that they defy binary oppositions (Braidotti 100-101). However, she notes that they are also objects of anxiety, vermin associated with aliens, and technology or machines (Braidotti 103): insects are as different as possible from mammals (and thus from humans) biologically, making them appear more machinic than animal (105). Bugs' "in-betweenness" prompts "simultaneous attraction and repulsion" as they mix organic life with technology, as evident in the way that insectoid or arachnoid language is often used to describe robots (Braidotti 104). As an example, Braidotti cites *The Matrix* (1999)

with its arthropod-like machines, but as Claire Charlotte McKechnie suggests, this phenomenon dates at least back to the Victorian period with H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (1897) (again with tentacled or many-legged machinery). Moreover, Braidotti notes that like machines, bugs' relentless reproduction is threatening, as they seem to generate perpetually (110). These different views of insects are relevant to exploring their representation in horror fiction because they demonstrate the ways that bugs produce horror as alien, foreign, Othered figures, thus informed by and perpetuating the matrix of Victorian cultural anxieties.

These anxieties tap into discourses around what is deemed normal or sought after. Lennard J. Davis' work in disability studies provides a useful framework with which to consider the ways that these anxieties permeate Victorian literature. Davis suggests that it is the construction of an idea of normalcy that itself creates the concept of disability as an alleged problem (24). He dates the creation of modern views of normalcy to the nineteenth century and the emerging fields of statistics and eugenics, emphasizing the strong connection between the two. He points out the links between nineteenth-century ideas of disability, criminality and racial stereotypes that contributed to discourses of Otherness, degeneration, and phrenology, all anxieties that bugs in literature often perpetuate. Using Joseph Conrad's works as examples, he suggests that most (if not nearly all) nineteenth-century novels perpetuate hegemonic normalcy through their attention to national, physical, and mental differences. This overwhelming attention to differences or Otherness permeates Victorian literature and subsequently scholarship on it.

For Davis, the "social process of disabling" was established during industrialization, especially through nineteenth-century discourses of "nationality, race, gender, criminality, sexual orientation" and others (24). The emergence of statistics and their link with industry, average physicality and morality, then scientifically justified bourgeois hegemony and middle-class ideology (Davis 26). Given that all early statisticians were also eugenicists, the construction of normal divides population into standard and nonstandard, which eugenics will attempt to normalize; however, as Davis notes, this distinction is a paradox because statistics always bell curve (30). Eugenicists emphasized national fitness, and considering individual citizens as part of a national body, focused on "feeblemindedness" in eugenics, including "low intellect, mental illness" and "pauperism" (where the poor were associated with inefficiency), and these constructs were further associated with ethnic groups (Davis 36). According to Davis, novels rest on these normative structures, and much literature includes the abnormal, because the hegemony of normalcy requires constant enforcement (44). He suggests that many novels attend to physical/mental/national differences and consolidate hegemony of normalcy (Davis 48). Insects are alien or Other and are often used in Victorian literature to enact these discourses to create terror. Of particular interest is his use of *Lord Jim* as a case study, given the entomologist Stein, which I will briefly mention here to preview the following sections on Victorian literature. Davis points out that Joseph Conrad's novel is littered with references, "metaphors to represent limitations on normal mortals, ethics, and of course language" (45). He argues that the concept of imperialism was "based on notions of race and ethnicity that are intricately tied up with eugenics, statistical proofs of intellect, ability" and more, that writers like Conrad depended on, and "part of the

hegemony of normalcy," setting; moreover the protagonists and characters are influenced by exotic locale different from Europe, with phrenology linked to construction of character and "ableist cultural repertoire" (Davis 45). He suggests that many novels attend to physical, mental, and national differences and consolidate hegemony of normalcy (Davis 48). Although not centered on insects or entomologists, this analysis serves as a foundational framework with which to approach Victorian literary bugs and entomologists.

III. Victorian Natural History

Before diving into Victorian fiction, I will provide some historical context of the period's culture around entomology and bugs in general. There was a growing interest in entomology in nineteenth-century England, and during the Victorian period it became recognized as a legitimate scientific discipline and profession rather than dismissed as a mere hobby. According to Clark, with increasing concerns in agriculture and public health, insects came to be perceived as "pests," though from earlier in the century some were also viewed as models of industry and social hierarchy (10-11). Thus, their worthiness or industry were viewed differently throughout the century, and also depended on the type of insect. For example, bees were thought to be model labourers in ways that mimicked some of the contemporary strategies for dealing with the problem of poverty, which had recently been thought of as a "social problem" requiring attention (Clark 55-56). The logic went that, as labourers, bees ought to be well-treated, in this case with an increase in new designs for beehives that accounted for their comfort, but must ultimately be as productive as possible, a scenario that paralleled attitudes towards the working poor (Clark 66). As Clark suggests, then, discourses about bee workers were mirrored by and

perpetuated ideas about the "lower" labourers and the larger workforce of industrialized England (55-56). The appearance of Victoria and Albert's new "rational beehives" and improvement were paralleled in *Punch* (Clark 55-56), as a representation of their efforts to maximize productivity with their "management and control of the working poor" (66). Some bugs were then deployed to uphold social discourses maintaining productivity and labour, as well as social hierarchy.

These ideologies were not only enacted through bees, but through ants as well, whose behaviours were applied to social views. According to Clark, bees and ants were viewed as examples of an appropriate social hierarchy. Charles Darwin used ants and bees as examples of natural selection (Clark 109), and in *Origin of Species* he describes what he calls "slave-making" in ants, suggesting that this is an example of natural selection and modifying insects (74). Darwin's *The Descent of Man* used the same logic in relation to human slaves in the American South (Clark 75), and his last book on the "ecological and evolutionary significance of worms" focuses on their mental capacities in order to explore the continuum and human and nonhuman animals (87). Darwin used insects as evidence for natural and sexual selection, and bees to indicate that there were no differences between the rational or mental capabilities between man and mammals, as well as what he calls "savage" people from foreign places (Clark 109). These claims draw particular attention to the ways that insects were viewed as Other, alien, and notably foreign, and how this logic was used to uphold racist idea through assertions of scientific fact. This rationale is evident in representations of insects both "at home" and "away," such as in *The Beetle* and "Empire of the Ants" that conflate insects with a racialized Other.

This sense of the foreign Other is very apparent in the idea of a vermin or pest, especially as an invasive species. In addition to mimicking social views (i.e. of the working poor, of social hierarchies, of perceived racial differences), the Victorian perspective on insects was marked by various moments of panic around invasive or destructive insects. The first major scare occurred in the 1870s and concerned the Colorado potato beetle who, as its name suggests, hails from Colorado and consumes the leafy bits of the potato plant (Clark 135). With Ireland's potato famine in recent memory, and with the threat of this invasive species, there was a great panic in England around their potato crop and this particular, ladybug-sized insect (Clark 135). As Clark indicates, this widespread panic drew on many fearful discourses of an invasive foreign Other to describe this "alien insect pest" (135). These discourses are also applied to anxieties around various foreign bodies supposedly infiltrating London, that are either actually monstrous, or simply foreign, or both, like the eponymous beetle in Marsh's novel and Count Dracula. Clark draws attention to this language and suggests that this insect threatens the Darwinian ideals of colonization displacing foreign, allegedly "savage" plants and animals with civilized, European ones (140). This scare did not in fact amount to anything, as the Colorado beetle only managed to destroy one potato patch during the decade-plus concern around this invasion, but it influenced subsequent pest control practices and elevated the prestige of entomologists who were now viewed as useful scientists in the wake of these anxieties for insect pests, a new concern in the growing field of agricultural science (Clark 15-16). This example demonstrates fears around an invasive Other located through an insect that literature draws on and perpetuates throughout the rest of the period.

Insects caused concern at home in England as well as abroad, especially with the rise of empire towards the end of the century. Likewise, economic (or applied) entomology developed largely due to the empire, as insects were identified as "vectors of disease" that threatened the imperial development of colonies in the tropics (Clark 195). Similarly, Charlotte Sleigh notes how entomology developed in part due to the need to understand and regulate "insects in European colonial possessions" where they posed a risk "to the colonial project" (36).[108] Although they had long been associated with disease, the connections between insects and the actual transmission of disease were proven in the late nineteenth-century (Clark 196). These scientific links caused direct concern for lost labour on tropical plantations and instigated a swift response to these pests (Clark 196-197). Additionally, these campaigns against malaria (and mosquitos as its carrier), influenced the London campaigns against the house fly at the turn of the century (Clark 224). The house fly was perceived as a product of industrialization, and indeed its population increased drastically in the nineteenth-century urban to suburban sprawl, due to the rising number of horse-drawn vehicles and therefore manure (Clark 233-234). Clark notes that house flies were viewed as "germs with legs," and fought as enemies of the household, especially given their link with infant diaorrhoea and the rising infant mortality rate after 1870 (234). The house fly was perceived as a product of industrialization, and indeed its population increased drastically in the nineteenth-century urban to suburban sprawl, due to the rising number of horse-drawn vehicles and therefore manure (Clark 233-234). Again, these concerns are largely centered around productivity, this time in the pursuit of empire. These discourses also appear in literature like adventure

[108] Likewise, Sleigh points to the militaristic language often deployed around insects, such as terms like "army ants" (36).

fiction where heroes must trek through the jungle to their peril, like H. Rider Haggard's *She*, as well as literature describing living conditions in England, such as *Mary Barton,* and non-canonical examples such as Mitford's *The Sign of the Spider* and Wells' "Empire of the Ants." These various insect threats, either in the foreign parts of the empire or closer to home, appear metaphorically and literally pertinent to the monster as a threat to English values (as well as the alien-like, monstrous qualities of creepy crawlies in particular). Moreover, the shifting views on various insects and entomologists over the nineteenth century in literature and society provide a context to situate these figures.

Although much scholarship on Victorian bugs is a non-literary, historical context of natural history, some authors use brief literary examples, such as Schmitt, who uses a scene from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to illustrate the deprecating view of beetle-collecting as a hobby (35). Schmitt describes how studying and collecting insects evolved from "an amateur pursuit driven by affective attachments" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to becoming a component of "rational and institutional knowledge production" towards the turn of the century, so Wilde's late-century Duke is an outdated example of the earlier, hobbyish amateur who bores his audience because he has not evolved from the pleasures of "natural history's endless tabulations" to the "selfless rigor" required of the biologist (36). Moreover, Schmitt draws attention to the alterity of bugs in science. In the case of bugs, the evolutionary consequences in the continuity of species were perceived as more difficult, according to Schmitt, as the "relation of similitude" in recognizing kinship with apes must also be extended into the "more traumatic and indisputably more demanding" transformation of the "radically unlike

humans" into kin (i.e. beetles) (39). However, this process is fraught and literature explores the anxieties of human-insect relations.[109]

There are more than insects of course, but also arachnids with some spider-dominant literature as we will see later (in *Sign of the Spider*, *Dracula*, and *Tenebrae*). McKechnie's analysis of contemporary Victorian views about spiders (in both natural history and for the common civilian) provides many amusing descriptions of the ways in which spiders (even common, British ones) are cunning, murderous, devilish things, such as the coining of term "arachnophobia" in 1884 by Reverend J.G. Wood to describe the common fear of these creatures, and Philip Henry Gosse and others on the "sinister" qualities of spiders (both at home and far away) (505-506). Referring to spiders as perhaps the most "universally hated and despised" animals, Wood describes the disturbances that they can cause, claiming that it is likely worse than that of a tiger appearing in the drawing room, and suggesting that "arachnophobia" is most common in ladies (286-287). Despite this exaggerated responses, he does not seem to find any cause for concern in spiders, who are depicted as simply desirous of a leisurely stroll (Wood 287). In contrast, several other naturalists portray spiders as having sinister qualities, both

[109] These relations can also be joyful or full of awe. Schmitt explores the tension in a popular anecdote of Charles Darwin trying to capture a third beetle in his mouth, arguing that the "desire for rarity and novelty" evident (40) in this "visceral and immediate" knowledge, which shows a reversal of Darwin's aim in *The Descent of Man* of anthropomorphism, towards zoomorphism (human-like traits attributed to animals) (41). Thus, for Schmitt, this way of knowing involves humans encountering the natural world, and also how a part of nature "goes about encountering another…and that involves not only dispassionate observation but also delight," where "selfishness and passion take the shape of (and give shape to) the desire to know" and resulting knowledge shows "relatedness of the human self to the objects of its inquiry" (42). Similarly, Alfred Russel Wallace describes a "human-beetle kinship" in first half of century, with his interest in (or appetite for) insect life and specifically beetles (Schmitt 43). He was particularly excited and overjoyed by the great number of beetle species available locally, as well as their profusion and diversity, and ability to capture in many places and year-round (Schmitt 44). Their passion for beetles "part of the process of the production of knowledge," explore relationship between knowledge and passion, focus on corporeal and emotional, bodily sensations (Schmitt 47).

at home in England and abroad. For Philip Henry Gosse, arachnids have "the stigma of a bad character, - decidedly, undeniably *bad*," are "bloodthirsty and vindictive," will betray their own kind, and have militant skill in violence as well as devilish motivations (184-185). Similarly, Grant Allen finds arachnids to be treacherous and wicked in their imitation of "innocent" flowers in order to trick their prey (61). This devilish trick, for Allen, is the "the final abyss of arachnoid perfidy," implying that they have many other perfidious qualities as well (especially, it seems, the foreign, "diabolical and perfidious" Brazilian spiders) (62-63). Various anxieties play out in the depictions of bugs and entomologists in Victorian culture and especially in their literature. They are often portrayed as Other, foreign, and alien, indicating a desire to protect the national body (which has a particular set of attributes such as whiteness, maleness, and distinguished class status).

Much scholarship on natural history refers to the potential to extend this nonfictional work on insects to literary texts. Unlike many other scholars of Victorian creepy crawlies, McKechnie does briefly explore the representation of spiders in literature, noting that they were largely sources of fear and tracing these associations in horror and empire fiction: Bertram Mitford's *The Sign of the Spider* and H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*, where the alien robots are spider-like. McKechnie argues that spiders represent sites of disorder and anxiety around the colonized subject (particularly the threat that they would aggressively rebel), as well as suggesting that the spider in fiction shows the influence of natural history in the period (509). Similarly, Sleigh analyses "Empire of the Ants," also by Wells, arguing that here, ants are a synecdoche for "the threat of savage lands" in conveying anxieties around the stability of the Empire (34-35).

According to Sleigh, Wells and his contemporaries concerned with the intelligence of nonhuman creatures, including ants, and she notes that that rationality was perceived to be the realm of white men over both invertebrates and "over uncivilized man" (57). The following section expands on contextualizing the bug and examining its representations in fiction (including but not limited to those around empire and species), as well as those of entomologists, and demonstrate how these pervasive Victorian anxieties influence and are perpetuated by their literature.

IV. Literary Analysis

There are a variety of examples of bugs and entomologists in Victorian literature, many of which have been neglected. Even in canonical texts with a wealth of scholarship, these representations have largely been ignored. This section will provide a survey of some exemplary texts. This brief survey will include notable figures in genre fiction, such as Sherlock Holmes' encounter with an entomologist and his dog in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a mad entomologist in Doyle's story "The Beetle-Hunter," Wells' rival entomologists in "The Moth," Mitford's mega-spider in *Sign of the Spider*, and Wells' man-eating ants in "Empire of the Ants." The section will then proceed to a more in-depth case study of *Dracula* and *The Beetle*, then finally draw attention to the virtually unknown *Tenebrae*. All of these texts are examples of late nineteenth-century mystery and horror, and in every case (except perhaps *The Beetle*), any existing scholarship does not tend to include much analysis of the bug or entomologist themselves. My aim is to draw attention to these figures and demonstrate how they are informed by and perpetuate anxieties of the period, and discourses around race and masculinity in particular, to create horror.

i. Eccentric Entomologists

Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is a quite canonical example of mystery fiction, where the villainous Stapleton is an avid entomologist. Stapleton is often described carrying his butterfly net around, venturing out onto the moor in search of specimens; this interest gives him the knowledge and excuse to explore the treacherous Grimpen Mire, where he hides the eponymous hound (*Hound* 117). Stapleton is constantly referred to as a naturalist or entomologist, and even before Watson is aware of the villain's identity, his narration describes the foreboding sense of an unseen force pulling threads or closing nets around the unsuspecting heroes (coincidentally, right before he encounters Stapleton himself, butterfly net in hand) (*Hound* 113). However, once Sherlock appears and reveals Stapleton's guilt, this bug-collecting language shifts, and it is Holmes who will pull the net around Stapleton and pin him into the Baker Street collection (*Hound*183) as if he were the insect to be caught. Despite the prevalence of this entomological motif, little scholarly attention has been paid to these connections, except as they relate to the idea of hunting in the novel, which is also prominent in the hound imagery.

Other, less renown examples of entomologists include Doyle's other story "The Beetle-Hunter" and Wells' "The Moth" where entomologists are also depicted as unstable and dangerous. In "The Beetle-Hunter," the eponymous hunter (again using hunting imagery) is prone to homicidal mania at night, and his family requires certification from a doctor who must "talk beetle" to demonstrate expertise in order to gain the trust of the reclusive man ("Beetle" 137). While claiming to be cured, the ending is ambiguous as to the stability of Lord Rossiter's mental state, with the narrator Dr. Hamilton claiming he

would lock his door if he spent the night there again ("Beetle" 145). Meanwhile, "The Moth" centers on a vicious rivalry between two entomologists, Hapley and Pawkins, whose brutal enmity results in Pawkins' death ("Moth" 304). Hapley begins seeing a totally unique moth species and believes it is the ghost of Pawkins, and slowly becomes mad and is relegated to an asylum by the end of the story because of this vision ("Moth" 311-312). Both stories associate entomology and an interest in bugs with madness, and *Hound of the Baskervilles* likewise plays on the eccentric entomologist trope as outlined by Clark (107) and Schmitt (40). These fictional examples explore anxieties around the stability of masculine intellect and passion ruling over logic, invoking discourses around the establishment and maintenance of a British national body.

ii. Empire Fiction

This section looks at two examples of empire fiction and the ways that they depict foreign bugs as dangerous: Mitford's *The Sign of the Spider,* where the spiders appear very late but are eminently terrifying, and "Empire of the Ants," where a ruthless, man-eating ant colony rampages any who encounter it. In *Sign of the Spider,* a particular spider is worshipped as a god by the Ba-gcatya tribe, although it appears only to be a spider of supernaturally gigantic size (with a face as large as a man's) (Mitford 199).[110] The "sign" in question is part of a locket that the white English narrator, Laurence Stanningham's (white) paramour Lilith gives him to remember her by (Mitford 113-115) when he ventures into the depths of indeterminate Africa as part of a slave-trading group (under the guise of ivory-traders) (132-133). The spider god is worshipped by the most

[110] Sleigh notes that the "enlargement of insects" is another variation of the "themes of multiplication" because "both are about man being overwhelmed by an other" (52).

dangerous and vicious tribe and, as in H. Rider Haggard's *She* and other exemplary empire fiction narratives, they reside in a secret kingdom that is impossible for a stranger to find the way in to or out of (Mitford 156). They capture Laurence, but he is able to endear himself to them because of the talisman he bears, which they interpret as the eponymous "sign of the spider," giving him protection from them (Mitford 149).[111] However, one of his former companions (who were also captured, but not treated as well in the absence of the protective sign), in a moment of fear, crushes a rather large spider on their land, and is sentenced to a mysterious doom (Mitford 188). Laurence intervenes and begs to go in his place: his fate is to be sacrificed to the spider god, and he is put in a kind of cavernous pit with this beast (Mitford 191-193). However, he succeeds by using the bones of the spider's former victims as weapons (stunning the "hideous spider-devil," but not destroying it) (Mitford 205-207). He escapes with the help of Lindela, the chief's daughter, who betrays her tribe to save him (Mitford 209-210), only to die, ironically, from a poisonous spider bite in the jungle on their journey (219-220). Laurence, meanwhile, makes it safely back to England as a rich man (Mitford 232); after finding Lilith married already in Johannesburg, he returns to his actual wife and children (225). There is little scholarly attention to this novel, and less about how the spider operates as a monstrous threat to English colonial power. While temporarily defeated, the spider lives on, and its threat continues.

[111] This fortunate outcome is unrelated to the intentions of his lady love, Lilith, when she bestowed the talisman, as they were both in utter ignorance of this tribe's existence or their symbols.

This continuing danger is even more dire in "Empire of the Ants," where a group of travellers encounter a man-eating colony of ants[112] in Brazil. The protagonist, Holroyd (from Lancashire) journeys with Captain Gerilleau along the Amazon river, with the fear of a "different sort of ant" hanging over them ("Empire" 93). Gerilleau tells Holroyd of the ants consuming men, and of the hierarchy of the worker ants ("Empire" 95), and Holroyd reflects on the wilderness teeming with what he views as primitive life, wondering "who were the real masters?" ("Empire" 97). Sleigh posits that insects are perhaps most threatening because of their numbers, tracing a fear of these swarms to "biblical plagues of locusts and flies," thus the "image of mass insect invasion" very powerful and produces horror (44). In Wells' story, as Sleigh notes (44), Holroyd remarks with awe that "in a few miles of this forest there must be more ants than there are men in the whole world!" ("Empire" 97). They come across another boat with no crew except two bodies that are "ragged flesh," having been attacked by the unique ant colony ("Empire" 100-101), and members of their crew fall victim to the horde (105-106). Having safely returned to England, Holroyd has been able to tell his story to the narrator, who says that "these new ants have got into his brain" and he seeks to warn the people of England about their inevitable arrival ("Empire" 107). The unnamed narrator describes the vast swathes of land that the ants have "occupied," noting that "their action has been a steady progressive settlement, involving the flight or slaughter of every human being in the new areas they invade," and with their rapidly growing numbers, they can be

[112] Sleigh describes Wells' use of two main behaviour types based on actual ant species: he incorporated "swarming ants which were known around this time. These were the driver ants (Dorylii) of tropical Africa and Asia, and the legionary ants (Ecitonii) of the American tropics…[the] common alternative name for both groups was simply 'army ants'" (42). According to Sleigh, these species could and did really bite people to death, as occurs in "Empire" (43).

expected to triumph over South America and continue onward ("Empire" 107-108). The story ends with the narrator's ominous estimate, fixing "1950 or '60 at the latest for their discovery of Europe" ("Empire" 108). This ending centers Europe as the last (or only) bastion of human civilization, and suggests that its destruction by the killer ants is inevitable – they will "come home" like Holroyd, but unlike him as an invasive species. Sleigh points out that in "Empire," the phrase "colony" is used for "both European imperial possessions and the organization of social insects (ants and termites)" (36), noting that these imperialist discourses suggest that "mastery of the dark continent entailed battle with both human and hexapod natives, joined in unwitting alliance" (40). The threat looming over the text is the concept of reverse colonization, that the ants in taking their revenge, will subsequently conquer and destroy white Europeans. Rather than being comfortably foreign and away, the Other threateningly encroaches on sites of power.

iii. Parasitic Control

This threat of the Other coming "home" is also present in *Dracula* and *The Beetle*, although this section will be focusing on the ways these texts employ hypnotism to establish a kind of parasitic control that lends itself to an analysis of the texts' creepy crawlies. Roger Luckhurst has written about both of these texts as inherently "*trance texts*," involving "somnambulic, mesmeric, and hypnotic states" both within and against gothic horror (159). Luckhurst argues that in gothic fiction, the remotely controlled person becomes a trope that is horrifying and also a way of exploring new, emerging subjectivities. Much other scholarship tends to overlook hypnotic control over time and distance, even when discussing hypnotism in texts like *Dracula*. According to Luckhurst,

hypnotic power is often part of the late nineteenth-century monster, associated with racial stereotypes, degenerate crime, and sexual terrorism (150). I will expand on this analysis by contributing the lens of parasitism, associated with insects, to these texts where bug imagery is pervasive and yet often neglected.

Dracula is of course a key example of late nineteenth-century horror fiction. My main interest here is Renfield, the mental patient who appears to be (or thinks he is) working for Dracula's behalf. Events relating to Renfield are generally conveyed through Dr. Seward's diary, as he tries to determine the cause of Renfield's hallucinations and obsession with collecting and eating insects. Renfield is introduced in the midst of collecting flies, which he feeds to spiders and sometimes eats himself; he also encourages a sparrow colony and aspires to have a kitten to "feed - and feed - and feed!" (Stoker 66-67). Initially, Seward diagnoses him as a "homicidal maniac," but after Renfield has been eating flies and sparrows, Seward decides that he needs a new classification: a "zoophagous (life-eating) maniac," based on Renfield's obsession with consuming as many lives as possible to multiply his own power (Stoker 68-69). Here, the body is a site of power through feeding (parasitically and vampirically): Renfield's attempt to become a vampire makes him a parasite, and underscores the ways that vampires, including Dracula, are inherently also parasitic.

Renfield is most often working with flies and spiders (despite the sparrows), and finds them "very wholesome" and invigorating (Stoker67), rather than insignificant or gruesome. According to Valerie Pedlar, Stoker's notes from 1890 include mad doctor and patient, "the fly patient" and in 1892 "the fly man" (136), emphasizing Renfield's association with bugs and perceived lower life forms, despite his ventures into other

animals like sparrows, and his feline aspirations. Despite categorizing them as lower life forms, he does not devalue their worth, but counts them up as lives (inasmuch as they benefit him, or as he supposes that they do) (Stoker 67-69). Seward writes: "what he desires is to absorb as many lives as he can, and he has laid himself out to achieve it in a cumulative way. He gave many flies to one spider and many spiders to one bird, and then wanted a cat to eat the many birds. What would have been his later steps? […] I wonder at how many lives he values a man, or if at only one. He has closed the account most accurately, and to-day begun a new record" (Stoker 69). His fixation on these creatures seems to be a part of his own psyche that is influenced by Dracula. Dracula's intense hypnotic powers appear throughout the text, but Renfield is perhaps the most sustained victim of these efforts and is driven mad because of it. However, he is not as present in the scholarship. *Dracula* especially condenses and mingles fin-de-siècle distinctions in its use of trance states. As Luckhurst points out, both Mina and Renfield can sense Dracula's movements, and acting as what Luckhurst calls an "occult telephone," Mina is able to save Van Helsing from hypnosis (163); Lucy is also punished for her "somnambulist eroticism"; and Renfield is killed for his "passive receptivity" (165), like the unfortunate Holt in *The Beetle*. Luckhurst mentions the ways that Jonathan, Lucy, and Mina are affected by hypnosis and the subsequent "trance-dependent tele-communications of natural and supernatural kinds" throughout the novel (162), but Renfield is somewhat obscured by the main characters in this compelling analysis. It is unclear how much of Renfield's insanity is caused directly by Dracula (if he was in the asylum first, for instance, or if his obsessive relations with Dracula put him there), but their relationship certainly perpetuates his madness. Renfield's behaviours indicate that he wants to become

Dracula, or at least gain similar power, which seems unique to him among the other characters, and it is unclear whether this desire is only due to Dracula's promises to him, or if his mental link with Dracula makes him feel what the vampire is capable of and to desire that too. I am most interested in what Renfield suggests about masculinity, mesmerism, and of course the bug as a product or materialization of madness.

Although somewhat canonical in horror fiction, there is not very much existing scholarship on Richard Marsh's *The Beetle,* though nearly all of it compares the novel to *Dracula,* at the very least noting that both were published in the same year (1897), and that *The Beetle* had more immediate popularity at the time. There are quite a few parallels, though: in each, a supernatural creature invades London and starts exercising a kind of hypnotic power over several characters, for its own ends. In this case, the Beetle seeks revenge against Paul Lessingham, an Englishman who escaped its clutches years previously in Egypt, when he was captured by the Beetle's cult of worshippers (Marsh 214-215). Like Dracula, the Beetle is amorphous: initially described as a woman, before later being almost consistently referred to as a (feminized and exoticized) man (Marsh 18), it can also of course transform into "a monstrous beetle,–a huge, writing creation of some wild nightmare" (215). The creature, what Luckhurst refers to as the "liminal man-woman-goddess-beetle-Thing," entrances the narrators of the first three parts (160). The Beetle first possesses the unfortunate fellow who discovers it, Robert Holt, using him as a vehicle to torment Paul (Marsh 42-48). As Luckhurst notes, Holt's remote control even extends to ventriloquy, almost a dual personality, and he ends up vampirically drained of all fluids, a "physical rendering of his psychic enslavement" (160). These and other correlations with *Dracula* permeate the text and are indicative of discourses and anxieties

at the time, particularly, in this case, the loss of control and the instability of the masculine body.

Like *Dracula* again, the band of heroes (Paul, his intrepid fiancée Marjorie, his rival Sydney Atherton, and detective Champnell) must compile their resources together to drive out the monster, while questioning their own sanity and struggling with the horrific, supernatural presence in their world. The persistent bug imagery and its use as horror (especially as an alien, monstrous thing that invades, as a parasite), as well as the connections with Egypt (associated with the scarab and pagan worship) are and complex and invoke anxieties around foreign invasion, specifically through an insect vehicle. The Beetle's mesmeric powers and ability to control the characters, especially long-distance, are reminiscent of Dracula's thrall over Renfield in particular, and evoke some of the anxieties around parasitism and insects. Tim Youngs argues that, like Count Dracula, the Beetle creature embodies many Victorian anxieties, as "prosopopoeia," or a disruption that shows all instabilities (104). I draw on Youngs' analysis and flesh out its allusions to insects in order to expand on the idea of parasitism in the text. Youngs argues that *The Beetle* is an "invasion narrative that exhibits reverse colonisation from the East," concluding that it is "overly sexual, combining the exotic with the erotic" (85), but I would add that this threat is that of an invasive species, such as an insect.

Youngs points out that Holt thinks of the creature as a huge spider, affecting horror and paralysis, and it is a physical invasion as the creature crawls upon his body (87): in his first encounter with the beetle, trying to imagine its form as it crawls over him, Holt imagines that it might be "some member of the spider family" (Marsh 17). In their first encounter, when the creature commands Holt to be still, he obeys, a loss of control that he

describes as being made "invertebrate" (Marsh 18); thus at his first loss of agency he feels like what he imagines to be a soulless insect as his body is invaded. For Youngs, the Beetle's control over Holt suggests disease as it "combines physical with moral and spiritual malady," invoking discourses of degeneracy, especially since the creature is quasi-human (89). Holt is hypnotised, in a sexual and racial narrative, with submission and inferiority to the master Beetle (Youngs 92). Holt acts as an unwilling host for the parasitic Beetle, and as so often occurs in parasitism, the vessel is eventually destroyed. When Holt, under the Beetle's control (but with his mind his own), is made to break into Paul's house and creature compels him to hiss, "THE BEETLE!" (Marsh 42), Paul is transformed in horror, which Youngs suggests is associated with his past in Egypt and images "of mirage, of delusion, of disease," where he was tricked (94).[113] As Youngs indicates, Paul is horrified by the mysterious "Woman of the Songs," claiming that he could have destroyed her without moral qualms, as if she were "some noxious insect" (85; Marsh 211). Here, the bug emerges as something morally culpable, and even under her thrall, Paul feels he could and must destroy her. The beetle comes to England because of Paul, as if he brought them back as an invasive species. This anxiety around the parasite invading a host body is literally enacted through the Beetle's invasion of Holt and his control over other characters, as well as his torment of Paul, indicating the threatening possibility of an invasion of the white, English, masculine body that is a synecdoche of the national body.

iv. Haunting and Psychological Horror

[113] Youngs argues that *The Beetle* reflects common attitudes from and towards the rationale of British colonization (102).

This final section builds on the association between madness and creepy crawlies to focus on a neglected text that exemplifies this connection. As evident in *Dracula,* there appears to be an association with creepy crawlies, specifically spiders, and insanity in late 1890s horror fiction, which I will also examine in the rather more obscure *Tenebrae* by Henham. *Tenebrae* is a noncanonical example of late nineteenth-century horror, and has virtually no scholarship on it specifically, let alone about its prolific depictions of spiders. It overtly demonstrates the ways that bugs can influence and perpetuate psychological horror. The narrator is a young gentleman whose uncle is portrayed as mad at the start, but the narrator's own sanity also becomes quite dubious. The uncle is often plagued by visions of spiders, seeing them in the garden (or hallucinating them) and imagining that some are malicious and not to be trusted. The uncle characterizes himself as a ruler of this creepy-crawly domain (Henham 8), and like Renfield he takes an interest in capturing flies and feeding them to spiders (8) (although in this case this interest is without vampiric influences). Here, the narrator describes spiders as among the "most detestable objects of created life," and a "grim insect" (Henham 8), suggesting their sinister qualities as naturalists like Allen and Gosse did (as well as confusing their classification). There is a fascination here with the predatory habits of the spider, which are associated with evil and demonic motives rather than simply being a natural part of their carnivorous instincts, imbuing them with human intent and anthropocentric concepts of morality.

The uncle shows his nephew a spider in the garden, whom he argues is "pious" and "a good Christian" because of the cross on his back (rather against many contemporary popular views of spiders as devilish), but the narrator disagrees: he has an affective response, "trembling" and fearing the spider even more because of this holy

sign (Henham 10). To him, it is worse that the spider bears this mark, because it is such a "hellish insect" (Henham 10). Both men imbue the spider with moral judgements (good or bad), and the nephew's fear suggests that the spider is especially unworthy of such a symbol of innocence. Additionally, although he claims expertise, the narrator reveals that he may be exaggerating, as he refers to spiders as insects (Henham 8, 10). However, it is evident that he has a fear and fascination with them, according to his descriptions of and responses to them. The narrator himself begins to be affected by visions of spiders, especially as he discovers that his beloved is actually engaged to his brother.[114] He becomes increasingly erratic and eventually commits fratricide (Henham 83), at which point he becomes haunted by a more specifically evil and immense spider, intensely black except for a cross on its back (146-147), hearkening back to one of the first spiders in their garden that his uncle describes to the narrator (10). His uncle sometimes seems to share these visions or know that an especially devilish spider is afoot and after his nephew and seems to have an uncanny awareness of his guilt: he claims to see two spiders fighting viciously, shortly after the narrator murders his brother, and overtly points out the apparent mirroring of their conflicts (Henham 92-94). The day after the murder, the uncle claims to have seen two spiders fighting to the death in the house, and the nephew believes that it is some kind of foreboding representation of his attack on his brother (Henham 93). This mirroring of the spiders' conflict begins an association between the spiders and the brother, as he seems ambiguously both to seek revenge for

[114] Given that the first-person narration is quite biased, it is unclear whether or not she ever returned the narrator's affection from the beginning, and I am inclined to think she does not, but he is convinced that they were lovers first and that she betrayed him with his brother.

his murder through this supernatural vehicle, and to be a haunting vision of the narrator's guilt.

Eventually, the narrator has a particularly potent and grisly vision of a spider seeming to haunt or stalk him. Alone in an upstairs room, he sees a huge spider on the wall and is paralyzed, feeling that it is a manifestation of his brother's soul or his crime and that it will destroy him (Henham 152). Again, the form of the spider is "unspeakable," and he takes a long time describing it before stating outright that it is a spider "monstrous in size, and of a most incomparable blackness" (Henham 146), yet it once again has a cross on its back: "the symbol borne by the most hideous of Nature's creations, the startling configuration of a silver-hued cross," a holy sign contrasted by "the utterly vile blackness of the still viler monster" (147). He feels that merely looking at it will drive him mad, and that certainly any physical contact is sure to do it (Henham 145). The narrator is trapped and paralyzed in his horror, afraid to even close his eyes in case the "black fiend" should descend upon him (Henham 148). Finally, the spider, "some ghastly cicatrix," drops upon his face, and he falls ill with hysterics (Henham 154). This traumatising episode exemplifies the arachnophobia that permeates the text and the ways that the narrator's madness and hallucinations are fixated upon spiders. Moreover, it exemplifies his guilt at having killed his brother, located through this haunting, and especially in the image of the cross suggested a kind of holy crusade or retribution from his brother through the vehicle of the monstrous beast.

The beloved marries the narrator out of sheer revenge: she suspects that he is the murderer and seeks to make his life miserable (Henham 192) (it is already unhappy). She finds out about the spider visions, which confirms the narrator's insanity to her, and she

plays on these ideas to torment him (Henham 190). Finally, she traps him in a room with a giant spider (that neither she nor his uncle can perceive) (Henham 182), and he frantically records this narrative before stabbing himself, as it seems that the spider is creeping toward him and he believes that it will destroy him (his uncle in the same scene also jumps out the window in a crazed fit to escape the spider, even though it is unclear whether he can actually see it too or not) (201). This novel takes arachnophobia to a fever pitch (perhaps more like an arachnomania), invoking anxieties around the stability of upper-class white masculinity and perceived threats encroaching on it.[115] The narrator's falling into insanity mirrors his uncle's hallucinations, and in both cases, their madness is centered around the spider as representing and causing this madness. This psychological and affective terror threatens the stability of the upper-class masculine body, which according to Victorian discourses (and often in the present) is extrapolated into a threat to the stability of the national body.

V. Conclusion

Insects creep and crawl throughout the pages of Victorian literature, although they are often unnoticed, ignored, or even maligned. The large absence of arthropods[116] in animal studies scholarship mirrors the ways that they are often disregarded or belied in general, although recent scholarship is increasingly attending to this gap, including Janette Leaf and Daisy Butcher's *Crawling Horror: Creeping Tales of the Insect Weird* (2021). My brief survey here demonstrates some of the ways that creepy crawlies emerge

[115] *Tenebrae* is reminiscent of (but predates) M.R. James' "The Ash-Tree" (1904), as both focus on the landed gentry and portray anxieties around the preservation (and corruption) of a family line via spider imagery.
[116] A phylum which notably includes all manner of sea-dwelling invertebrates, which I have also neglected here.

in literature, and the social discourses intertwined in their depictions. Insects are portrayed as causing or perpetuating madness; associated with hypnotism and remote control; used to uphold the discourses of empire; and invoke anxieties around the maintenance of the white masculine body, and subsequently, the national body. Although this piece has largely focused on horror and mystery fiction, other texts could be considered in more detail. Further study might examine bugs in realist novels such as *Mary Barton* and *Lord Jim*, or texts from the earlier part of the nineteenth century.

Elsewhere in this portfolio, I draw attention to bugs and entomologists in literature and film, including Chapter 2 on bugs in B-movies from the Syfy channel (co-authored with Sean Rhoads), and Chapter 5 on entomologists in fin-de-siècle literature. Opportunities abound for further analysis, especially in films, including *Arachnophobia* (1990), *Tremors* (1990), *Cronos* (1992), the *Men in Black* (1997) series, *Mimic* (1997), *Starship Troopers* (1997), *The Mummy* (1999) franchise, and *Slither* (2006). Monster studies scholarship has also attended a bit more to monstrous bugs in film,[117] than animal studies has attended to bugs in literature. However, there is much opportunity to weave these fields together to examine bugs in media more broadly. Bugs make up a vast portion and array of life on earth, and they persist in showing up pervasively throughout media, often in ways that invoke awe, fascination, and sometimes fear.

[117] See Joshua David Bellin, (2009); May R. Berenbaum and Richard J. Leskosky (2009); and Leskosky (2006).

Works Cited

Allen, Grant. *Falling in Love, with Other Essays on More Exact Branches of Science.* Smith, Elder, 1889.

Braidotti, Rosi. "The Cosmic Buzz of Insects." *Nomadic Theory*, Columbia UP, 2011, pp. 98-123.

Carter, Margaret L. "Stoker's Vampire of the Mind." *Specter or Delusion?: the Supernatural in Gothic Fiction,* UMI Research P, 1987, pp. 101-118.

Clark, J. F. M. *Bugs and the Victorians.* Yale UP, 2009.

Conan Doyle, Arthur. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, edited by Francis O'Gorman, Broadview P, 2006.

Davis, Lennard J. "Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, the Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century." *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body,* Verso, 1995, pp. 23-49.

Denenholz Morse, Deborah and Martin A. Danahay, editors. *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture.* Ashgate, 2007.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Mary Barton*, edited by Jennifer Foster, Broadview P, 2000.

Gosse, Philip Henry. *Life in Its Lower, Intermediate, and Higher Forms.* Carter and Brothers, 1860.

Henham, Ernest J. *Tenebrae*, edited by Gerald Monsman, Valancourt, 2012.

Luckhurst, Roger. “Trance-Gothic, 1882-97.” *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys, Palgrave, 2000, pp. 148-167.

Marsh, Richard. *The Beetle*, edited by Minna Vuohelainen, Valancourt, 2008.

McKechnie, Claire Charlotte. “Spiders, Horror, and Animal Others in Late Victorian Empire Fiction.” *Journal of Victorian Culture,* vol. 17, no. 4, 2012, pp. 505-516.

Mitford, Bertram. *The Sign of the Spider*, edited by Gerald Monsman, Valancourt, 2008.

Pedlar, Valerie. “The Zoophagus Maniac: Madness and Degeneracy in *Dracula.*” *Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction,* Liverpool UP, 2006, pp. 134-158.

Schmitt, Cannon. “Victorian Beetlemania.” *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture,* edited by Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 35-52.

Sleigh, Charlotte. “Empire of the Ants: H.G. Wells and Tropical Entomology.” Science as Culture, 10:1, 2001, pp. 33-71

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*, edited by Roger Luckhurst, Oxford UP, 2011.

Wells, H.G. “The Empire of the Ants.” *The Time Machine and Other Stories,* Ernest Benn Ltd., pp. 92-108.

Wood, J.G. *Petland Revisited.* R.Worthington, 1884.

Youngs, Tim. “The Bat and the Beetle.” *Beastly Journeys: Travel and Transformation at the Fin de Siècle*, Oxford UP, 2013, pp. 74-106.

"No one but an entomologist would understand quite what he felt": Eccentric Entomologists and Insect-Collecting Kinships in Arthur Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells' Mystery Fiction

During the Victorian period, collecting and classifying insects grew as a practice and entomology became recognised as a legitimate science, though many entomologists were still viewed as hobbyists. Many enthusiasts described the joy of collecting, particularly how it increases with the rarity of the specimen. Their passion for the subject characterizes the insect as object, especially as a prized commodity from foreign places to trade back in England. I will explore often overlooked late-Victorian insect-collectors and their specimens in H.G. Wells' "The Moth," published in 1895 and Arthur Conan Doyle's 1898 short story "The Beetle-Hunter," as well as Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-1902). In these texts, the entomologist is often depicted as eccentric or mad, yet passionate about their subjects, and the habit of collecting reinforces male kinship bonds. Entomological expertise affirms ties between English gentlemen, many of whom engage in the trade of insects at home and abroad.

Many amateur collectors and enthusiasts expressed great joy and fascination in their pastime, conveying the idea that there was something novel and unique about insects that they were very passionate about. For example, Canon Schmitt describes the "desire for rarity and novelty" in collecting (40), and he and Clark both recount an oft-cited anecdote of Charles Darwin desperately trying to capture a third beetle in his mouth when he already had one in each hand because he was determined to catch them all (Schmitt 40; Clark 107). Schmitt argues that Victorian fascinations with beetles show "the affective registers of knowing the natural world in the nineteenth century"; focusing

on beetlemania in natural historians Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, he suggests that their autobiographies show "affective epistemology," not only objects for empirical knowledge, but "organisms whose alluring alterity gives rise to paroxysms of desire and bouts of miserly acquisitiveness," and the "powerful and peculiar emotional charge" of beetle-hunting (37). According to Schmitt, Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace's autobiographies depict insects as "organisms whose alluring alterity gives rise to paroxysms of desire and bouts of miserly acquisitiveness," demonstrating the "powerful and peculiar emotional charge" of beetle-hunting (37). Schmitt attributes some of the passion for beetles explicitly to the excitement and joy for vast number of beetle species available, their profusion and diversity, and ability to capture in many places and year-round, novelty in the whole natural world (44).[118] As Schmitt mentions, there are plenty of fictional examples of this phenomena, though he focuses on these autobiographies; I argue that in late-nineteenth century genre fiction, these gentlemen are characterized as kooky and potentially insane through their obsessions with bugs.

I will examine several examples of entomologists in Doyle and Wells' mystery fiction to explore the ways that their fascination with bugs connotes their instability, as well as how their kinships are established through this passion. As Wells' protagonist Hapley suggests, only an entomologist can understand the feelings of another on their subject (308), a sentiment agreed upon by the other collector figures in these texts. Hapley's intense rivalry with fellow entomologist Pawkins is compounded when Pawkins dies and Hapley begins to hallucinate the appearance of a new species of moth that he

[118] As Schmitt notes, beetles alone account for a substantial amount of the world's biodiversity: they encompass 20% of all living organisms and 25% of all animals (44).

then believes is Pawkins himself. These bonds are particularly evident through Hapley's intense rivalry with fellow entomologist Pawkins, who eventually appears to haunt him as a moth, and the eponymous character of "The Beetle-Hunter" who will only speak with others who share his interest in collecting (in between his bouts of murderous mania). In both stories, there is a tension between rational experts and those who are driven or already mad, reinforcing depictions of entomologists as eccentric. Meanwhile, Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* characterizes its entomologist as a deceitful villain, who is particularly difficult for Holmes to entrap, requiring him to use entomological images to pin him down (*Hound* 183).

However, entomology and especially bug-collecting hobbies were not very highly viewed. As Clark notes, the nineteenth-century interest in entomology allowed it to grow from simply a hobby to a scientific discipline and profession (11), for instance, the necessity of "economic entomology," developing into "'applied, manage, industry, public science'" (171). Jim Endersby suggests that natural history sciences in general were more popular among women and children, and subsequently "some men of science regard[ed] them as low-status disciplines" (300). This feminization suggests a sense of irrationality that fiction authors often articulated. For instance, texts like *Dorian Gray,* according to Schmitt, portrayed a deprecating view of the beetle-collecting hobby for the upper-class (35). According to Schmitt, in the nineteenth century studying and collecting insects evolved from "an amateur pursuit driven by affective attachments" to a component of "rational and institutional knowledge production," so to have a late-century fictional example of the earlier, hobbyish stance in *Dorian Gray* shows that the entomologist has not changed with the times from the pleasure of collecting to rigorous scientific pursuits

(36). There are plenty of fictional examples of this phenomena, and I will expand on the late-century examples of mystery fiction that portray passionate collectors as eccentric and potentially dangerous. I argue that in these examples of late-nineteenth century genre fiction, these gentlemen's obsession with bugs correlates with their alleged insanity. These bonds are particularly evident through Hapley's intense rivalry with fellow entomologist Pawkins, who eventually appears to haunt him as a moth, and the eponymous Sir Thomas Rossiter of Conan Doyle's "The Beetle-Hunter" who will only speak with others who share his interest in collecting and who experiences bouts of homicidal mania. In these short stories, there is a tension between rational experts and those who are driven or already mad, which reinforces the depictions of entomologists as eccentric. Additionally, Stapleton uses his collecting habit as an excuse to navigate the Moor, where he has hidden the eponymous Hound, and the language of collecting shifts to Holmes: male bonds are broken by Stapleton's criminal activity, and it is Holmes who must catch Stapleton and pin him in the Baker Street collection (*Hound* 183). I will explore these characters' turns from eccentricity to madness or criminality, how their expertise is used as a form of bonding to reinforce English imperial masculinity, and how entomology was perceived and deployed as an emerging discipline in these texts.

"The Beetle-Hunter"

In Doyle's short story, entomological expertise is required and verified in order to access and affirm male-male bonds. The eccentric Sir Thomas Rossiter will only speak with fellow entomologists, requiring protagonist Dr. Hamilton's specialised knowledge to gain access to Rossiter in order to treat his violent outbursts. His brother-in-law Lord Linchmere sends out an advertisement in order to have a witness to one of these periods,

so that he may subdue the gentleman accordingly and have him confirmed to an asylum. The advertisement requests "the services of a medical man" who must be "of strong physique, of steady nerves, and of a resolute nature,"[119] *and* he "must be an entomologist – coleopterist preferred" ("Beetle" 130). He is most interested in beetles of all insects, as they are most varied and accessible in Britain, and has his own collection of "some hundred varieties" ("Beetle" 131). In addition to performing vigorous masculinity, the entomological expertise is necessary to bond with a crotchety gentleman who is in the habit of having periods of homicidal mania at night. Upon answering the ad and meeting Linchmere, Dr. Hamilton is questioned about beetles: "I talked. I do not profess to have said anything original upon the subject, but I gave a short sketch of the characteristics of the beetle, and ran over the more common species, with some allusions to the specimens in my own little collection and to the article upon 'Burying Beetles' which I had contributed to the *Journal of Entomological Science*" ("Beetle" 133). Linchmere is delighted that he is actually himself a collector and proclaims that he is "the very man in London" for the job ("Beetle" 133). Rossiter, who is the "greatest authority" on beetles in the world, and "had made it his life-long study, and had written a most exhaustive work upon it," which Hamilton assures Lady Rossiter and Lord Linchmere that he has read and appreciated ("Beetle" 134). Hamilton is engaged for the task without any details, except that he is to be paid very well, be prepared for danger, and to bring his "'case for collecting beetles, and…a stick, the thicker and heavier the better'" ("Beetle" 135). Lord Rossiter's obsessive passion is the reason for Hamilton's necessary expertise on beetles, though the mystery of the case is shrouded from Hamilton until the end. At Rossiter's

[119] This depiction of masculinity is reminiscent of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859).

residence, Delamere Court, Linchmere implores Hamilton to “talk beetle all [he] can” (“Beetle” 137), and Rossiter, displeased at this unexpected guest, interrogates Hamilton on “’the names of the better-known species of the British scarabaei,’” and other matters; while unprepared for an examination, Hamilton answers satisfactorily and Rossiter is pleased: “‘it is a rare thing for me to meet anyone who takes an intelligent interest in such matters. People can find time for such trivialities as sport or society, and yet the beetles are overlooked’” (“Beetle” 138). Here, Rossiter is characterised as an old, outdated scholar (though he has made it his profession rather than being an amateur), who is only passionate about one subject and can only be spoken to about that subject. To interact with him, it is necessary to be part of a kinship: either his family members, or those in an entomological specialist kinship (or both, as in Linchmere’s case). Again, male bonds and masculinity are also foregrounded in both the characters and the narrative.

These texts dwell on the increasing mental instability of the entomological experts. Hamilton describes Rossiter’s constantly working forehead as being “in a continual state of movement” which is to him suggestive of “some nervous weakness” (“Beetle” 139). Rossiter himself explains that he is averse to strangers in part because of his nerves: “‘My travels in search of beetles in my younger days took me into many malarious and unhealthy places. But a brother coleopterist like yourself is always a welcome guest’” (“Beetle” 139). It is his entomological efforts that may have undone his mind here. Again, he is depicted as eccentric and very likely mentally unstable, thus unwilling to have any unknown visitors unless they can “talk beetle” (“Beetle” 137). Additionally, these texts end by depicting these entomologists as insane, or with the threat of madness uncontained, as I will expand on in the following case studies. In Doyle’s story, Rossiter

talks beetles throughout the evening, unused to a "sympathetic listener", and Hamilton begins to think that Linchmere might be a lunatic ("Beetle" 140), especially when he requests that they keep watch in his own room – for what, Hamilton does not know (141-142). When Rossiter violently attacks Linchmere in the middle of the night with a hammer, Dr. Hamilton sees that he is clearly "a dangerous maniac" ("Beetle" 143). Having subdued him, Linchmere explains that Rossiter "comes from a stock which is deeply tainted with insanity" and is prone to "homicidal outbreaks" in which he unwittingly targets his loved ones ("Beetle" 144). Subsequently, his wife and young son are absent from the house, and the scar on her face is explained ("Beetle" 144) (unfortunately, marital battering will resurface again in *Hound*, again from the entomologist). However, Rossiter does not remember these attacks and will not believe that he is insane, hence Linchmere's advertisement in an attempt to prove the insanity to another medical man ("Beetle" 144). Thus, the love of beetles is here used as a bonding method to appease Rossiter in order to save his family. Although Hamilton says that Rossiter is allegedly cured during the time he tells the story, he does not feel secure enough to stay at Delamere Court with an unlocked door ("Beetle" 145). Wells leaves it unsettlingly ambiguous whether Rossiter's ailment is truly resolved or not, suggesting that his insanity might persist as steadfastly as his interest in entomology.

"The Moth"

Likewise, Wells' short story foregrounds entomological expertise in its depiction of the fraught relationship between two rival entomologists. The story begins by asserting

protagonist Hapley's notoriety, describing him as "the Hapley of *Periplaneta Hapliia*,[120] Hapley the entomologist," and assuming that the reader who knows about him will then also know "of the great feud between Hapley and Professor Pawkins" and its mysterious results (Wells 302). The narrator characterizes scientific pursuits as evoking a special kind of affective response, remarking that "your common man has no conception of the zeal that animates a scientific investigator, the fury of contradiction you can arouse in him" (Wells 302). The zeal of the rival entomologist emphasizes this point that it is something unique that rouses all the passions of a specialist. Hapley and Pawkins have been arguing for years about "every open question in entomology" and writing personal attacks to each other (Wells 303). The feud "began years and years ago with a revision of Microlepidoptera[121] (whatever these may be) by Pawkins, in which he extinguished a new species created by Hapley"; Hapley "was always quarrelsome" and "replied by a stinging impeachment of the entire classification of Pawkins" (Wells 303). One "Rejoinder" from Pawkins accuses Hapley of being an "irresponsible meddler" because he was not a professor at the time (Wells 303), suggesting that his amateur status makes him less legitimate as an entomologist, as merely a hobbyist. The story revolves around their relationship, to which entomological expertise is foundational.

Despite their continued vitriol, Wells emphasizes the strength of their bonds in entomological expertise. Centering around entomological debates, their animosity becomes increasingly ruthless: "It was a long struggle, vicious from the beginning and growing at last to pitiless antagonism…now Hapley tormented by some success of

[120] This classification for which Hapley is (in)famous is an amusing joke from Wells and provides insight into Hapley's character – *periplaneta* is a genus of cockroaches.
[121] Again, some insight and foreshadowing from Wells, as microlepidoptera is a grouping of small moths.

Pawkins, and now Pawkins outshone by Hapley" (Wells 303). Eventually, Pawkins' declining health leads him to publish work far below his usual quality, and Hapley subsequently attacks him: "Hapley got his opponent down, and meant to finish him. He followed with a brutal attack upon Pawkins, in the form of a paper" that "was murderous in argument, and utterly contemptuous in tone; an awful thing for the declining years of a man's career" (Wells 304). Pawkins replies by catching influenza, which became pneumonia, and subsequently to die: "perhaps as effectual a reply as he could make under the circumstances," and which turned public feeling against Hapley: "there could be no reasonable doubt the fret of the defeat had contributed to the death of Pawkins" and in fact, "another crushing attack was already in the press and appeared on the day before the funeral" (Wells 304). Hapley does not know what to do with himself after Pawkins' death: "in his private thoughts Hapley could not forgive Pawkins for dying," partly for escaping "the absolute pulverisation" Hapley had for him, and partly because Hapley feels a gap in his mind without Pawkins: "for twenty years he had worked hard, sometimes far into the night, and seven days a week, with microscope, scalpel, collecting-net, and pen, and almost entirely with reference to Pawkins" (305). He retreats to Kent yet reflects "day and night of Pawkins and good things it was now impossible to say about him" (Wells 305). Despite (or because of) their animosity, their bonds were intensely strong for years and continue posthumously, built through entomological expertise and showing the depths of their dedication to the craft, tied up in their rivalrous dedication to each other, indicating the power of their kinship bonds.

These bonds persist even after Pawkins' death, so much so that Hapley's mind is affected. After Pawkins' death, Hapley is visited by a mysterious moth, a species

unknown to him despite his expertise: late one night, Hapley sees “a large moth or butterfly” even though the windows are closed, and it oddly matches the tablecloth, and even more strangely, it is to “Hapley, the great entomologist … altogether unknown”; at first, he is gleeful to find a new genus in England and thinks that “nothing would have maddened Pawkins more” (Wells 307). Thinking of Pawkins, he finds that “something about the head of the body of the insect became singularly suggestive of Pawkins” (Wells 307). Hapley tries to catch the moth but it remains out of reach, even when it blunders into his face, knocks over a lamp and “in the darkness he saw Pawkins quite distinctly laughing at him” (Wells 307). Upon his landlady’s appearance he realises that his conduct must appear “strange and alarming” and reflects that she “could not possibly understand about the strange moth,” because “no one but an entomologist would understand quite how he felt” (Wells 308). Here, although Hapley realises to some extent how his actions might appear to an outsider, he doesn’t bother to try and make her understand, suggesting that it is impossible for a non-specialist or layperson to comprehend his feelings. Later he feels “that no one would ever to able to see the strange moth except himself, and that it behoved him to keep silent about it” (Wells 311). Here, Wells emphasizes the specific and unique affective response of the enthusiast, which is for Hapley also part of his bond with Pawkins that was unique to them, indicating that mutual understanding is only between specialists even if they are bitter rivals. Moreover, this intensity troubles Hapley’s mental state.

Hapley’s battle against Pawkins for entomological acclaim instead becomes a battle against the mysterious Pawkins-moth for his own sanity. The moth continues appearing, “trailing an odd flavour of Pawkins with it,” and no one else can see it: visiting the Vicar,

Hapley sees it quite clearly on the table between them, but the Vicar does not (Wells 309). That night he wonders if it is "pure hallucination," and can tell he is "slipping," fighting "for his sanity with the same silent energy he had formerly displayed against Pawkins. So persistent is mental habit that he felt as if it were still a struggle with Pawkins" (Wells 309). Hapley is increasingly troubled by the moth, and his struggle is characterized as being the same as his fight with Pawkins, further emphasizing the idea that, to Hapley, the moth is Pawkins himself, continue to persecute him from beyond the grave. Additionally, the stakes are higher here as Hapley is fighting for his own sanity. Although increasingly troubled by the moth, Hapley finds it impossible to catch, and he feels it is itself Pawkins mocking him. It provokes in him "the old rage – the rage he had so often felt against Pawkins" (Wells 311). Having broken his leg after falling while attempting to catch the moth, he lies there in sudden realisation of his deeper plight: "it came into his mind with extraordinary vividness, that no one would ever to able to see the strange moth except himself, and that it behoved him to keep silent about it" (Wells 311). Thus, he understands that there is a disconnect between his visions of the moth and what others will see. However, late that night when resting with a set leg, he becomes "feverish" and forgets "his self-restraint," looking for the moth, which he finds near his hand, and "with a sudden wave of anger he smote at it with his fist," but misses it (Wells 311). Despite his better judgement, he cannot help himself from struggling to capture and dominate the moth. He can still "see quite clearly the insect going round the cornice and darting across the room, and he could also see that the nurse saw nothing of it and looked at him strangely" (Wells 312). Thus, he shows his continued struggle with sanity despite no one

else seeing or understanding what is happening to him, and the perpetrating moth is very much associated with Pawkins himself, who continues to taunt him just out of reach.

As in “The Beetle-Hunter,” the unstable entomologist is constrained for madness that is not fully resolved at the end of the story. Like Rossiter, Hapley is also consigned to an asylum, though with more permanent results. As his fever grows “the very dread he had of seeing the moth made him see it” (Wells 312), indicating his inability to fight off the madness. Eventually he is tied down to keep from lunging about, but “at this the moth came and crawled over his face, and Hapley wept, swore, screamed, prayed for them to take it off, unavailingly” (Wells 312). The moth seems to have a life of its own and haunts his waking and sleeping moments: “it never left him while he was awake, and it grew into a monster in his dreams. While he was awake he longed for sleep, and from sleep he awoke screaming” (Wells 312). Here, the haunting plagues him into a mental illness, so that he is unstable and erratic like Doyle’s Rossiter. Just as Pawkins was always there to respond to his academic assertions, the moth never abandons Hapley, as though their bond is too great to separate them. The story ends with the narrator recounting that Hapley is now perpetually “in a padded room, worried by a moth that no one else can see,” and “when he is in his easier mood and can talk, [he] says it is the ghost of Pawkins, and consequently a unique specimen and well worth the trouble of catching” (Wells 312). Here, Hapley demonstrates the classic entomologist fascination with and appreciation of the uniqueness and rarity of the specimen, as Schmitt describes. Unlike Rossiter, there is not even the suggestion that Hapley might recover, as even when he has moments of clarity and awareness, he remains deluded by the apparition. Thus,

Hapley confirms the notion that it is Pawkins he is struggling against, and he suffers as if in punishment for his cruel final attack against Pawkins.

The story suggests that this tormenting figure is vengeance from Pawkins' ghost, if not merely a hallucination, indicating the strength of their bond and the potential vitriol of the specialist, especially against another scientist. Thus, the collectors' joy in both cases becomes uncanny and melded with insanity. Wells suggests that Rossiter might not be fully cured at the end of the story, and the idea that he cannot be reasoned with or convinced of his instability (necessitating deceit) suggests the unreliability and eccentricity of the passionate specialist to the detriment of his loved ones. Here, the danger is not only to the entomologist himself, but to those around him. Meanwhile Hapley cannot escape Pawkins' revenge, despite his lucid moments, and their feud and bond before and after Pawkins' death is deeply entrenched in their shared entomological interests. In this way, they develop a community of ultimate outsiders through their passionate pursuits, both in the oddity of these interests and in their mental instability. Next, I will analyze a rather different entomologist figure, who is decidedly sinister and who does not promote masculine bonding (or bonding with anyone particularly).

The Hound of the Baskervilles

In Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* Sherlock Holmes is called away from London to investigate a case in the wilds of Dartmoor about the mysterious events surrounding the estate of the new Sir Henry Baskerville. Initially, he sends Watson in his stead, and Watson's narration centers around the strange haunting curse that apparently lies over the Baskerville heirs involving a ferocious hound that threatens to destroy them on the moors. The initial description of Sir Henry's neighbour Stapleton foregrounds his

intellectual interests and abilities: he is a "naturalist" and one of the only "men of education" in the area (*Hound* 66). In addition, at his first appearance, "a tin box for botanical specimens hung over his shoulder and he carried a green butterfly-net in one of his hands" (*Hound* 113). Even Watson uses his detection skills to correctly identify Stapleton before he introduces himself because of the "net and box," as he "knew that Mr. Stapleton was a naturalist" (*Hound* 114). As Watson is introduced to Stapleton, Stapleton also introduces him to the Grimpen Mire, couched in mysterious language. Stapleton claims, "'you never tire of the moor. You cannot think the wonderful secrets which it contains. It is so vast, and so barren, and so mysterious'" (*Hound* 116). Moreover, the mire is quite dangerous: Stapleton warns, "'A false step yonder means death to man or beast'" (*Hound* 116-117). However, he himself "can find [his] way to the very heart of it and return alive" (*Hound* 117). Stapleton's mastery over this threatening and unpredictable landscape is specifically connected to his entomological expertise. He claims that "'there are one or two paths which a very active man can take,'" and he has "'found them out'" because the depths of the mire "'is where the rare plants and butterflies are, if you have the wit to reach them'" (*Hound* 117). Here, Stapleton does have the "wit to reach them," showing what Schmitt asserts as the "desire for rarity and novelty in collecting" (40), and suggesting that scarcity and the difficulty in catching them is more worthwhile than overabundance. From this introduction to both Stapleton and the mire, the novel intertwines both together with entomological imagery.

Stapleton is intent upon his bug-collecting work, allowing it to disrupt his conversation with Watson, and further associating himself with the bugs he pursues. Mid-conversation, Stapleton suddenly exclaims, "'oh, excuse me an instant! It is surely

Cyclopides.'[122] A small fly or moth had fluttered across our path, and in an instant Stapleton was rushing with extraordinary energy and speed in pursuit of it. To my dismay the creature flew straight for the great Mire, and my acquaintance never paused for an instant, bounding from tuft to tuft behind it, his green net waving in the air. His gray clothes and jerky, zigzag, irregular progress made him not unlike some huge moth himself" (*Hound* 119). Here, he shows his intense preoccupation with insects, as well as associating himself with one as his zig-zagging evokes the moth itself (as well as Hapley trying to catch his moth). Stapleton's characterization is inseparable from his passionate interest in entomology. Scholars like Nils Clausson discuss degeneration and criminality, and the links between Stapleton and the Mire, and I would add the lens of entomology and its associations with mental instability. Clausson writes that the novel explains crime as "regression down the evolutionary scale to primitivism and savagery" by connecting "the moor and the great Grimpen Mire, Stapleton and his hound, and Selden the escaped convict" through degeneration and atavism (71-72). For Clausson, "the primary symbol in the novel of the primitive – and hence the criminal – is the moor and the mire" (72), which is particularly key for Stapleton in his ability to navigate the mire because of his entomological interests.

In order to solve the case and reassert mastery, Holmes (and even Watson) must take on the characteristics of the criminal Stapleton, which is couched in entomological imagery. When approaching the inhabited hut on the moor (in which he believes he may

[122] Francis O'Gorman writes in the footnotes that this is "not an English butterfly, but the generic name for several South African skippers, or moth-like butterflies, of the family Hesperiidae. This is either an inaccurate reference on the part of Conan Doyle, or a hint to the knowledge that Stapleton is untrustworthy, or that, once more, he is trying Watson out" (*Hound* 119). As in Wells' text, the naming of the insect is indicative of the characteristics of the entomologist.

find the criminal, although it is only Holmes), Watson walks "as warily as Stapleton would do when with poised net he drew near the settled butterfly" (*Hound* 165). Notably, Chapter XIII is titled "Fixing the Nets" (*Hound* 179), as Holmes prepares to entrap Stapleton through his own entomological imagery. On discovering the likeness of Stapleton in a portrait at Baskerville Hall, Holmes triumphantly declares that he has found his criminal, claiming that "'before to-morrow night he will be fluttering in our net as helpless as one of his own butterflies. A pin, a cork, and a card, and we add him to the Baker Street collection!'" (*Hound* 183). Here, Holmes himself becomes the entomologist trapping and displaying his prize. Holmes often dabbles in criminal activity himself to catch his suspects, but here his dabbling is entomological. Once discovered as a criminal, Stapleton's skill and cunning is also portrayed through his entomological interests. Holmes admires Stapleton's nerves when discovering that he accidentally murdered the criminal Selden instead of his target Sir Henry: "'I told you in London, Watson, and I tell you now again, that we have never had a foeman more worthy of our steel'" (*Hound* 177), suggesting that Stapleton is a particularly impressive opponent. When Holmes reveals Stapleton's identity to Watson, the latter writes that "in that impassive colourless man, with his straw hat and his butterfly-net, I seemed to see something terrible – a creature of infinite patience and craft, with a smiling face and a murderous heart" (*Hound* 170). Holmes is able to trace Stapleton's false identity in part because he used to be a teacher, noting specifically that when he learned that the "'man was devoted to entomology the identification was complete'" (*Hound* 171). In addition to being a particularly nimble opponent (mentally and physically, as he navigates the mire),

Stapleton's associations with entomology give him both the key to committing his crimes (hiding the hound), and provide Holmes with the key to catching him.

Stapleton's place in the Baskerville family tree and his interests in entomology imply that there is a duality of primitivism and modern cultivation in any individual. Stapleton's crimes can be explained through degeneration, as Clausson points out (71). As the son of Rodger Baskerville, Sir Charles' younger brother, Stapleton qualifies as a Baskerville with the potential to inherit the estate (*Hound* 201). Holmes calls him a "throw-back" to an earlier age, with the earlier crimes of his ancestor Hugo Baskerville (*Hound* 183), showing a sense of degeneration in the family that suggests "hereditary determinism" according to Robert Mighall (163-164). As Clausson notes, "the Baskerville family is just as likely to produce a Stapleton as a Sir Henry, and so to degenerate into beastliness," unsettlingly suggesting that duality exists in all individuals (80). However, even the animalistic and criminal Stapleton is a "recognized authority" on entomology at the British Museum (*Hound* 202). In addition, his real "name of Vandeleur has been permanently attached to a certain moth which he had…been the first to describe" (*Hound* 202). Here, the entomologist and the moth are inherently connected, as the moth is not identified without the name of the entomologist. This expertise contrasts with the concept of Stapleton as a "throw-back," but as Clausson suggests, "It is surely no accident that Stapleton is repeatedly called 'the naturalist': what could be more natural than for a degenerate throw-back to plan and execute such a bestial crime?" (79). Here, his associations with entomology as a naturalist affirms both his atavism and criminality, as well as his modern and educated mind which proves a worthy adversary for Holmes.

Although collectors were generally deprecated, Doyle and Wells take the view of entomology further and suggest that sometimes passion can go too far into obsession and madness. Rossiter's dangerous travels and intense focus on his passion at the expense of other communication, as well as Pawkins and Hapley's feuding that ends disastrously for both parties suggests the dangers of such obsessive interests. In these cases, strong affective responses become overwhelming and are taken to a horrific conclusion for both, indicating the threat of uncontrollable or unruly emotions. However, both stories also reaffirm ties between gentlemen, to their demise in the case of overwhelming emotion, or if rationality maintained, to their benefit, as in the cases of Hamilton and Linchmere who have other interests. The stories suggest that it is dangerous to be an entomologist or someone so passionate about their interest by taking this niche specialisation and its associated zeal to a disastrous extent. Affirming male kinship bonds can either help or hinder this enthusiasm, reaffirming masculinity in either case. Likewise, this niche group is consolidated as something special and unique in itself, belonging to something and different from others, based on kinship and mutual understanding. By emphasizing its affective responses, Doyle and Wells explore the limits of group bonds. In addition, Stapleton is perpetually described by and entrenched in his entomological interests, which are associated with his criminality (both in the sense of primitivism, and in his nimble mind as an adversary). While he is eventually destroyed by the very mire he hid the hound in (*Hound* 199), and Holmes reasserts order and mastery over the wilds of Dartmoor, he is a highly threatening opponent and the unsettling threat of his duality continues in the uncertainty of the quality of the next Baskerville heir. As in Rossiter's case, his instability has the potential to be passed on through the family line. This

continued threat is intertwined with entomology, suggesting that these fascinations can be overwhelming and dangerous.

Works Cited

Clark, J.F.M. *Bugs and the Victorians.* Yale UP, 2009.

Clausson, Nils. "Degeneration, *Fin-de-Siècle* Gothic, and the Science of Detection: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the Emergence of the Modern Detective Story." *Journal of Narrative Theory,* vol. 35, no. 1, 2005, pp. 60-87.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. "The Beetle-Hunter." *Tales of Terror and Mystery,* Doubleday, 1977, pp. 129-145.

---. *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, edited by Francis O'Gorman, Broadview, 2006.

Endersby, Jim. "Sympathetic Science: Charles Darwin, Joseph Hooker, and the Passions of Victorian Naturalists." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2009, pp. 299-320.

Mighall, Robert. *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares,* Oxford UP, 1999.

Nordau, Max Simon. *Degeneration*. Heinemann, 1895.

Schmitt, Canon. "Victorian Beetlemania." *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture,* edited by Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 35-52.

Wells, H.G. "The Moth." *The Complete Short Stories of H.G. Wells,* Ernest Benn Ltd., 1966, pp. 302-312.

"'She has me, body, soul, and spirit; and she thinks it such a jest!'": Laughter, Haunting, and Madness in Richard Marsh's *The Goddess: A Demon*

Although Richard Marsh is most well-known for his 1897 novel *The Beetle* (which was immensely popular and initially outsold *Dracula*), he wrote many other mystery and horror novels that were widely read at the time, yet have not received much scholarly attention. *The Goddess: A Demon* is one of these novels, published in 1900. In *The Goddess: A Demon*, there is no actual goddess or demon, exactly, but instead an automaton that appears to be possessed by some kind of malevolent spirit. The narrator, John Ferguson, becomes involved in the murder case of one of his neighbours, Edwin Lawrence, who appears to have been killed by some strange, monstrous creature in the night. Ferguson witnesses the crime via a dream, vision, or somnambulism – he is not quite sure which. That same night, a mysterious woman named Bessie Moore crawls through Ferguson's bedroom window, without any idea of her identity or why she is there – he believes that she is also a somnambulist, and came there by mistake. When she is suspected of murdering Edwin, due to her presence at their apartments and inability to explain what she was doing there, Ferguson takes it upon himself to protect her and prove her innocence. At the end, it is revealed that it was actually Edwin's brother Philip Lawrence who was murdered, by Edwin, and that the "creature" in question was an automaton (which is equipped with knives and quite capable of murder), that Edwin brought back from India and refers to as "The Goddess."

Throughout the novel, the Goddess-automaton's precise power is unclear, even after Edwin's extensive explanation at the end of how it killed Philip; however, throughout, her presence influences various characters, especially Bessie and Edwin,

reinforcing the idea that there is some sort of force possessing the automaton. In his final explanation of the crime, Edwin gives the impression that it is a "demonic spirit," and as Shuhita Bhattacharjee suggests, it seems as though it is like "a living intelligent thinking being, possessed with […] a malignant will" (82). According to Bhattacharjee, the Goddess then represents the "violent rebelliousness of the colony" made "terrifyingly alive, selfpropelled and evil" (82), which is the case whether or not the automaton is made life-like by some kind of spiritual force; even if it is a mere automaton, it still enacts murderous revenge against the white English colonizers.

The Goddess' laughter is heard by various characters, even when she is not present, and it is this quality most of all that leaves the impression that she is not merely an automaton. Kristie Schlauraff suggests the need for scholarship on Victorian gothic sound, and for considering the whole soundscape, not just music (2). According to Schlauraff, new sound technologies (like the phonograph) prompted debates "over the agency of disembodied voices and the haunting properties of sound liberated from its source" (2). Thus, Victorian gothic authors "unsettle listeners by depicting the audible world as pervasive or 'less containable'" (Schlauraff 6), as Marsh does: it is the laughter, heard by everyone, that makes the idol most "life-like," or rather, not a mere object. It is this laughter that makes the difference, and although there is an attempt to contain it by explaining it away as a kind of phonographic device, that cannot be so, as it is heard in various places by many (apparently sane) characters, when the automaton is not present. Briefly, Bhattacharjee also suggests that the idol subverts "British rationalistic confidence," noting that the Goddess never speaks directly (as far as the reader is concerned), though according to Edwin they had conversations together, and her "voice

becomes synonymous with its undecipherable laughter" that disrupts English rational ideals, "embodying their fears of insurgent Otherness" (80). In addition to confusing and disturbing other characters, these haunting sounds contribute to Edwin's madness and Bessie's memory confusion. Examining the various instances of the idol's vocal influence (through her laughter), and who can hear her – and when – shows the disruptive effects that these sonic elements have on Englishness. These sounds disrupt the rational and technological logic imposed at the end of the novel, and suggest an inability to identify the exact nature of the Goddess.

Ferguson witnesses the murder, through what he calls a dream-vision (though it is likely somnambulism), and it is described as animalistic and violent, with a mysterious, unknown culprit (evoking the Whitechapel murders). He approaches his friend Edwin Lawrence's room (also in the same mansions building), from which he hears what sounds like a wild beast attacking someone (Marsh 8). Entering, Ferguson sees Edwin (he thinks) "struggling frantically with some strange creature," though he cannot make out what it is in the "mass of whirling movement" (Marsh 8). Despite not knowing how to characterize it, Ferguson believes that there is "something about the creature which was terribly human"; when it finally stops, "motionless," Ferguson hears "the sound of a woman's laughter," and even though he claims not to be either nervous or cowardly, he admits that the sound causes him to immediately flee the scene in terror (Marsh 8). His shame towards this retreat shows the threat of potentially unstable masculinity: Jane Wood notes the new ideas of manliness required at the end of the century, where vigorous, *tough,* and restrained men were viewed as necessary to the demands of empire (64). According to Wood, "visions, hallucinations, and trance-like waking dreams were frequently associated

with moral or emotional derangement or seen as signs of incipient insanity" (113). Unsure of his mental state (whether he imagined the scene, or was really there, or what he even saw attacking Edwin), Ferguson is already vulnerable to this threat, and the sound of laugher entirely disarms him, causing him to leave, thus threatening his masculinity and implying that even he is susceptible to the Goddess.

Moreover, the mysterious creature is associated with Bessie, the woman who comes through Ferguson's window on the night of the murder. In the whirling motions he witnessed, Ferguson recognised long skirts, which he then sees Bessie wearing when they meet (Marsh 36); the police already suspect Bessie, and this connection makes it seem that she is more involved in the murder than she actually is. Bhattacharjee claims that Bessie harms Edwin, even though it cannot possibly be so, but these links make it ambiguous where the automaton ends and Bessie begins. Bessie's apparent mental instability is emphasized, as she has temporary amnesia and Ferguson believes that she is shocked from what she has witnessed, and that the violence of the murder leads her to experience "some sort of neurosis," though he is convinced that some unknown creature was the murderer, not Bessie (Marsh 36). As Minna Vuohelainen points out, it is uncertain what exactly Bessie witnessed until the end of the novel (32). It remains ambiguous whether she is deceiving Ferguson until Edwin's explanation, leaving her a suspicious character despite Ferguson's conviction of her innocence. Bhattacharjee argues that the "goddess takes complete control of Bessie" and makes her the "creature" that attacks Philip (72), and thus explains the confusion where Bessie's robe whirls around in the attack. Yet it must be the contrivances of the idol itself that murder "Edwin"

(who is actually Philip), stabbing him repeatedly and rendering his features unrecognisable (Marsh 23).

However, despite Ferguson's faith in her, and the fact that her innocence is eventually proven, Bessie does have some captivating power of her own, subtly evoking the Goddess'. She is discovered to be a very popular actress who holds sway over her audiences, and on their first meeting, her voice thrills Ferguson "strangely": he claims (even after witnessing a murder), that "nothing which had gone before had disconcerted [him] so much" than the pleasing sound of her voice (Marsh 10). Later, Bessie displays near-goddess-like power when she flees to Edwin's room, and demands that the policeman guarding it let her pass in: "she waved him aside with an imperious gesture, as if she were a sovereign queen," and "in an instant, she was through the door" (Marsh 66), leaving the others to confront the confused policeman in order to follow her in. In Edwin's room, Bessie begins to remember and reconstruct the scene, saying: "'We both said we would kill him, both of us; and he laughed […] Then – then it came in. It! It!'" (Marsh 69), here confusing identities and pronouns. Unable to remember exactly what happened, Bessie confusedly asks if she might be "'two persons in one body,'" saying that her "'brain seems blurred – as if it were in two parts'" (Marsh 70). Bessie's memory loss and confusion taps into what Jill Matus calls "contemporary ideas about a 'non-unitary self,'" that has become fragmented due to a "great shock" (160). She feels that she is being "haunted," but is not sure whether it is "by a vision, or by something which really happened" (Marsh 71). Her confusion around her own identity and distinctions between herself and others reinforce the sense of suspicion towards her, and the instability of the English, even though she knows nothing about the Goddess at this point.

As Bessie begins to remember what she saw, the sound of laughter affects her more than Ferguson: Bessie remembers having seen Ferguson in the room at the time of the murder (reinforcing his somnambulism), and asks him about the "thing" or "creature" there (Marsh 80). She says that she has heard its "'dreadful noise'" ever since, and claims to hear it even then, but Ferguson says it must be her imagination because he cannot hear it (Marsh 80). Later, Ferguson and Bessie determine to flee England until she is cleared from suspicion of the murder, and on their way she thinks she sees Philip Lawrence, but cannot be sure (Marsh 130); immediately after this sighting, "through the mist, out there in the Fulham Road, there came the sound of a woman's laughter" (131). This time, Ferguson hears it too, and knows it is "that curious laughter" he heard in Lawrence's room when he was killed: "soft, low, musical; yet within it […a] horrible suggestion" (Marsh 131). Here, the sound is heard by both out in public, far away from the actual automaton, reinforcing the sense of unknown and pervasive danger. Vuohelainen argues that the novel confirms contemporary anxieties about the dangers of urban life, which medical discourses associated with the perpetuation of nervous ailments (32). Bessie insists the laughter is from "'That which did it," saying that "It is with Mr. Lawrence. It is his shadow: it follows close behind him'" (Marsh 131). Here, she means the living Mr. Lawrence, which is in fact Edwin, and her ideas of his shadow reinforce the sense that he is being haunted by the Goddess (either in reality or psychologically, or both), showing what Vuohelainen calls the "detrimental consequences of modern urban living," that coincide with "medical definitions of fear and phobia, which emphasize the irrationality, the loss of control and the potential insanity of the sufferer" (24). However, these instances of the laughter being heard by other characters than Edwin reinforce the

haunting quality of the sound and the instability of various characters beyond the "mad murderer"; even the vigorous, masculine Ferguson is far from immune.

Edwin's state of mind is greatly influenced by the Goddess, and he emphasizes her autonomy and life-likeness through her humour. When Bessie and Ferguson finally find Edwin (not Philip) Lawrence and Ferguson demands an explanation, Edwin replies that the whole crime was the Goddess' creation, and offers to show her to them (Marsh 137-138). He claims that the unknown She is "'here now – enjoying the joke,'" and that he can hear her laughing; this time Ferguson hears nothing (Marsh 138). While it initially appears that this is only Edwin's imagination, the earlier experiences of the Goddess' laughter leave some doubt, and the other characters are soon affected by it again. Shortly after, Edwin claims that the Goddess is laughing with him (Marsh 141); at first, Ferguson cannot hear her, but Bessie says that she can hear the same laughter that she heard during the murder, and that they had just heard in Fulham Road, and then Ferguson admits that he hears "woman's laughter which had in it so singular and disagreeable a quality," that it has "a most uncomfortable effect" on him (142). In his warehouse hideout, Edwin claims that the whole murder and the "'jest'" of switching places with Philip was her idea and that she has enjoyed it so much that "'ever since she has done nothing else but laugh'" (Marsh 146). He claims they must hear her laughter even now, and Ferguson admits that a woman's laughter comes through the passage, asserting this time that they all hear it, which is confirmed by the Inspector who asks Edwin who he has hidden away in there (assuming there is a real woman concealed) (Marsh 146). This scene emphasizes the Goddess' playfulness in juxtaposition with vengeance, and suggests that she is more than an automaton, given that several people can hear her laughter, notably including the

Inspector who does not know anything about her, nor does he suspect that some unknown creature is the murderer, as Ferguson does, so it cannot only be imagined by those who have encountered her already.

Edwin's mental instability is threatening because, as Andrew Smith points out, "failure of masculinity becomes a *national* failure" in Victorian England (21). Smith notes that men were viewed as more at risk of "moral vices including sex, alcohol and gambling" (23) and Edwin alludes to his need for having his pleasures "hot" (Marsh 153). As Smith suggests, in other fiction, the horror is enacted as a challenge to male authority (76); in this case, it is the Goddess that instigates the murder, and makes it an especially brutal one. Finally divulging how he did it, Edwin continues to emphasize the Goddess' sense of humour and amusement in her horrible work: when he thinks of her as a resource at first in his apartment, he finds it "'a humorous idea,'" remarking that "'it is always her humorous side'" that is first appealing (Marsh 157). He laughed at it, and "'she laughed too,'" which was the first time that he had heard her; it causes "'an odd effect on the marrow in [his] bones'" (Marsh 157), suggesting again his susceptibility to her, even when she is only laughing. The Goddess draws Edwin on with her laughter, which he could hear even when she was locked in a cupboard: "a little soft, musical laugh, suggestive of exquisite enjoyment" leads him to take her out and unpack her, and she demonstrates her power to him, "laughing all the time" (Marsh 158). Having taken her out, he says that she has never left him alone, and "grown into the very web of [his] being" (Marsh 158). For Bhattacharjee, the idol is situated within other tales of threatening objects or curses that portray the empire biting back: they reflect the anxieties "that these objects cannot be tolerated in the imperial metropolis" and the threat of their

"vengeance" (69). It is uncertain whether Edwin is influenced by the Goddess or already susceptible to violence, but her presence appears to increase his madness, with its implications of degeneration.

In the warehouse, with the Goddess hidden behind a silk screen, Edwin recounts the story of his brother's murder (Marsh 151). Ferguson cannot tell what is sanity and what is madness, but is impressed by Edwin's "air of conviction" despite his obvious disorder, feeling that there is "method in his madness" (Marsh 159). Edwin asks if they hear her laughing now, and although Ferguson cannot be sure, he admits it seems like "the sound of a woman's laughter," from behind the screen (Marsh 159). The crime began earlier when Bessie's "'vagabond of a brother,'" Tom Moore, forged some bills for Edwin with his brother Philip's name on them, to cover his debts, and Bessie went to Edwin to plead on Tom's behalf (Marsh 62). Edwin became worried about his brother finding out, because Philip has a "distinctly bad" temper and they have already fought about Philip loaning him money in the past (Marsh 156). Philip is much stronger and always wins their quarrels, and Edwin begins to hate and fear him, eventually resorting to the Goddess (Marsh 157). Edwin's perspective emphasizes his fear of Philip and the desire for revenge against him, suggesting that in addition to fears of colonial insurgency, the Goddess' presence invokes existing desires for vengeance in the English.

Recounting his story, Edwin says that when Philip finally confronts him, his brother is in a murderous rage, threatening to kill him, so that Edwin immediately turns to the Goddess (Marsh 62). As he describes the subsequent attack to his audience (of Ferguson, Bessie, and the police) in the warehouse, Edwin knocks over the screen to reveal the Goddess, which is "an idol; apparently a Hindoo goddess" with "a curious

suggestion of life" about it (Marsh 163). Edwin says that "'she only needs a touch to fill her with impassioned frenzy,'" as if she were a living being, and Ferguson agrees (Marsh 163). Edwin demonstrates how Philip rushed at the Goddess that night, and how she sprang forward in response, by suiting action to the word: Ferguson describes the idol becoming alive instantly in the warehouse, as blades spring forth from its frame, and it twirls Edwin around, up and down, piercing and hacking him all over (Marsh 164). As it attacks Edwin, Ferguson hears "the sound of a woman's laughter," the same that he heard in his dream-vision (Marsh 164). Edwin cannot be freed from its grasp, until Ferguson knocks it over and strikes it repeatedly on the back with a chair; then it is "again inanimate," and rolls over "lethargically," "as if its lust for blood was glutted … a grin – as it were a smile, born of repletion – was on the creature's face" (Marsh 165). The sense of playfulness here reinforces the idea of a predatory animal, toying with its prey, juxtaposing intense violence with gentle, joyful laughter that the other characters find disturbingly sinister.

In the denouement after Edwin's demise, the automaton is finally "torn to pieces; its anatomy laid bare" by the legal authorities: its body is a "light steel frame" with "strong springs" attached inside to "clockwork machinery" that enacts its motion, while its scarlet leather covering is full of holes for the blades that can leap forth "ceaselessly … till the machinery [runs] down" (Marsh 166). Most improbably, the voice is allegedly explained away by the presence of something like a phonograph in the head, causing "the sound resembling a woman's gentle laughter … not the least eerie part of its horrible performance" (Marsh 166). As Bhattacharjee suggests, this dissection foregrounds the idol's "essential lifeless thing-hood," reducing it "to the status of a curio" at the end (73),

in “an attempt to control the machine (79). It is revealed that the idol “had originally been intended for sacrificial purposes,” and was used in temples at Allahabad, where “it would go through its gruesome performance” in religious rituals; Ferguson comments that “some queer things still take place in India” (Marsh 165). This resolution reinforces colonialist discourses and attempts to reassuringly resolve the matter.

However, the novel also reveals the instability of Englishness, through the characters’ vulnerability to the Goddess and their own emotions: Ferguson believes that Edwin “could hardly have been perfectly sane” when he bought the idol, because no “healthy-minded man” would have wanted it (Marsh 166). However, the novel implies the instability of multiple characters, and of England itself: the resident doctor, Hume’s hobby is mental instability, and he believes that “we have all of us a screw loose somewhere, and that out of every countenance insanity peeps” (Marsh 24), which as Vuohelainen suggests, coincides with “contemporary theories that modern life was harmful to mental stability” (note 24). Despite Philip’s initial description as “a man of high position and noble character” (Marsh 28), Edwin’s own account reveals that Philip has a violent temper: he is described as an enraged bull when roused to “fits of passion,” and on the night of the murder, Philip “’went for [Edwin] as the bull goes for the toreador’” but meets the Goddess instead (which is why Edwin lives, or so he claims) (Marsh 163). His story emphasizes the self-defence angle, and shows the susceptibility of even the most upright gentlemen to fits or disorder. Ferguson discovers that the brothers had fought their whole lives, and their pattern was that “Philip would attack [Edwin] with unreasoning violence,” but would repent after his “fit of fury” was over (Marsh 166), so it is evident that Philip not as upright he seems if his temper is so vicious.

Thus, the novel's apparent finality is not so conclusive, because of the ambiguity of the disembodied laughter heard by various characters, and the uncertain extent of the influence it held over Edwin; these elements are unknown, and not necessarily eliminated with the destruction of the actual automaton. Moreover, the other characters are implicated in their instability, suggesting that the threat is not only with a mysterious, Other, force, but within the English body and mind. As Wood suggests, an "aberrant act or anomalous individual" signifies the disturbance of the allegedly calm surfaces of moral and social order; likewise, the "feverish wanderings of delirium" interrupt the "pattern of normal, waking life" (115). Not only Edwin, but Bessie and Ferguson are affected, and the apparent resolution suggests that there was a desire for vengeance before the Goddess, as well as the possibility that she is not contained.

Works Cited

Bhattacharjee, Shuhita. "The Insurgent Invasion of Anti-Colonial Idols in Late-Victorian Literature: Richard Marsh and F. Anstey." *English Literature in Translation, 1880-1920*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2018, pp. 66-90.

Marsh, Richard. *The Goddess: A Demon*, edited by Minna Vuohelainen, Valancourt, 2010.

Matus, Jill L. "Dissociation and Multiple Selves: Memory, Myers and Stevenson's 'shilling shocker.'" *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction,* Cambridge UP, 2009, pp.160-182.

Schlauraff, Kristie A. "Victorian Gothic Soundscapes." *Literature Compass,* vol. 15, no. 4, 2018, pp. 1-11.

Smith, Andrew. *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin de Siècle.* Manchester UP, 2004.

Vuohelainen, Minna. "'Cribb'd, Cabined, and Confined': Fear, Claustrophobia and Modernity in Richard Marsh's Urban Gothic Fiction." *Journal of Literature and Science,* vol. 3, no. 1, 2010, pp. 23-36.

Wood, Jane. *Passion and Pathology in Victorian Fiction: Body, Mind, and Neurology.* Oxford UP, 2001.

SECTION 3: THE DEMONIC AND IDENTITY IN HORROR FICTION AND FILM

"'Fool that you were to confide yourself to a Devil!'" (441):
Magic, Demons, and Vice in Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*

Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* scandalized readers with its depictions of violence and sexuality centering around the monk Ambrosio's depravity. Ambrosio's journey into sin is influenced by Rosario/Matilda, who is later revealed to be an agent of the devil (Lewis 440). Matilda's repeated use of magic establishes evil as a fantastic spectacle, and her strategic temptation of Ambrosio critiques the fallibility of Catholic clergy members. Scholars like William Brewer note the uncertainty of Matilda's status as either human or demon, as she is only revealed as a "spirit" at the end of the novel by Satan, who unsurprisingly, may not be a reliable source (196). However, reading her as a demon emphasizes Lewis's use of supernatural and evil forces in tempting Ambrosio. As Ambrosio's vices are provoked and drawn out by Matilda, his affective responses and attempts to negotiate away his own responsibility for his crimes enact a Faustian staging of demonic dealings. Through the spectacle of Matilda's magic use and the narrative she creates around summoning demons herself, she acts as a model to show Ambrosio the potential power he can access through demonic forces (Lewis 267). As a strategic depiction of what it will take to draw out Ambrosio's vices, Matilda's character is engineered to push him towards Satan. He is drawn in, alternately appalled and curious as a spectator. Lewis portrays magic as a vehicle of evil forces, particularly through Matilda's alluring rituals, and her temptation of Ambrosio through this aesthetic appeal reinforces Lewis' exploration of audiences' fascination with the lure of evil and supernatural terror.

Ambrosio is characterized as being easily tempted by evil, and Matilda is subsequently designed to lure him through spectacle. At the end of the novel, Satan ultimately exposes Ambrosio's responsibility for his crimes. After finally receiving Ambrosio's soul by the signed contract, Satan exposes Ambrosio's hypocrisy, saying that he thought himself "'proof against temptation, absolved from human frailties, and free from error and vice,'" yet had such "'pride'" and vanity that the devil had long since considered Ambrosio his "'prey'" (440). According to Satan, Ambrosio was always "'virtuous from vanity, not principle,'" and Satan was inspired to send in a "'a subordinate but crafty spirit'" to tempt him after seeing Ambrosio's "'blind idolatry'" of his Madona painting (440). This choice suggests that the Madona-double spirit, Matilda, was generated from his lust and tailored to Ambrosio in the first place, implying that Ambrosio's "fall" is predetermined. As Brewer notes, this spirit could have had any gender, and assume any shape or being according to Satan's wishes (196). However, if the Matilda figure is entirely a spirit throughout the novel, then their form and actions are performed choices. Ambrosio has been avoiding complicity throughout, and is now faced with the consequences of having been extremely implicated in vice from the beginning.

If Ambrosio himself is already corrupted before the beginning of the novel, so is the abbey and the Catholic structure in which he operates; Matilda reveals this hypocrisy through tempting Ambrosio with spectacle. Matilda finally seduces Ambrosio by proclaiming her desire for him and having her habit fall open to expose the "dazzling whiteness" of her bosom, and Ambrosio gazes with "insatiable avidity upon the beauteous Orb" (65). Gazing with "a mixture of anxiety and delight," Ambrosio claims he "'can resist no longer,'" allowing the "'Enchantress'" to remain for his "'destruction'"

(65). Here, Matilda reveals to him a lust previously unknown and unfelt, although Satan later suggests that it was there all along, just under the surface. Diane Long Hoeveler asserts that this scenario is an example of the trope of a female character in disguise as a monk to be near "her beloved," which was transformed into "an anti-Catholic device that revealed Catholic hypocrisy about sexual matters" (44), although Lewis complicates this convention through Matilda's demonic work. Moreover, portraying herself as a pious figure, Matilda reveals the hypocrisy of her worshipful adoration of Ambrosio. When her veil is disarrayed while she plays the harp for him, Ambrosio sees her identical resemblance to his treasured Madona. Matilda reveals that she had the painting created and presented to him to see the "effect" it would have on him (81). Although playing a modest and pious role here, Matilda still admits to tricking him in her affection. As a predetermined strategy, her form is exactly the one that appeals to his vanity to bring out Ambrosio's supposedly inherent nature, and expose his hypocrisy in claiming purity.

Through her initial concealment of magic practices and insistence that Ambrosio obey her while maintaining that she is doing everything for him, Matilda plays with power dynamics in a way to entice him to further vice. Matilda insists on entering the caverns of St Clare alone because it is too dangerous for Ambrosio (Lewis 231), building suspense and the sense of her own strength and superiority; his "awe" of her "menaces" makes him obey (232). When Matilda reappears, she does not explain what she has done; she says that will not trust Ambrosio with her secret, but adds that his good judgement and the "'curiosity'" in his eyes gives her hope that he might be worthy of her confidence in future (Lewis 234). Matilda is clearly in control here, but lures him in by piquing his curiosity and suggesting that he might too be rewarded in the future, enticing him to

magic before he knows what she is doing. Hoeveler explains that the concept of "'priestcraft'" referred to the "supposed supernatural abilities" of the Catholic clergy, which Protestants viewed as "an elaborate system of mystification" designed to keep Catholics "dependent on their priests" (109). While Ambrosio has previously held a similar sway over his audiences and fans that appealed to his vanity (another motive for his temptation, according to Satan), Matilda uses actual supernatural powers to enact these discourses around Catholicism by putting Ambrosio in a similar position of wonder and ignorance.

When Matilda reveals her use of magic and offers to help Ambrosio in his desire for Antonia, she attacks his hypocrisy and piety in her attempts to convince him. Matilda claims to have learned magic from her guardian, who commanded "'infernal spirits'" by actions that were "'esteemed impious'" (Lewis 267), though she now portrays these tactics as liberating. According to Matilda, it was only her concern for staying alive for Ambrosio that made her take this step, as she formerly "'shuddered at the thoughts of Magic,'" and "'formed a terrible idea of the consequences of raising a daemon'" (Lewis 267). However, despite these fears (of the consequences, not the impiety of the acts), she did "perform those mystic rites" to summon "a fallen Angel" to her in the cavern at St Clare's in order to save her own life (Lewis 267). Contrary to her initial fears, she claims that the daemon was "'obedient'" to her, and that "'instead of selling [her] soul to a Master, [her] courage had purchased for [herself] a Slave'" (Lewis 268). Matilda presents herself as entirely in control, having summoned demons for her service, and providing a model for the possibilities of power that Ambrosio might attain if he does the same. However, Ambrosio is too afraid, so Matilda undertakes the crime of summoning spirits

on his behalf, although she challenges his fear (Lewis 268). According to Matilda, Ambrosio is not held back from "'respect for God,'" but from "'the terror of his vengeance'"; he does not care about committing the crime, but is terrified of the consequences (Lewis 269). Ambrosio calls her sin "'unpardonable,'" but she rejoins that god's capacity to pardon is supposed to be limitless (Lewis 269), and Ambrosio himself uses this argument shortly afterward to reassure himself (273), as well as at the end when he faces Satan (441). Through her image of success, and by goading Ambrosio's fears, she both provides him with a model to imitate and exposes his hypocrisy.

Matilda first shows Ambrosio the possibilities of magic visually with her mirror, where her display enacts anxieties around witchcraft and its associations with Catholicism. Matilda's mirror has mysterious inscriptions on it, and when certain (unspecified) words are said before it, it will show the person "on whom the Observer's thoughts are bent"; in her case, Ambrosio appeared, allowing her to monitor his movements (Lewis 270). Giving him the mirror, he wishes for Antonia to appear as Matilda says "the magic words": "a thick smoke rose from the characters traced upon the borders," and when it clears, Antonia is clearly visible within it (Lewis 271). Ambrosio watches a seductive tableau of Antonia getting into the bath, successfully persuading him to agree to Matilda's aid in getting access to Antonia (Lewis 271). Ambrosio is now involved, having commissioned Matilda's help, and is using magic by association. However, Ambrosio reassures himself that, as Matilda says, he would always have "time sufficient for repentance," and because "he employed *her* assistance, not that of the Daemons," he cannot be charged with "the crime of Sorcery" (Lewis 273). Ambrosio fears that "the delusions of Magic" could "force him to some deed" that would place him

beyond repentance (Lewis 273), something he clings to desperately while committing various sins. However, Lewis' portrayal of Catholicism plays on its associations with magic. Aligning British Protestantism with national identity, Robert Miles describes the supernatural in Gothic novels as disrupting the "'laws' of the nation" rather than the "laws of nature." Hoeveler describes the Protestant view that Catholic rituals resembled "demonology, witchcraft or something vaguely worse, cannibalism and vampirism," especially their belief in transubstantiation (108). Miles also notes that Catholic priests were perceived to use these supernatural devices while "exploiting the credulous populace." Matilda's performances enact these anxious discourses around Catholic practices as she leads Ambrosio into temptation, keeping him dependent on her while appearing to serve him. In doing so, she exposes his own hypocrisy and that of the Catholic structure itself, as well as affirming these popular ideas about Catholicism.

When summoning the aid of a demon, Matilda most obviously appears as a user of magic, and her ritual is spectacularized for Ambrosio's benefit, inspiring him with awe as well as drawing parallels with priestcraft. Matilda reappears without her "religious habit," and instead wearing a robe, with "unknown characters" embroidered on it, a poignard attached to the girdle, and holding "a golden wand" (Lewis 274). Her arms are bare and her loose hair "flowed wildly"; her "terrific expression" and entire "demeanour was calculated to inspire the beholder with awe and admiration" (Lewis 274-275). Visually, she appears prepared for magic work, according to Ambrosio's expectations, confronts him as a mysterious unknown power. Matilda brings Ambrosio into the cavern but tells him to be quiet while she enacts "the mysterious rites" (Lewis 275). These rites include Matilda drawing a circle around each of them, speaking in "indistinct sentences,"

and causing “pale sulphurous flame” to rise up, turning into “blue trembling fire” that overspreads the cavern except for their encircled areas (Lewis 275). Matilda speaks “her incantations” that Ambrosio cannot understand, and takes various objects out of her basket that Ambrosio does not recognize, save for “three human fingers, and an Agnus Dei which She broke in pieces,” throwing all the objects into the flames (Lewis 275-276). Her use of Catholic mass items here further blurs the distinctions between ritualized Catholic practices and magic. Hoeveler describes the Protestant popular views of “Catholics as witches that needed to be confronted and destroyed” (21), and the view of the Catholic clergy as “meddling and hypocritical,” and likely practicing “a variety of sexual perversions” (38). These Protestant visions portrayed Catholic “priests as wizards, magicians, or even vampires,” and saw “celibate priests and monks as …unnatural and in fact diabolical” (Hoeveler 38). In this view, Ambrosio is already suspect before he even begins consorting with demons, and Matilda offers opportunities to bring these traits out.

While staging the summoning ritual Matilda puts on a performance, as does the figure she summons; these performances are designed to impress Ambrosio with a sense of wonder and fear without increasing his terror of the consequences of magic use. With “a loud and piercing shriek,” Matilda appears overcome “with an access of delirium” in which she “tore her hair, beat her bosom, used the most frantic gestures,” and pierced her arm with the poignard kept in her girdle (Lewis 276). As Matilda drops the blood outside her protective circles, “dark clouds” emerge from the spot where it lands, and Ambrosio prepares for “something strange and horrible” based on “the solemn singularity of the charm” (Lewis 276). Hoeveler notes that Protestant anxieties around Catholicism included the “fear of literal blood being used in a religious ceremony,” invoking “the

pagan aspects of transubstantiation," as well as associating Catholicism "with cannibalism, human sacrifice and devil worship" (115). Matilda's use of blood in the ritual appears to solemnize the magic by making her appear more complicit, while also emphasizing these beliefs around Catholic and pagan rituals involving blood. To Ambrosio's surprise, a beautiful figure appears: a "Youth … the perfection of whose form and face was unrivalled" (Lewis 276-277). Ambrosio is "enchanted," looking "upon the Spirit with delight and wonder," though he still notices "a wildness in the Daemon's eyes, and a mysterious melancholy" in his countenance that shows him to be a "Fallen Angel" and inspires "the Spectators with secret awe" (Lewis 277). The devil appears much more appealing than Ambrosio anticipated, and he enjoys the spectacle even in his terror. Reading Matilda as already a demon, and therefore not needing to summon one, this scene is even more blatantly a show for Ambrosio, whose presence is also otherwise unnecessary for the ritual, emphasizing its performativity for his benefit.

Matilda's negotiation with the devil establishes a mysterious spectacle for Ambrosio that keeps him ignorant of their work, while impressing him with a sense of their power that is portrayed as working for his own benefit. Matilda appears to negotiate with the Daemon, speaking in "a language unintelligible" to Ambrosio (Lewis 277). Matilda holds the power of language, understanding, and interpretation in this interaction, which Ambrosio implicitly trusts even though she is literally dealing with the devil, invoking the potential ignorance of followers who trust the clergy's interpretations of God. As Matilda negotiates with the demon, Ambrosio is frozen in place, "his faculties … all found up in pleasure, anxiety, and surprize" (Lewis 277), as an eager spectator. While successful, Matilda says she has promised to never again summon his service on

Ambrosio's behalf, warning him to be careful using this unique opportunity (Lewis 278). In future, Matilda's cannot use her "'magic arts'" for him, so he would need to summon the demons and also face the consequences on his own (Lewis 278). According to Matilda, he will never be able to do so, because he does not have the "'strength of mind to force them to obedience'" (Lewis 278). She challenges his masculinity and determination again here, but also implicitly makes him dependent on her help by doing so, and he complies. Although she later explains what she has done, the fact that she left Ambrosio initially ignorant of her aim makes him dependent on her narrative of what happened, emphasizing her unreliability and Ambrosio's apparent determination to perceive her as only acting in his best interests. Matilda presents herself as both servant and commander: she has "'spies, who are ever employed in bringing [her] intelligence for [Ambrosio's] service (Lewis 329), and claims that she only lives "'to serve'" Ambrosio, as "'contributing to [his] forms now [her] only pleasure'" (330). While under her employ, these spies allegedly do nothing for her own personal use, but only for his; in his vanity, Ambrosio suspects nothing, but Matilda's version is evidently only meant to reassure him. Moreover, the idea that he is not personally responsible for any magic use allows him to believe that he has not yet revoked his claims to salvation.

As they try to finally gain Ambrosio's soul at the end, Matilda and Satan's rhetoric is similarly focused on the inevitability of his descent into hell. Matilda's final act is to try to convince Ambrosio to sell his soul to the devil, by providing herself as a model for him to follow. At the Inquisition, Ambrosio and Matilda are charged with the "crime of Sorcery" due to the discovery of the magic mirror (Lewis 423). Matilda magically appears before Ambrosio, joyfully explaining that she has freed herself, but

“‘at a dear, at a dreadful price,’” asking if Ambrosio is willing to “‘pay the same’” (Lewis 427-428). She has “‘sacrificed all for life and liberty,’” revoking the potential of heaven for “‘the power of every bliss, which can make that life delicious’” (Lewis 428). As Brewer notes, Matilda here appears totally freed, “a woman apparently commencing a life of unbounded sensual delights” and leaving Ambrosio a victim in the dust (202). At first, Ambrosio resists and admonishes Matilda’s actions. When she reveals that she paid with her soul, he calls her “‘Wretched Woman,’” but she rejoins, “’Weak Man,’” calling out his hypocrisy in hoping for salvation when his crimes have been so great, and asserting that he will end up in hell anyway (Lewis 429). Matilda leaves him with the Book and instructions on the magic he needs to summon the spirit as she has done (Lewis 430), giving him the opportunity and a convincing motive for committing himself to Satan, but still portrays it as his choice and his responsibility to decide; she can only do so much on his behalf, but in this case it is enough.

Although he does take up this offer and summon Satan for aid, Ambrosio remains reluctant to employ sorcery himself, holding on to the belief that until this point, he has kept himself relatively distant from the responsibility of performing magic. Satan repeats the offers that Matilda has made but insists that Ambrosio perform the ritual of signing a contract to give over his soul without restraint. As Matilda suggests, Satan confirms that Ambrosio was marked for him “‘in the book of destiny,’” and although doomed to flames he can avoid them for the present by signing the contract (Lewis 434). By implying that Ambrosio’s end is fated, the devil legitimizes his claim and dissuades Ambrosio’s hope for mercy. Ambrosio finally signs “‘the fatal contract,’” which Satan receives with “‘malicious rapture,’” claiming that he is now irrevocably doomed to hell, and suggesting

that Ambrosio in fact might have escaped, had he only resisted signing (Lewis 437). By summoning Satan on his own at the end, and signing a binding document, Ambrosio makes his involvement overt; he can no longer claim to be a mere accomplice while Matilda engages in magic on his behalf.

Here, the devil portrays his involvement as opening and offering opportunities for Ambrosio to accept, and does so with great success, implying that Ambrosio only needed demonic aid to facilitate his course, which was itself already predetermined. Magic and ritual provided a vehicle for Ambrosio's crimes, indicating his perpetual responsibility and inability to accept consequences throughout the novel. In addition, these demonic rituals are associated with his Catholic practices, emphasizing the ambiguity around users of magic and their roles (as clergy, witches, or in Satan's case at the end, the law). Miles writes that in Gothic novels, "fakery is a practice abjected in the ideological process of constructing an authentic--which is to say, pure--national identity," and he includes the "'explained supernatural'" in this category. The latter definition points to Matilda, but Ambrosio is also a fake, as an impure priest, who is incongruent with a British Protestant ideal, whose fall is explained through both supernatural interference and his own intrinsic nature. In the public eye, Lewis ultimately places Ambrosio in the role of a sorcerer. At the novel's end, the Inquisition explains his disappearance as sorcery, and speculates that his "former influence over the minds of the People was entirely to be ascribed to witch-craft," before he is forgotten entirely (Lewis 424). Ambrosio is complicit throughout and faces the consequences he has desperately tried to avoid. He is a fascinated spectator, like the audience, but one who has become too involved in the performance.

Works Cited

Brewer, William D. “Transgendering in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*.” *Gothic Studies,* vol. 6, no. 2, 2004, pp. 192-207.

Hoeveler, Diane Long. *The Gothic Ideology: Religious Hysteria and Anti-Catholicism in British Popular Fiction, 1780-1880.* U of Wales P, 2014.

Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk*, edited by Howard Anderson, Oxford UP, 2008.

Miles, Robert. "Abjection, Nationalism and the Gothic." *Essays and Studies*, 2001, n.pag.

"The Unraveling Mind": Satanic Screen Cults and Psychological Instability in 1970s American B-Movies

Interest in and terror of the occult hit its stride in the 1970s and permeated film, establishing a horror film cycle. This interest in the supernatural and occult stemmed from the late 1960s and eventually prompted the Satanic Panic of the 1980s. This chapter will examine the aesthetic and cultural conventions of Satanism in 1970s B-movies. There is much useful scholarship on religion, history, and the demonic in several touchstone satanic films preceding the 1980s, namely *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), and *The Omen* (1976). Drawing on this literature, I will explore other films that were popular at the time but have drifted out of scholarly conversations around satanism, and the sense of a corrupt modern world that paved the way for the 1980s Satanic Panic. These discourses include cultural anxieties developed in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965, the establishment of the Church of Satan by Anton LaVey in 1966, and the sexual liberation movement of the mid-to-late-1960s. Informed by this context, I will examine depictions of possession, hypnotism, and coercion in *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971), *Necromancy* (1972), *Race with the Devil* (1975), and *The Devil's Rain* (1975)[123] to explore how they blur the distinctions between self and the Other to create terror. Their portrayal of psychological instability in the occult perpetuates anxieties about whether evil is really "out there" by suggesting that it is much more insidious and closer to home.

These films were popular at the time but have since fallen out of favour given their B-movie status, yet they perpetuate and reify many satanic tropes that reflect the

[123] For which LaVey served as Technical Advisor

period's anxieties. I will focus on these films as forerunners to many of the anxieties colliding in the Satanic Panic, due to their depictions of threatened children, secret cults, and psychological instability. These films feature satanic rituals situated in American culture, including panicked rural villages, widespread collusion of cults (some dating from the pilgrims, others in contemporary trailer parks), and generational legacies of witchcraft in seemingly quaint small towns. These occult societies tend to employ possession or enthrallment, as well as visions, creating instability in a sense of self that parallels the broader instability of a flawed modern America where everyone, including the self, is suspect.

I will analyze what Bernard Doherty briefly calls the "satanic conspiracy of evil" (86) in these films, the robed and unknown figures worshipping or enacting another (demonic) entity's alleged will, and extend this analysis to include the dynamics of mind control at play that further collapse a sense of identity. I aim to draw connections between self-identity and a national or communal identity by exploring the agency and capacity of the satanic worshippers or "witches" in these films, especially in relation to those that they corrupt or draw into their circle (particularly youth and children). As Carrol L. Fry points out, Satanic films often foreground a "conspiracy by a shadowy group of Satanists, working for their own ends against society," which has "broad appeal: fear of a group of Others, people who look just like us and fit into society but have their own agenda that is destructive of our values" ("Sign" 99). Horror films love "paranoia about the hidden Other," and in Satanic films it is often a central element (Fry, "Sign" 99). As many critics take into account, "popular film mirrors social issues and concerns" and Fry emphasizes the element of paranoia in satanic films, "an irrational fear of the insidious Other who

corrupts and would destroy our society from within" as the main source of horror ("Sign" 93). Ultimately, these films explore how one can determine who is "one of us" or infiltrating their ranks (either as a Satanist or not), and how evil is constructed in relation to the self and Other. I will examine how these occult anxieties were depicted in film to explore the ways in which a Satanic Panic seemed plausible by the 1980s in America.

The Satanic Panic: "Save the Children"

Anxieties around the corruption of youth were foundational to the Satanic Panic. "Save the Children" movements appeared with increasing paranoia due to "shifting values and perceptions of the United States at home and abroad" (Beard 215). These concerns applied to young children as well as youths, especially with the counterculture movement of the 1960s (Beard 215). Drew Beard describes the "sense of mysterious and predatory forces using youth against their parents and the American way of life" and argues that this paranoia is foundational to 1970s supernatural horror (215). For Beard, "perceived oppression from something 'out there'" was associated by the early 1970s with the occult (215). According to Sean M. Quinlan, "by the mid-1970s, as the 'demonic' genre took off … tradition and authority seemed everywhere under assault" (316). Likewise for Beard, the 1970s occult panic became perceived as "a battle between good and evil" by figures like "parents, religious authorities, law enforcement, mental health professionals, tabloid talk show hosts and others," who purported that thousands of children were victims of Satanic cults (Beard 219). Simultaneously, many elements of 1970s supernatural horror included "children in jeopardy from supernatural forces" (Beard 219) These concerns permeated 1970s media and provided a cultural context for the paranoia that provided a foundation of plausibility to the 1980s Satanic Panic.

Concerns around youth and counterculture movements abounded throughout the 1970s, especially given the events of 1969 and the Manson murders. Beard notes that supernatural horror continued to be informed by cultural anxieties, but many of them stemmed from the Tate-LaBianca murders and "new fears about violent crime, home invasion and the figure of the 'killer hippie'" (Beard 215). Likewise, Sarah Hughes cites these crimes as significant to the development of occult paranoia, given that they were popularized in the media through its connection with *Rosemary's Baby* (directed by Roman Polanski, Tate's husband), and the influence the film had over Manson's cult (07). Speculations around Satanism as a motivator for the Tate-LaBianca murders circulated the idea of "an evil conspiracy of devil worshipers" (Dyrendal et al. 57). Interest in the occult increased throughout the 1970s, fueled by and perpetuating these cultural anxieties around youth and counterculture.

These cultural anxieties over the state of the nation and its youth laid the foundation for the 1980s Satanic Panic. Hughes argues that the Satanic Panic "over the presence of devil-worshipping pedophiles in America's suburbs," particularly around the 1984 McMartin trial and allegations, "demonstrated that dozens of American suburbs in the 1980s were prone to hysteria" and endorsed by the legal system as well as media (Hughes 692).[124] According to Hughes, the Panic was both "an extension of this fundamentally misguided approach to the national problem of child abuse" and

[124] The Satanic Panic "lasted from 1983, when Buckey was first accused of molesting Matthew Johnson, a two-year-old boy who attended McMartin, until 1990, when a second hung jury led to Buckey's final acquittal on all counts. The panic's central narrative argued that circles of satanists, pedophiles, and pornographers, who owned and operated suburban daycare centers, were seducing, abducting, molesting, and sometimes murdering the nation's children. … The panic polarized entire towns and brought social and financial devastation to those who had once been well respected members of the community" (Hughes 692).

"symptomatic of the major social, cultural, political, and economic changes that had taken place in the United States since the late 1960s" (693).[125] Given that child abuse had only just become legally recognized, legislation did not handle it well and many widespread misconceptions gave rise to further anxiety that led to the idea of Satanic involvement. Hughes notes that accusing people of "satanic ritual abuse" is a concept that "could only be conceived and condemned in a society universally acquainted with the Bible and generally accepting of its interpretations of good and evil" (711). Thus, this situation was portrayed as a moral fight of the nation's youth.

Cultural Background of Pre- and Early-1970s Anxieties

Rosemary's Baby and *The Exorcist* are significant for establishing many satanic cinematic tropes over the course of the 1970s. Many authors note the formative nature of these films for the occult screen and wider cultural milieu. Nikolas Schreck argues that Rosemary's Baby "became a kind of blueprint for the occult renaissance of the late 1960s" (137). and that after the film during the 1970s Satanic films were "churned out" and Satanism onscreen became a kind of "formulaic subgenre of monster movie" (143).[126] Beard notes that *The Exorcist* "prompted a mid-1970s cycle of horror films

[125] Hughes argues that part of the panic's source was "national anxieties surrounding the recently articulated problem of child abuse"; the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was signed on January 31, 1974 (692). Further legislation "aimed at kidnapping, child pornography, and abuse within the foster-care system continued to work from these same basic assumptions … and catered to the concerns of their patients, who were often well-todo white suburbanites" (Hughes 693). Here, the focus of concern is on and with the upper-middle and professional classes, reflected on screen through their own alleged involvement in Satanism.

[126] *The Exorcist* "can be seen as a reactionary answer to *Rosemary's Baby*" and marks a shift in satanic films (Schreck 143). Schreck argues that when the fever around *The Exorcist* was fading, *The Omen* (1976) emerged with its own "demoniacal problem child" and similarly was "concealed Christian propaganda masquerading as a mainstream movie" (143). Ten years after *Rosemary's Baby,* "the cultural tide had turned against the depiction of the dark and disturbing in mainstream pictures," according to Schreck (143).

typically featuring American families under supernatural assault in the guise of demons, ghosts, witches, satanic cultists and others," and its popularity was seen by some fundamentalists as "the first stage of a future attack on humanity by Satan himself" (211-212). It ran from sold-out theatrical showings to "second-run houses and drive-ins throughout 1974 and into 1975" (Beard 217). Similarly, Quinlan suggests that the novels *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), *The Exorcist* (1971), and *The Omen* (1976) "literally *demonized*" sixties counterculture and made it so that "traditional authorities were somehow unwilling or unable to contain the threat – or were collaborating with it," invoking paranoia about the collapse of legitimate authority (315). For Quinlan, this phenomena demonstrated societal collapse through doctors and priests who are unable to contain social disorder *or* are contributing to it (315). Here, the suspicion of traditional authority engenders further threat to the child and, by extension, the threat to the nuclear family. These three films serve as benchmarks for their immense popularity and influence over the 1970s horror cycle; notably, they all also center around the cult of the child.

Additional anxieties in Catholicism emerged from the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), which modernized many aspects of the church. Doherty refers to "increasingly paranoid themes regarding a Satanic conspiracy of evil" in this time (87).[127] Quinlan notes that post-Vatican II, this modernization of the church alienated some adherents to the earlier pre-conciliar style and this sense of displacement informed films like *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* (317). For Doherty, the rise in occult interest over the 1960s and 1970s provide evidence to those who were looking for it that this "upsurge in

[127] He suggests that *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* emphasize a "nostalgic pre-conciliar Roman Catholic aesthetic" and "a reactionary worldview in which a triumphalist Roman Catholic Church is often (though not always) seen as the sole efficacious arbiter of religious truth in a cosmic struggle between good and evil" (Doherty 87).

the immanence of the preternatural with post-conciliar change" (75). According to Quinlan, many Americans thought of this period in "eschatological or chiliastic terms," as various crises "transformed how they understood themselves, the social order, and the role they played in it" (328). He suggests that "ordinary Americans were overhauling how they understood cultural authority…and how professional experts represented reality itself" making authority figures seem "self-interested or ineffective" (Quinlan 328). This struggle with whether or not to trust authority, and to what extent or in what context permeates these horror films as we will see.

Another influence on this surge was Anton LaVey and his Church of Satan (established in 1966), which was driven by and perpetuated interest in the occult and was foundational to establishing the Satanist aesthetic.[128] LaVey's satanic movement coincided with liberal themes of the late 1960s such as "individuality, freedom, anti-authority, new forms of association, and interest in esoteric pursuits" and thus his audience was primed to be receptive to the movement (Dyrendal et al. 49). When LaVey published the Satanic Bible in 1969 the movement began growing more nationally, though it was still primarily based in the U.S. (Dyrendal et al. 50).[129] LaVey "embodied Satanism" making it "plausible and attractive as a movement," especially by coming to represent Satanism in the media (Dyrendal et al. 57).[130] The Church of Satan notoriously

[128] Gabriel Andrade for instance explores LaVey's influence on the modern satanic aesthetic (50).
[129] With the book's publication, the church grew from a local San Francisco movement to national and international growth: "To accommodate the increased interest, LaVey (in the esoteric vein) gave individual "charters" to construct local branches ("grottos") of the Church of Satan" (Dyrendal et al. 59).
[130] Although LaVey purported to have portrayed the Devil in *Rosemary's Baby* for clout, the man in the costume was actually actor Clay Tanner (Schreck 138).

parodied and inverted Christianity (Dyrendal et al. 66),[131] but LaVey emphasized that the movement "was not about worshiping the Devil," but was in fact "atheist, and in that sense, denied that Satan truly existed" (Andrade 56). Instead, he saw the figure of Satan as a "powerful heroic symbol" as the Romantic poets and John Milton did (Andrade 56).[132] Thus, his "homage to Satan" was not about doing evil things (like human sacrifice), but a sense of rebellion "against an oppressive system" (Andrade 58).[133] The inspiration from, and appeal to, late-1960s and early-1970s countercultural movements is evident. Many of LaVey's aesthetics permeated popular media and films about the occult, and he occasionally advised them directly, as in *The Devil's Rain.*

Tropes and Trappings of the Satanic Screen

Occult films tend to play with the most perceived dangerous ideas of who belongs to Satanism, situating them not as hippie youth but as seemingly respectable members of society. Quinlan cites late-60s and early-70s "cultural currents" of interest in the occult and questioning authority that correlated in the middle-class family (Quinlan 315). As Fry notes, Satanic aesthetics involve a great "body of sign and symbol readily adaptable for the screen" ("Sign" 98). These ideas are perpetuated by films like *Rosemary's Baby* in which a distinct cult is hidden in plain sight, occupying a localized region (the apartment

---

[131] LaVey "appealed to the idea that there had long been a "Satanic underground, centuries old" from which to learn; though such was not really the case, this sense of old wisdom appealed to the movement (Dyrendal et al. 66).

[132] Additionally, he "valued the role of the adversary as the sort of countercultural hero that refuses to conform to the moralistic mediocrity of the establishment" (Andrade 56).

[133] Black masses were a notorious element of the satanic worship practice, as popularized by LaVey and in books and films like *The Exorcist* (Fry, "Sign" 98). The actual Black Masses celebrated by LaVey were much more sexual and profane than the movies, though sharing the common trope of (especially female) nudity and eroticism. See Hugh B. Urban, "Satanic Sex and the Black Mass, From Fantasy to Reality," in *Magis Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism,* U of California P, 2006, pp. 191-221.

complex), and consisting of genteel people who happen to seek the coming of the Antichrist, in contrast with popular ideas around hippies and youths as proponents of occult practices. Many films explored the idea that Satanists, or Others, are already "here" and in plain sight.[134] The satanic conspiracy of evil, even before but especially since *Rosemary's Baby*, consists of "a coven of usually black-hooded, socially elite Satanists who work in concert with the forces of darkness to thwart the forces of good" (Doherty 87).[135] The danger is thus already present, and these films emphasize the covert actions of the upper-middle and professional classes and their authority in order to establish horror.

Satanists are identified by their actions and by certain tropes and trappings, such as pentagrams, robes, rituals, and cults,[136] elements that are prominently included in the following four B-movies.[137] In addition to these visual tropes, occult films often follow

---

[134] From across the pond, the British film *The Devil Rides Out* (1968, based on Dennis Wheatley's 1934 novel) perpetuates a few important thematic ideas, like *Rosemary's Baby* of the same year. It foregrounds mind control and the threat to the child, as well as having a charming and respectable cult leader (played by Charles Gray). Fry suggests that "the film establishes the story elements and visual image of the Satanic cult that were to appear in so many films to follow as well as the portrayal of the shadowy Others operating outside the notice of society" ("Sign" 105). Schreck notes that "these are eminently civilized Satanists … operating during the 1920s in the leisurely sphere of upper class British country life" (128). The head Satanist, Mocata, pays a call on the protagonists, and Schreck notes he "is the very picture of the English gentleman presenting his visiting card at the door" but with powerful hypnotic command (128).

[135] On British films *The Witches* (1966) and *The Devil Rides Out*, Michael Wood suggests that they "put forward the proposition that the supernatural, and those who know how to manipulate it in order to advance their nefarious plans, are not mere legends from the past, or the features of less-developed areas of the globe, but are with us today, in the stately homes and picturesque villages of modern England" (136).

[136] Wood lists many staples and trappings of the satanic film, the tropes that form the public view of the occult: "− Symbols: Pentagrams, glyphs, numerals and mysterious lettering − Specialized items: candles, skulls, curtains, robes, altars, idols, wands, ancient texts − Rituals: chanting, invocations, possessions, animal and human sacrifice − Ecstatic dances, drugs, dreams and hallucinations − Esoteric groups and cults, some with a very old history − Charismatic cult leaders or magicians often with a rather obscure plan" (137).

[137] Notably, several also play with the Goat of Mendes image. Goats were associated with Satan due to the Greek deity Pan, and LaVey popularized the goat imagery during rituals by wearing horned costumes and featuring Baphomet in his theatricality, with an inverted pentagram

similar plotlines. Several authors outline common plotlines of Satanic films. In distinct genre of the occult of the 1970s, Quinlan identifies four "types," including "how communities could become possessed or dominated by cult-like behaviour" such as in *The Brotherhood of Satan* and *The Wicker Man* (1973) (315). As Quinlan suggests, we will take up this communal possession trope in *The Brotherhood of Satan*, as well as the three other films to be discussed. Doherty lists five themes in contemporary Catholic horror films with important relation to the debates around the Vatican II reforms, including "preternatural phenomena surrounding manifestations of evil" and "the existence of a Satanic conspiracy of evil" (68). While not specifically discussing what he refers to as "Catholic horror films," I will borrow some of this terminology and refer to these tropes in light of the perpetuation of Satanic cult tropes on screen, especially supernatural phenomena, and the "Satanic conspiracy of evil."

Similarly, Fry identifies four Satanic film plots: the "coven or cult, arrival of the Antichrist, exorcism, or Faust plot" ("Sign" 93). As perhaps to be expected, this article concerns itself with the Satanic coven or cult, though Fry emphasizes that these plots may be combined (for instance, *Rosemary's Baby* and its cult adventing the Antichrist). In "We Are Legion," Fry elaborates that these plot lines convey "a common element of most Satanic films is a hidden cult of Others supporting Satan's invasion" (8-9). Fry writes that *The Exorcist* demonstrates "the primal narrative of invasion of the Other" where the horror centers on "the threat of pollution of the gene pool" via the child; she notes that Satanic films often thematically focus on a threat to the child as "the carriers for the

---

replacing the human torso below the goat's head (Andrade 55). See also Schreck on the Goat of Mendes in *The Devil Rides Out*, 127-128.

group's and species' genetic future" ("Legion" 19). In general, these plot lines are concerned with Us and Them, specifically the invasion of the Other or the corruption of the self to become Other. While the following four films do not include a strict possession story or a Faustian deal with the devil, they explore these possibilities of invasion via mind control, personal gain, and corruption. These themes are undoubtedly relevant to cultural anxieties and play out on screen to create horror.

Post-*Rosemary's Baby* and Pre-*Exorcist* Films and the Cult of the Children

Danger to the child foregrounds the plot in *The Brotherhood of Satan* (1971): here, elderly, genteel Satanists participate in a cult of reviving their youth by way of possessing children. The missing children cause an atmosphere of intense panic throughout the small town so that it becomes hostile to strangers: no one can get in, and no one can go out, because the Satanists (unbeknownst to the townsfolk) bewitch travelers and delivery-people with accidents. Here, the danger to the youth comes from middle- and upper-class society, as the seniors are portrayed distinctly from the townspeople, who have "gone mad" with despair at the loss of the children. The film follows a young family on a road trip: Ben (Charles Bateman), his girlfriend Nicky (Ahna Capri), and his daughter K.T. (Geri Reischl). Seeing the remains of a car accident on the highway, they try to report it in town, but the Sheriff (L.Q. Jones) tries to violently arrest Ben on sight and questions him about hi child, while the townspeople swarm around them frantically. Unbeknownst to the family, they suspect Ben of being behind the stolen children because they are the only strangers able to enter the town; they barely escape and as they drive away Nicky murmurs "my god, they're all mad." Their mob rage is intense and their anger and despair at the lost children shows how this kind of panic can

affect a community. The town is truly gone mad: they have had “26 people” and six families wiped out in a little over 72 hours, people pulverized, some suffocated, and “all those children missing”; later, the Sheriff aptly says the “town’s just about ready to explode.” These scenes dramatize the kind of paranoia and chaos that might result from anxieties such as the Satanic Panic and the distress it would cause in some communities.

The opening credits scene demonstrates the control the Satanists have over the village: they are depicted as three children who control a toy tank as it runs over a toy car, cut with an actual car being crushed and killing those inside. The implication is a sort of fantastical doubling of the toy and the actual event, foreshadowing a train of possessed or magical objects in the film, where the Satanist children have control over these figures that become animated. Later, a child’s doll awakens in the night and strangles her parents; and a child’s father Mike (Robert Ward) is killed when his statue of a knight on a horse becomes animated and life-size, beheading him. Here, things become possessed just as children to work in Satan’s favour, suggesting that the children are objects or pawns in the same way. Thus, the Satanists are not simply taking over their bodies but using a form of mind control before their transition to youth to make the children into essentially mindless drones. The Satanists themselves are all elderly and genteel, thus characterized as benign and respectable, drawing on the anxieties around the Satanic hiding in plain sight in seemingly the most unlikely places; their chief priest is also the local doctor, Duncan (Strother Martin).

Authority figures continue to struggle over the cause of the children’s disappearance, and the Priest emerges as a knowledgeable guide. As in *The Exorcist*, the Priest here must look beyond the normal to the spiritual, sinister cause that the Sheriff

cannot figure out and the Doctor will not figure out because he is behind it all. When K.T. goes missing like the other children, the Priest arrives with the answer that it was a coven of thirteen witches, who require thirteen children (explaining the reason why K.T. and her family were allowed into town when no one else was). The film backs religious authority here as the Priest single-handedly solves the mystery and is to be trusted. These results also demonstrate a reliable kind of predictability: the Satanists might be lurking in secret, but they rely on fixed numbers and rituals that can be solved by someone in the know. However, the Priest later finds Mike's body and goes into a state of shock, rendering him useless at the climax, suggesting that ultimately, he and these other authority figures cannot be relied upon to stop the cult.

During the ceremony to transplant their souls into the bodies of the children, the Satanists are enrobed and chanting in a large room where they each stand at a pedestal with a child standing on it. The trappings of this ceremony are very Catholicized, with large candles and an altar, and the High Priest speaking prayers in Latin. This ritual is intercut with the heroes searching for the boy that will be chosen for the sacrifice, and when they find Joey is missing, to the Satanists themselves. Ben finds Mike's horse statue, restored to its former object-self but now bloodied, and they search the "old Berry place." However, they are too late: they stumble into what looks like an abandoned house with all the children standing in a circle blankly staring at them (all trappings of the ritual having disappeared). Thus, the children are not saved, suggesting a disturbing outcome in which the Satanists are victorious. In fact, the following films will continue to offer such sinister endings in which the threat of the cult remains very much alive and well.

Meanwhile, Bert I. Gordon's *Necromancy* (1972) centers around Mr. Cato's (Orson Welles) attempts to raise his child Timothy (Terry Quinn) from the dead. Cato is a toymaker who presides over the town of Lilith,[138] which is itself essentially a witch coven he has created in an attempt to master necromancy. He hires Frank, who is to move into Lilith with his wife Lori, chiefly because Lori is allegedly "born with the veil," meaning, according to Cato, that she has the power to exchange her life for Timothy's. From its opening scene, *Necromancy* purports that the eponymous act of reviving the dead is "the most dangerous of all the occult rituals" because it requires consorting with evil spirits and because "success in the ceremony will result in the death of that person for he or she must adhere to the ancient rules, a life for a life." The film follows Lori and Frank's arrival into town and her subsequent fears of the witches; it is revealed to be a hallucination or dream at the end, but the events of their moving day begin to proceed as usual, giving the impression of a premonition of her doom instead, thus blurring the distinctions between the real and the supernatural. This time, the cult of the child is a Satanist one, and the focus on reviving and keeping the child is from their perspective. Lori has had a miscarriage that foregrounds the lack of children in the film's universe and suggests that she ought to bring forth life in some other way (namely, necromancy).

Lilith is a town of young people, but not of children. Lori's friend Georgette (Lisa James) and her husband are leaving soon because she's pregnant (Georgette later has a miscarriage to keep her in town). The town is populated by hippie youths: Priscilla (Lee Purcell) says that aside from Cato, everyone in Lilith is under thirty, and Cato does not

[138] Lori says that Lilith is a "female witch that's believed to live in desolate places and goes around menacing little children," which is an interesting definition in general and for the film's focus on children.

allow children; in exchange they have a "permissive life, with everything provided for our pleasure." At a welcome party for Lori and Frank, they all affirm they want to be happy, with "total involvement to pleasure. Lilith is total involvement to pleasure," and they criticize Lori for being resistant to this principle. The town is thus full of corrupted, hippie youth, according to the day's discourses on hippies and the occult. Moreover, when Lori claims that she will be leaving, Doctor Jay (Harvey Jason) says, "no, you've waited too long, witchcraft is like a drug that you can't turn away from once you been seduced to its pleasures," emphasizing the correlation between drug use and witchcraft. Thus, the film invokes anxieties around youth culture and the youth being corrupted by the occult, dramatizing these ideas as well as the notion that professional, respectable authority is behind it all in the face of Cato.

The distinction between reality and the supernatural becomes increasingly blurred as Lori begins to have more visions, particularly of Cato's son. As Timothy comes to life in his coffin, the Satanists shut Lori in the coffin and lower her as she yells to be let out and the camera cuts to her alarm clock on the day of the move as she wakes up. Once they prepare to leave, the phone rings as it did on that day in her vision, and she screams as the credits roll. The film leaves it ambiguous whether these events are a hallucinated dream or vision, but firmly portrays the events as inevitably going to play out as Lori perceived, suggesting that her fate is inescapable even if she is forewarned. Both of these films thus foreground mind control and the cult of the child in order to create horror.

Two Post-*Exorcist* Films and Satanic Cult Revenge

Initiated in part by *Rosemary's Baby,* the 1970s horror film cycle shifted with the release of *The Exorcist* in 1973. *The Exorcist* is of course "a cultural phenomena," and for

Beard it captured "the general atmosphere of paranoia and cynicism" of the time (213). Beard notes that the film's narrative elements indicate the "growing fear of intrusion in 1970s culture, with spaces assumed to be safe revealed to be easily breached, a sense of vulnerability and a lack of significant protection from previously trusted institutions" (medicine and science, in the case of *The Exorcist*) (213). According to Beard, these cultural anxieties combined "with a renewed interest in the supernatural to create the '1970s supernatural horror movie' …that would significantly influence the following decade" and its Satanic Panic (215). Beard argues that "*Exorcist* imitators" like *The Devil's Rain* and *Race with the Devil* gave face to "the oppressive 'something out there'" (216). However, these are only imitators in the sense of general 1970s horror and fear of the Other; they are not exorcism stories but Satanic cult stories.

In *Race with the Devil* (1975), couples Roger (Peter Fonda) and Kelly (Lara Parker); and Frank (Warren Oates) and Alice (Loretta Swit) are on a road trip in a motor home from Texas to Colorado. One night, Roger and Frank witness what appears to be a typical bonfire ritual with the usual Satanic robes and accoutrements, and continue watching as women dance naked around the fire until one of them is stabbed by a masked leader as a sacrifice. The onlookers flee in the motor home, but are pursued by the vengeful Satanists. Here, the Satanist cult seems ridiculous with all the usual trappings, but the film reveals that it is actually made up of regular local folks – the conspiracy of evil here is large and involves many authority figures and resources. While the logistics are cinematically exaggerated, the idea of a widespread and pervasive cult community is established to create horror.

The film taps into contemporary concerns about hippie culture through the authorities' suggestions that hippies were the source of the problem. Sheriff Taylor (R.G. Armstrong) and his Deputy, Dave (Wes Bishop) insist that it was hippies, probably sacrificing an animal. Here, the authorities, who are corrupt themselves, invoke anxieties around hippies and the counterculture movement that would play into contemporary beliefs. Ultimately, the film suggests that these fears are unfounded, just as Roger and Frank do. The travelers are unconvinced, and the authority figures begin to appear suspect. While the men are out showing the Sheriff the scene, Kelly and Alice find a note on the mobile home window (which was smashed by the pursuing Satanists), half in English half in runes; they find a book at the library explaining a ritual human sacrifice by witches and believe that it describes what their partners witnessed. Roger reveals that he secretly got a blood sample at the scene from what the authorities claim is a dead dog, and wants to take it to the "big city police department" to see if it is canine or human, and compare with the local Sheriff's results. Thus, authority is still fundamentally to be trusted but local, rural professionals can be suspect; however, unfortunately for our heroes, they do not anticipate the extent to which they cannot trust this community.

Determined to enjoy some of their vacation, the friends stop at a recreation vehicle park. They are welcomed by kindly neighbours, the Hendersons (played by Carol Blodgett and Clay Tanner),[139] who come bearing a cocktail jug and admire the motor home's features (colour TV! a microwave!). Later, they find Kelly's dog Ginger hung over the motor home door and Kelly insists "it's the same people, they've followed us";

[139] As Schreck puts it, Clay Tanner is the "secret star of the '60s Satanic cinema who Polanski cast as the Devil in *Rosemary's Baby*" (175).

they also find two live rattlesnakes in the cupboard, and the tires on their dirt bikes have been slashed. As suggested by the dead dog at the scene of the sacrifice, animals are not exempt from this cult's activities. This cult of course employs both human and animal sacrifice, which were not endorsed by LaVey's Satanism, but add additional terror. Kelly's assumption that they have been followed to the vacation home park is disturbing enough, but truth that the Satanists are already in the trailer park waiting for them is even more so.

Gradually, they realize the extent to which a network of communities is in on the Satanic cult action. They become increasingly targeted: they stop at two separate gas stations where the phones fail to work; they are boxed in by three transport trucks and barely escape; and they encounter a staged "accident" with a school bus hit broadside (while the children happily playing nearby, uninjured). Fortunately, as Frank says, he "don't believe in school bus on Sundays," and they notice none of the are kids harmed (here, children are safe, though again used as props). When they finally escape this pursuit, pull over, and begin to feel that "it's all over," they hear chanting outside. A fire has encircled the motor home and out of the darkness robed figures emerge, surrounding them, including Sheriff Taylor and the Hendersons. Here, authority figures and regular folks are not to be trusted, emphasizing a sense of rural insularity. Ultimately, the blatant satanic activity and ritual are very brief in the film, and the main focus is that no one is trustworthy (at least in certain perhaps "backwards" rural communities), and that the American dream is thus corrupted.

In *The Devil's Rain* (1975), the Satanic cult also seeks revenge, this time on a specific family for their past wrongdoings. Jonathan Corbis (Ernest Borgnine) is "Satan's

minister on earth," by his own description, and his cult of Satanic pilgrims was betrayed by members Martin (William Shatner) and Aaronessa Fyffe (Erika Carlsson); he curses them and vows revenge on their descendants, currently the Prestons. Additionally, Corbis has captured souls in a punishment called "the devil's rain," where they are trapped in a vessel while their bodies act as worshipper drones to do his bidding. The names of those he has converted are recorded in a book which is in the Prestons' possession, and which Corbis is attempting to retrieve so that he can achieve his full powers (what this will look like is left unspecified). In the present day, the film follows Mark Preston (William Shatner), his brother Tom (Tom Skerritt), and Tom's wife Julie (Joan Prather), as they struggle against Corbis and try to keep him from getting the book.

The Satanists employ much of LaVey's Satanist aesthetic, as well as invoking some of the anxieties around rural cult activity. Mark meets Corbis at the ghost town Redstone, where they agree to a challenge of faith, wagering Mark's parents against the book. Corbis invites him to survive a ceremony in the church, which looks a lot like inverted Christianity (thanks to LaVey's technical advice): it includes Latin chanting; Corbis' prayers paralleling Mark's recital of the Lord's Prayer; an inverted pentacle over the door; hooded figures praying in pews and a hooded organist; and an intricate stained-glass Baphomet. A hooded and robed Mrs. Preston (Ida Lupino) appears with eyeless sockets like the other worshippers and says she has found peace and they have saved a spot for Mark, as they swarm him. These figures employ typical Satanic accoutrements, as well as the trope of worker drones under the control of a head priest (with the implied threat that the protagonists may become One of Them).

The film also dramatizes extrasensory capabilities in collusion with occult to further the horror around unstable mental states. We are introduced to Mark's brother and sister-in-law at a medical classroom where Tom is assisting a Dr. Richards (Eddie Albert) in a lecture on extrasensory perception with Julie as the subject. Julie has extrasensory experiences and talks about how that feels as the camera cuts back and forth to visions of various Satanic scenes, such as Mark during the church ceremony, and hitherto unseen shots of hooded processions. Later, Julie has another vision while looking into the eyeless sockets of one Satanist that Tom has knocked out, which reveals the origins of the cult, the book, and Corbis' animosity towards the Prestons. Thus, Julie's visions are both a handy method for exposition as well as a threat given that the Other permeates her mind and gives the impression of mutability. Moreover, Corbis' revenge seems inevitable given the longevity of his history and the ways that Julie can see it happening in both the past and future.

The denouement emphasizes the inescapability of occult power as Corbis emerges victorious. At the church, Dr. Richards and Tom find the "devil's rain," a glass vessel with a golden goat's head on top of it under the floor, containing the weeping souls who have been possessed by Corbis (literally possessed as in he owns and keeps them). Worshipper Danny (John Travolta) finds that the devil's rain jar has been taken but also that they have left the book, which he promptly returns to Corbis. Our trio of heroes appear to escape as before the church explodes, seeming to have won; however, in the last shots, Tom hugs Julie who turns into Corbis, and the camera shows the culmination of Julie's visions has come true as she is now behind glass, tormented by the devil's rain (somehow, even though the vessel is broken). Thus, her visions appear to be inevitable

and she becomes trapped even though the vessel is destroyed; despite their efforts, and Mark's temporary attempts to stop Corbis and briefly coming back to himself, they are foiled. Thus, both of these films, and those pre-*Exorcist* foreground the machinations of the Satanic conspiracy of evil as foolproof and inevitable, not to be escaped. Rather than the widespread conspiracy of *Race with the Devil*, *The Devil's Rain* employs a more localized approach with continuity over time, though both portray Satanists as vengeful and attempting (rather successfully) to gain control over others at any cost.

Approaching the Advent of the 1980s Satanic Panic

Popular media depictions of the occult and Satanic cults foreshadowed the anxieties of the 1980s Satanic Panic. Films like these demonstrate how the influence of the satanic permeates the mind: even without a strict possession story, these films show a perhaps more insidious version of influence and control that a community or cult can have over individuals, and the subsequent power gained. Even more so than individualized possession as in *The Exorcist,* or the disaster to one family as in *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Omen*, films like *The Brotherhood of Satan* demonstrate a broader sphere of influence and control. Others like *Necromancy, Race with the Devil,* and *the Devil's Rain,* while focused on a small group of people, show the great influence of a wide group of Satanists beyond a specific time or place. There was massive influx of these occult horror films in the 1970 trying to get in on the hype, and they also shifted by the end of the decade into a disinterested, rote trope of satanic films. However, despite waning interest in some of these tropes, the decade as a whole allowed occult anxieties to permeate and percolate in the American cultural consciousness, allowing beliefs of the Satanic Panic to seem plausible. In particular, these films draw on anxieties about the

hippie counterculture movement yet suggest, perhaps more disturbingly, that it is not rebellious youth at the heart of the problem (though they may be corrupted in it), but those respectable upper-middle or professional class, "everyday folks" who are most likely to also be authorities in the Satanic cult and can wield its power. Moreover, it is significant that none of these four films adequately contain the horror (nor do many other films like *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Omen*), in fact suggesting that it continues to thrive after the film's conclusion. This result suggests the helplessness of the heroes and the inherent corruption of American culture in that the cult is both already here and flourishing despite any attempts to curb it. These films dramatize the distinctions between who is one of Us or one of Them, drawing out and perpetuating fears of the Other and suggesting a disturbing mutability between these apparently distinct categories. The self, these films suggest, is not stable even or especially in one's own mind, and any Other is suspect.

Works Cited

Andrade, Gabriel. “Animal Imagery in the Satanism of Anton LaVey.” *Journal of Religious and Theological Information,* vol. 20, no. 2, 2021, pp. 49-64.

Beard, Drew. “Horror Movies at Home: Supernatural Horror, Delivery Systems and 1980s Satanic Panic.” *Horror Studies,* vol. 6, no. 2, 2015, pp. 211-223.

Doherty, Bernard. “The Smoke of Satan on the Silver Screen: The Catholic Horror Film, Vatican II, and the Revival of Demonology.” *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion,* vol. 33, no. 1, 2020, pp. 66-96.

Dyrendal, Asbjørn, Lewis, James R., and Petersen, Jesper Aa. “The Age of Satanism: Anton Lavey and the Church of Satan.” *The Invention of Satanism*, edited by Dyrendal, Lewis, and Petersen, Oxford, 2015, pp. 47-70.

Fry, Carrol L. “Sign, Symbol, and Primal Fears in the Satanic Film.” *Cinema of the Occult,* Lehigh UP, 2008, pp. 92-157.

---. “‘We Are Legion’: Primal Dreams and Screams in the Satanic Screen.” *Journal of Religion & Film,* vol. 19, no. 2, 2015, pp. 1-30.

Hughes, Sarah. “American Monsters: Tabloid Media and the Satanic Panic, 1970-2000.” *Journal of American Studies,* vol. 51, no. 3, 2017, pp. 691-719.

Necromancy. Directed by Bert I. Gordon, performances by Pamela Franklin, and Orson Welles. Cinerama Releasing Co., 1972.

Quinlan, Sean M. “Demonizing the Sixties: Possession Stories and the Crisis of Religious and Medical Authority in Post-Sixties American Popular Culture.” *The Journal of American Culture,* vol. 37, no. 3, 2014, pp. 314-330.

Race with the Devil. Directed by Jack Starrett, performances by Peter Fonda, Warren Oates, Lara Parker, and Loretta Swit, 20th Century Fox, 1975.

Rosemary's Baby. Directed by Roman Polanski, performances by John Cassavetes, and Mia Farrow, Paramount Pictures, 1968.

Schreck, Nikolas. *The Satanic Screen: An Illustrated Guide to the Devil in Cinema*. Creation, 2001.

The Brotherhood of Satan. Directed by Bernard McEveety, performances by Charles Bateman, Ahna Capri, and Strother Martin, Columbia Pictures, 1971.

The Devil's Rain. Directed by Robert Fuest, performances by Ernest Borgnine, Ida Lupino, William Shatner, and John Travolta, Bryanston Distributing Co., 1975.

The Exorcist. Directed by William Friedkin, performances by Linda Blair and Max von Sydow, Warner Brothers, 1973.

The Omen. Directed by Richard Donner, performances by Gregory Peck, Lee Remick, David Warner, and Billie Whitelaw, 20th Century Fox, 1976.

Wood, Michael. "Witches and Demons: The Occult in Two Hammer Films from the 1960s." *Monstrum*, vol. 1., no. 1, 2018, pp. 135-161.

"We're Honouring Murderers": the Small Town and Narratives of Belonging in John Carpenter's *The Fog* (1980)

In this paper, I focus on the origin stories surrounding the small coastal town of Antonio Bay in John Carpenter's *The Fog* (1980). In the film, contemporary origin narratives of the town are challenged when the local priest discovers that the town's founders sank a ship of people with leprosy in order to maintain the ideals of their locale. Subsequently, on the anniversary of this event, the ghosts of these sailors come to seek vengeance on the town. I aim to analyze the ideas of haunting the land, as well as the concept of stewardship and how it is constructed in the film in respect to the land. Furthermore, the ghosts employ the environment (namely, the eponymous fog) against the town in their search for revenge. As Murray Leeder points out (in 2009, and little has changed), *The Fog* "has received little treatment in discussions of the canon of ghost films, or even significant emphasis in the existing scholarship on Carpenter" (71). The film is ultimately concerned with how narratives are constructed and how a sense of belonging is determined. The terrors that this ghost story invokes centre around place and its stewardship, drawing attention to who is considered to belong and who is considered out of place.

The film opens with a countdown to midnight, as old Mr. Machen (John Houseman) recites the story of the origin of the town one hundred years earlier, on the 21st of April, to various local children around a campfire. John Kenneth Muir notes that the film itself is a ghost story, that is "obsessed with the verbal nature of storytelling, of frightening tales repeated from one generation to the next" (86). The first shot of the film, as Muir notes, is of a "ticking pocket-watch … a reminder of passing time, of the

generational differences between the storyteller and listeners around the fire" (86). Mr. Machen's words are obsessed with time: he intones: "11:55. Almost midnight. Enough time for one more story. One more story before 12:00, just to keep us warm. In five minutes, it will be the 21st of April. One hundred years ago on the 21st of April, out in the waters around Spivey Point, a small clipper ship drew towards land…" Moreover, he states that this opening story has been "told to the fishermen of Antonio Bay by their 'fathers and grandfathers,'" which as Muir notes, emphasizes "the passage of time and a generational sharing of communal stories" (86-87). Mr. Machen's story reminds listeners that the fateful anniversary of the beginning of the ghost story is about to occur, which Muir suggests immerses the listeners in the story (87), a connection which is heightened by the fact that they are all sitting around a campfire and listening, and the ship crashed due to seeing a fire through the fog and heading towards the light. Thus, the film immediately foregrounds generational storytelling as significant, suggesting that it is important to consider the narratives we pass down and how they become or already are distorted. This frame establishes these ideas right away and the rest of the film meditates on them. Notably, Mr. Machen's story also sets up the element of the fog as significant: he recounts that the crew of the "clipper ship" the Elizabeth Dane saw a fire on the shore strong enough to penetrate the fog and steer their course, but after they crashed, the fog lifted as suddenly as it had come, went back, and never came again. Moreover, he suggests that according to the story, "when the fog returns to Antonio Bay up by Spivey Point the men in the sea will rise up in search of the campfire that led them to their dark icy death," which he declares just as the bell tolls midnight. Thus, these ghosts haunt the land, and haunt generations of Antonio Bay citizens through this story, even before the

true narrative is known – even before establishing the treachery of the town's founders, this narrative does not bode well for the people of Antonio Bay, suggesting that the crew of the ship will seek revenge for the traitorous campfire itself. While not implicating the founders or people themselves yet, the story establishes revenge as a key element of these ghosts.

Meanwhile, the narrative pivots to other events happening in the town as it becomes affected by the arrival of the anniversary, from midnight to one AM. In the church, Father Malone (Hal Holbrook) sees a brick fall out of the wall in the study, revealing a crevice in which he finds an old journal, belonging to his grandfather Father Patrick Malone, dated from 1880 (one hundred years earlier). Over the local radio station, KAB, at midnight, "the witching hour," Stevie Wayne (Adrienne Barbeau) wishes the town a happy birthday on its one hundredth anniversary. Machines begin to go haywire: payphones start ringing, store shelving shakes, glass windows break, lights turn on, and car alarms go off, all within five minutes of midnight. Just at 12:12am, Nick Castle (Tom Atkins) has picked up hitchhiker Elizabeth Solley (Jamie Lee Curtis), and suddenly all the windows in his truck spontaneously break. These events continue to emphasize the importance of time, as the camera pans over clocks or Stevie's voice continually reminds us what time it is. Moreover, these disturbances affect everyone in the town, implying that the whole town is complicit and that the ghosts are seeking revenge on everyone, even Elizabeth who is just passing through. The ghosts encroach on the usual machinations of the town, suggesting a break in time to when the ghosts fell victim to the founders' violence – while time technically marches on, their clock-breaking and glass-

shattering pulls at the moment when everything shifted for them and the moment that the town has since tried to conceal.

The first victims are the crew of the trawler the *Sea Grass*, who fall under the hold of a large fog bank, out of which emerges an old ship and its ghostly crew, who stab the three men aboard the trawler. As Leeder points out, "despite the association of the ghosts with evanescent things (e.g., water, radio signals, and the fog itself), they are nevertheless shown as highly material, highly physical" (77). They board the trawler, appearing zombie-like, and repeatedly stab the three crewmen. In contrast, Robert E. Ziegler notes the characteristics of the fog as antagonist in the film, arguing that "the disruptive killer force belongs …explicitly to nature" and is "a property of open space itself: the air" (776). While the fog is disconcerting and heavily associated with the ghosts, it is they who do the (tangible and physical) killing. In addition to the ghosts and their search for revenge, fear is localised into "this conversion of dark powers into a vague climatological presence," according to Ziegler (776). While both solid and tangible, they also become aligned with the fog and its permeability. When Nick and Elizabeth find the missing *Sea Grass* later, the trawler is covered in water and at the morgue, Dr. Phibes (Darwin Joston) says the only body that they found looks like it has been underwater for a month; he claims that this man "died in the ocean" even though he was actually just stabbed as we saw, indicating the natural forces that work alongside the ghosts' vengeance. Thus, the ghosts are aided and abetted by nature, which they become associated with as it advents their approach to the town. Nature itself seems to turn against the town here and assist the ghosts in their revenge.

The film provides another version of this origin story, as Father Malone discovers his grandfather's journal, depicting what actually occurred during the founding of the town. The journal tells that his grandfather met with Blake, who was "cursed" with leprosy, but a rich man who wanted to establish a leper colony nearby to try to "better his situation and that of his comrades." Even Malone's grandfather, a priest, struggles with this idea, writing, "I must balance my feelings of mercy and compassion for this poor man with my revulsion at my thought of a leper colony only a mile distant." The implication of course is that this nearby community would negatively affect the future of the bourgeoning town of Antonio Bay, the founders of which are already constructing an idealized sense of who does and does not belong there. Then he tells how the six conspirators met and "planned the death of Blake and his comrades," trying to reassure himself that the "gold will allow the church to be built and our small settlement to become a township." They build a "false fire" to break the ship on the rocks at Spivey Point, "aided by an unearthly fog that rolled in as if heaven-sent, although god had no part in our actions tonight." The government and the church are thus aligned against the arrival of Blake and his comrades, and their conspiracy indicates a corruption of these institutions in their desire to create an idealized community allegedly untarnished by these undesirable associations. Here, the fog seems to help them and the town rather than their victims, but after this crime it becomes associated with the ghosts. Initially, the fog seems heaven-sent for the conspirators' purposes, indicating its ambiguity and sense of being changeable or mutable like the sea. Later, it is quite firmly aligned with the ghostly crew and their mission.

Malone claims that the planned anniversary "celebration tonight is a travesty. We're honouring murderers." Mrs. Williams (Janet Leigh), who is actively planning the event thinks he's "taking all this much too seriously" but he claims that "Antonio Bay has a curse on it … we're all cursed." Here it seems that everyone in the town must pay for the founders' actions, but actually it turns out that the ghosts only want six of them. As Robert C. Cumbow suggests, Father Malone feels immense guilt about the truth of the origin story, and "almost Christlike, takes onto his shoulders the burden of guilt shared by the six original conspirators" (96). Cumbow points out that "here the monsters represent precisely the return of the unnatural, not to say evil, beginnings on which Antonio Bay's settled domesticity is based, the self-denying lie that the town's citizens have suppressed for generations" (96). Here, he uses monsters to refer to the ghosts, but the term might be more appropriately applied to the original founders of the town, who are revealed to be monstrous in their crimes. Moreover, this false narrative is the story on which the town's whole identity is based, as Cumbow points out, indicating the culpability of the whole town by association in maintaining it.

The town's celebration ceremony is extremely ironic, given what we now know about the approaching ghosts and their mission. Muir suggests that *The Fog* aligns with "Carpenter's negative opinion of America's capitalist history" because it is really about "the underside of the American dream," given Antonio Bay's secret bloody history (89). Even worse, "their descendants celebrate the conspirators for winning" by holding this "extravagant celebration," as Muir puts it (89). Mrs. Williams insists on fulfilling her speech even though she has just discovered that her husband is missing from the *Sea Grass*, and despite the true account of the story she heard earlier from Father Malone.

She declares: “all of us living here in Antonio Bay today owe a great debt of gratitude to those men and women a hundred years ago who struggled and sacrificed to make this town grow into what it is today, and it’s up to us to keep their kind of spirit alive.” Mrs. Williams is, as Leeder suggests, “the character most associated with the town’s fraudulent self-image” (72). Given these associations, she might seem to be a likely target for the ghosts, but they appear to seek vengeance on the town at large rather than specific people, even in their search for six representative victims, implying that they are all complicit. They target the town at large suggesting that it is not simply any descendant of the conspirators that they seek, or the allegedly worst or most hypocritical citizens; rather, the town itself is implicated in the crimes of its past. As Kendall R. Phillips suggests, the ghosts’ “attack is predicated on crimes of the past” and he usefully points out that “the parallel here with the long history of American treachery toward Indigenous peoples … is clear” (138). For Phillips, the film demonstrates “the ways that our normal world-civilization is built upon layers of dishonesty and theft” and that “our efforts to bury these crimes …are never fully successful” (140). Thus, the film is concerned with stewardship of the land, which creates a parallel with crimes towards Indigenous peoples, but the film does not overtly acknowledge this existing history. However, it suggests the unreliability of the narratives we create about ourselves, especially about who belongs in an idealized American town.

As the fog actually encroaches on the town, Stevie monitors it from her lighthouse and updates the citizens over the radio, instructing them to get to the higher and holier ground: “if you can get out of town, get to the old church,” she says; our major characters converge there and encounter a drunken Father Malone. Malone claims they “can’t hide

any longer, no matter where we go it'll find us…Blake and his men'll come for us, it's our day of judgement." Here, he suggests that they are all doomed, but while anyone could be a target, they will not all have to pay for these past crimes. Together, they read the journal and discover the injunction that six men must die, and count them out, realizing that thus far the ghosts have claimed five victims. Malone says, "that's what they want, they've come back for the six original conspirators," believing that they want him because his grandfather was part of the original group (although it seems that the ghosts actually attack whoever they can find rather than being concerned with specific descendants). They discover that his grandfather Patrick Malone took the stolen gold back and hid it in the church, and find this missing treasure in the wall in the form of a giant golden cross. As the ghosts encroach on the church, Malone takes the cross out and offers both it and himself up to them, claiming, "This is your gold Blake. My grandfather stole it from you. I'm the one who must answer for it…I'm the sixth conspirator. I'm Father Malone. Take me." Here, he presents himself as one of the six conspirators, as if he was actually there and paying for the crimes of his forebears, and offering himself and the gold as a kind of promise, an indication of goodwill in contrast to his ancestor's act of violence. They take the gold, and disappear, but leave Father Malone alive, for the moment.

After the ghosts disappear everywhere, Stevie speaks for the last time over the radio: "I don't know what happened in Antonio Bay tonight. Something came out of the fog. It tried to destroy us. In one moment, it vanished. But if this has been anything but a nightmare and if we don't wake up to find ourselves safe in our beds, it will come again. To the ships at sea who can hear my voice, look across the water into the darkness. Look

for the fog." According to Muir, this new "ghost story" gives a new ending to the earlier story, in that the ghosts return for their vengeance, and that since this story is told by newcomer Stevie, it means she has become part of Antonio Bay, "having suffered for its crimes" like the others (88). Thus, these crimes continue to define what it means to be a citizen of Antonio Bay. By ending with a speech from a newcomer, someone who has not heard the false narrative through generational storytelling, the film suggests that at this point a new story might emerge. Muir suggests that this ending indicates they must remain vigilant about the terror (88), though Leeder argues that it is "unlikely that the inhabitants of Antonio Bay will face these particular ghosts again, but the metaphorical ghosts of its history (hauntological, as it were) may prove harder to shake entirely" (72-73). The ghosts finally return for Father Malone, thus claiming a total of six victims as indicated. However, whether or not the town will acknowledge the truth of its history is unknown, and even if it does, it may as Leeder suggests, be haunted by it still.

Thus, *The Fog* centers around the people and history of Antonio Bay, though the film makes it clear that these histories are contradictory and deliberately constructed. The ghosts and their supernatural fog challenge these origin stories and demand justice for the wrongs done to them by the town at large, specifically looking for six victims to pay for these crimes. These crimes themselves haunt the land and the people who live on it and are enacted through the element of the fog and the return of the original victims. This narrative taps into anxieties around stewardship of the land, and the nature of the narratives we tell ourselves and pass on through generations to make meaning and create our identities. The film is a ghost story, but it is also highly concerned with the stories we

tell ourselves, about ourselves and our communities, as well as who belongs in them and who allegedly does not.

Works Cited

Carpenter, John, director. *The Fog*. AVCO Embassy Pictures, 1980.

Cumbow, Robert C. "'We're All Cursed': *The Fog.*" *Order in the Universe: The Films of John Carpenter.* The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1990, pp. 93-101.

Leeder, Murray. "Skeletons Sail an Etheric Ocean: Approaching the Ghost in John Carpenter's *The Fog*." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 2009, vol. 37, no. 2 pp. 70-79.

Muir, John Kenneth. "The Fog." *Films of John Carpenter.* McFarland, 2000, pp. 83-90.

Phillips, Kendall R. "Forbidden Thresholds: *The Fog, Ghosts of Mars, Halloween, Prince of Darkness, In the Mouth of Madness.*" *Dark Directions: Romero, Craven, Carpenter, and the Modern Horror Film.* Southern Illinois UP, 2012, pp. 137-148.

Ziegler, Robert E. "Killing Space: The Dialectic in John Carpenter's Films." *The Georgia Review*, 1983, vol. 37, no. 4, pp. 770-786.

Conclusion

This portfolio has examined horror and mystery texts from the 1790s to 1980s, exploring the ways that they employ monstrosity and anxieties around the Other to promote terror. I have drawn on and expanded conference papers, articles in edited collections, and public-facing scholarship in the form of a podcast to explore these ideas. The texts range from short stories, novels, and feature films, and depict various monsters, demons, creatures, and ghosts, to name a few. Many of these texts are generally overlooked in scholarship, some because of being largely unavailable until recently, and others because they are examples of widely-distributed popular culture (and subsequently not highly regarded). I draw attention to these widely neglected texts in order to assert their value and importance to the cultural lexicon, and analyze them through the context of their historical moment. I analyze dynamics such as relationships to nature, homosocial bonds, curses and cult activity, community narratives, creepy crawlies, and haunting. I explore these figures largely through cultural anxieties about the Other, and what those fears reflect about dominant ideals. By focusing on this Othering and the anxieties it invokes and perpetuates, I examine the ways that these texts depict cultural fears.

The first section is primarily concerned with the ways that natural phenomena is portrayed as horrific and monstrous, focusing on terrifying landscapes and animals. In the first piece I examine landscapes (namely swamps) in two late Victorian novels, H. Rider Haggard's *She* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, following the connection between the ways swamps are characterized in literature as primitive and horrific, and the ways the modern white Englishman must pass through them and uphold

a national masculinity. Further scholarship might attend to various landscapes in literature of the period, especially where they have been overlooked. Next, I explore the correlation between natural landscape and monstrous bugs in contemporary Syfy channel B-movies. With my co-author, Sean Rhoads, I analyze the ways that discourses around bugs dating from the nineteenth century appear in contemporary B-movies that portray nature as a vengeful force. There is a gap in scholarship on Syfy channel B-movies which the collection as a whole aims to address, but could be expanded on in general. More specifically, connections between the "big bug" films of the 1950s and earlier monstrous bugs might be linked to more mainstream movies. Finally, I move to B-movie creature features in an example of public-facing scholarship, a podcast co-hosted with Benjamin Reid and Sean Rhoads. We discuss the ways that nature is portrayed as threatening in *Roar* (1982) and *Frogs* (1972) through swarms of creatures. In the framing of this piece, I argue that the conclusions of these films reinforce dominant family structures, although they diverge in the ways that nature is characterized as monstrous. I included several examples of films and tropes that scholarship might address, such as examples of swarming creature features, and monsters located in the American South. Public-facing scholarship is also an exciting field in which to share and disseminate ideas, and one that I feel I will continue contributing to. These pieces are connected in the ways that they portray nature as monstrous, or even vengeful, and how this monstrosity invokes anxieties around race, class, and gender dating from the nineteenth century.

In the second section, I connect anxieties around madness to upholding ideals of a stable white English masculinity in late-Victorian horror and mystery fiction, especially in terms of psychological instability, through monstrous creatures like bugs or haunting

figures. The first piece traces discourses around bugs and entomologists throughout the nineteenth century, ending with an analysis of monstrous bugs and eccentric entomologists, ultimately suggesting that these unstable figures invoke anxieties around a supposedly secure national body. Animal studies in general has a gap around insects and those who study them, which could be addressed in a variety of texts and through many lenses (including some examples that I mention in the piece). I hone in on these entomologist figures in the following piece on Doyle's "The Beetle-Hunter" and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and H.G. Wells' "The Moth," focusing on entomologists' relationships and their psychological instability as couched in their entomological expertise. This piece addresses a gap in scholarship on entomologists specifically, which could be analyzed in more mainstream texts of the period as well, or texts from earlier in the century. Next, I turn to haunting figures and the demonic as it invokes psychological instability to create horror, focusing on a haunting spirit in Richard Marsh's *The Goddess: A Demon*. I trace the aural haunting from this spirit that appears to demonically possess a dangerous automaton, exploring the psychological instability effected in the main characters (mostly men). I draw on sound studies, an emerging and promising area of scholarship that could be expanded on, especially in relation to haunting and ghost fiction in general. The pieces in this section deal with the ways that madness is depicted in late-Victorian literature that eerily portrays an unsettlingly unstable masculinity.

In the final section, I explore the demonic and discourses around identity, both individually and as a community, in horror fiction and films. The first piece analyzes the demonic and spectacle in a classic example of early Gothic novels, M.G. Lewis' *The Monk*. I focus on the ambiguity of Rosario/Matilda and the ways that they both fascinate

and horrify the monk Ambrosio, who is tempted into vice by the spectacle of their magic rituals and sexuality. Further study might consider this sense of spectacle in Gothic texts throughout the 1790s, or make connections with the sublime. Next, I move to the twentieth-century to analyze 1970s American B-movies and the ways that they depicted satanic cults. I draw attention to the ways that these depictions cultivate paranoia leading to the Satanic Panic of the 1980s, and how they portray dominant ideals around normalcy and model communities. Additional scholarship might consider B-movies of the 1980s during the height of the Satanic Panic, and how they might reinforce or diverge from mainstream films. The last piece draws out these community ideals further to explore John Carpenter's *The Fog* and the ways it portrays the narratives that communities choose to perpetuate. Through the sailors' ghostly revenge on the community that betrayed them, the film critiques narratives of belonging and shows them to be falsely constructed by dominant ideals to preserve a sense of coherent identity. More scholarship on *The Fog* is needed in general, and might analyze it in conversation with earlier ghost stories. This section explores the ways that these demonic figures critique anxieties around identity and belonging, both as an individual and in part of a larger group.

This portfolio as a whole addresses the construction and preservation of dominant discourses, exploring how they are threatened or critiqued by a monstrous Other. I argue that this spectre of the Other demonstrates the ways that these ideas are artificially constructed and therefore unstable and open to disruption, as well as how they require constant maintenance in order to continue. I address several gaps in the scholarship, and believe that many of these pieces offer fruitful areas for expanding work, especially the pieces built from conference papers that could be developed further. The first section

traces monstrous figures from Victorian literature through to contemporary films, exploring nature as monstrous and sometimes vengeful, through creatures and the landscape itself. Next, I focus on late-Victorian horror and mystery fiction to explore anxieties around madness and psychological instability and how these fears relate to upholding ideals of a stable, white, English masculinity. Finally, I take up a novel from the 1790s, and 1970s-80s film, exploring the ways they portray demonic and ghostly figures in order to examine cultural anxieties around identity and belonging. Cultural fears and anxieties are often invoked in horror texts (including literature and film), especially in examples of popular culture. These pieces traverse through various genres, forms, and time periods, to explore the ways that horror articulates these anxieties. I argue that these monstrous figures and the anxieties they invoke reveal the actual monstrosity of dominant discourses that must allegedly be maintained at any cost.

Reflections on the Process

This project has had a long and varied journey, as I began by envisioning a traditional dissertation and then it evolved, seemingly of its own volition, into this portfolio. Even when I proposed a traditional dissertation, I was accepted to Queen's with a very different project than the one I eventually turned to. I had originally intended to examine female villains in Gothic novels from the 1790s and 1890s, comparing and contrasting the ways that anxieties around women behaving badly shifted over the century, a project that I still find interesting, but I moved away from when I began to develop more of an interest in the fin-de-siècle texts I was reading. The concept of my dissertation emerged when I was studying for my Comprehensive Exams in 2018, when I (finally) found myself reading Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* and wondering where the bugs were in animal studies. After some digging, I found that they were largely and conspicuously absent. Encouraged by Dr. Maggie Berg, I determined that my dissertation would address this gap, and focus on the horror and mystery fiction that I had always loved (and that had some overlap with my original proposed project). I began researching this topic, and found many fruitful connections with various texts and some existing scholarship.

However, along the way I became distracted by various opportunities for conference papers. While all were generally related to my love of horror and mystery, a variety of topics and areas appealed to me, and I followed my nose to these fields. My interest in bugs and nature developed into several conference papers on entomologists and landscapes. I developed an interest in Richard Marsh's work, choosing a generally neglected example of his substantial oeuvre and connecting it to haunting and sound

studies. During my coursework, I had regular movie night with some friends to enjoy and riff on a variety of B-movies; during the COVID-19 pandemic, this hobby developed into a podcast on B-movie monsters co-hosted with my dear friends. In addition, my friend and I had combined our love of B-movies and our respective research interests (bugs, and ecocriticism), to respond for a call for chapters on Syfy channel original movies. I continued to develop my interest in films and address otherwise neglected areas, such as B-movies and a somewhat overlooked John Carpenter film. I had written my first conference paper on the depiction of the devil in M.G. Lewis' *The Monk*, and I traced this interest in the satanic and occult to a call for articles on the Satanic Panic, focusing on my love of B-movies. Although I was drawn into many different areas, their general topics and themes followed similar lines: horror, especially creatures and monsters or the occult; cultural fears anxieties; and popular fiction that was otherwise overlooked.

Knowing that I had produced a body of works on horror and mystery (and seeing also comparatively, how few chapters I had produced in the traditional dissertation model), my kind supervisor Dr. Brooke Cameron in her wisdom suggested that I pivot to the portfolio project. At first, I was admittedly resistant, worried that I had not followed the traditional path I had intended, that my pieces were too disparate, and that I had failed in producing what I saw as a proper dissertation. However, with some encouragement (again, thanks to Brooke), I began to feel that it was in fact the most appropriate route for me to take, given all I had produced and my consistent focus on horror and mystery texts. Having decided to pursue the portfolio option, I began to develop and expand the chapter drafts I had written thus far, as well as the conference papers and articles I had produced. I made connections between the pieces and grouped them accordingly, and wrote an

introduction that developed these links and situated them in a theoretical framework. When I stopped resisting against what I initially thought might be a failed project, it began to come together naturally and logically, given the work I had already consistently been doing. This project emerged somewhat organically, when I realized and accepted that it was truly a culmination of the work I had been doing all along.

Moving forward, I aim to take up monstrous bugs further in more contemporary films, such as the ones I list in Chapter 4, in conversation with discourses around bugs and entomology dating from the nineteenth century. For example, I hope to produce a piece analyzing Egyptomania and the popular image of the beetle in late nineteenth century literature and culture, drawing connections between these colonial discourses and those found in *The Mummy* film franchise of the late 1990s and early 2000s. I aim to focus on depictions of beetles and scorpions in these texts, including Marsh's *The Beetle*, and how they are associated with Egypt, and portrayed as an atavistic and foreign Other. I am also excited by the opportunities afforded by public-facing scholarship, such as podcasts, and will continue co-hosting *Monster Club* ™, and exploring the wealth of B-movie monsters and the anxieties they may challenge or perpetuate. My interests continue to be situated in horror and mystery texts, which I find fascinating and rich in the various ways they depict what we are culturally most afraid of.