

## **EcoGothic Dislocations in Hanya Yanagihara's *The People in The Trees*.**

Our own time of world-globalization is a destitute time, in which the man of captialogic has all but forgotten the nature of being, the very worldly processes of 'dwelling' or 'building up' and 'worlding'. Caring for literature and the humanities in this oblivious time of Earth forgetting [...] can become an ex-static way of attending to language as a 'site of the historically determinate disclosure of the world horizon as such.'

'Worlding as Future Tactic', Rob Wilson, p.216.

'When massive entities such as the human species and global warming become thinkable, they grow near. They are so massively distributed we can't directly grasp them empirically. We vaguely sense them growing out of the corner of our eye while seeing the date in the centre of our vision. These hyper-objects remind us that the local is in fact uncanny.

Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Co-Existence*, 2014

In 'Worlding as Future Tactic', Rob Wilson argues that the study of culture in the era of globalisation involves exploring how reading 'texts of contemporary being and uncanny world dwelling can become a historical process of taking care, and setting limits, entering into and making the world horizon come near and become local and informed, situated, instantiated as an uneven/incomplete material process of world becoming'.<sup>1</sup> In his discussion of Gayatri Spivak's seminal work, 'Three Women's texts and a Critique of Imperialism', on worlding as a tactic for cultural critics, that can counter the globalizing regimes of 'multimediated territorial liquidation', Wilson suggests Spivak's influential injunction here is to enact a kind of radical de-distancing, a 'connecting up of the eerie plantations of the West Indies and South Asia to the refinement of the British Empire tea cup and those seemingly metropolitan pleasures of consuming the domestic novel', where one place and time inhabits and radically alters the

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<sup>1</sup> Worlding as future tactic, Rob Wilson, in [The Worlding Project: Doing Cultural Studies in the Era of Globalisation](#), Rob Wilson and Christopher Leigh Connery, 2007.

other.’<sup>2</sup> We might fruitfully understand this as a kind of uncanny worlding, or consider that all worlding involves the uncanny, insisting on relationships between those things conventionally kept apart. Extreme intimacy or de-distancing, changes the perception of the world, and as Tim Morton suggests in Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Co-existence, it is uncanny. For Wilson this is valuable because,

worlding can at the same time entail some kind of against-the-grain critical process of life-world estrangement and an everyday de-reifying, to use these active verbs, as well illustrated in Gayatri Spivak’s making strange of the British white women-subjects in the far flung colonial gothic spaces and narrative trajectories of *Jane Eyre*, whose self-consolidation as white-feminist individual is contingent upon the abjection if not ruination of native subjects and peripheral spaces and modes: the unhomely worlding of a so-called Third World life-world into dependency and exploitation in the West Indies, the Congo, India, and Oceania then and now.’<sup>3</sup>

Oceanic landscapes have been a fertile site of Gothic literary imagining by both colonial and postcolonial writers, haunted by the buried traumas of invasion and genocide that under-pin unsettled settling as Alison Rudd notes in her account of uncanny settlement in New Zealand literature (Rudd, 2010). Recently, arguing for the value of the term Tropical Gothic Justin D. Edwards and Sandra Guardini Vasconcelos migrate the term from its usual geographical domiciles, to suggest a particular subgenre located in the Tropics, connected to specific colonial processes of transculturation that arise out of colonial acquisition and uprooting of a culture, engendering new cultural phenomena ‘where indigenous cultures articulate historical and political injustices while struggling to regain a sense of cultural identity’ (Edwards & Vasconcelos, 2016). This tropicalization can be understood as having a bi-directional intercultural flow of dissemination that tropicalizes Gothic, thriving on producing regionalized, locally hybridized, radically altered discourses.

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<sup>2</sup> Wilson

<sup>3</sup> Wilson

Where the effects of globalisation and postcolonial experiences of violences done to self, nation and land converge or collide with intimations of globalised ecological catastrophe further gothic forms proliferate. The rise of ecoGothic literary texts and criticism reflects the sense of there being a need to address what Sharae Deckard, citing Jason W. Moore terms the ‘world-ecology’ of wealth, power and nature of global capitalism and its neo-liberal incarnations, where ecological thinking is absent/repressed and where gothic is a culturally significant point of contact between literary criticism, postcolonial and ecocritical theory and the traumatic effects of globalising political and economic processes across diverse local scenarios (Deckard, 2013). It concurs with Hilary Scharper’s understanding of Gothic as always already ‘green’ literature, where landscape, nature and the world are metaphysical spaces, and the use of *who* rather than *it* to discuss ‘nature’ captures ecogothic’s ‘tendency to depict nature as a living, acting, alien other’ (Tyburski, 2015, 133).

In The People in the Trees (2013), a fictional Pacific Micronesian island Ivu’Ivu is visited, pillaged and ecologically devastated; a destruction facilitated by two U.S. scientists, an anthropologist Paul Tallent, and immunologist and virologist, Norton Perina. Their trip to the island, ostensibly under the auspices of anthropological data collecting, descends into actions that violate the beliefs of the people they are studying, when they discover a kind of turtle named Opa’ivu’eke, the flesh of which when eaten, appears to prolong life indefinitely. Perina’s ensuing actions, of stealing the turtles for experimentation, and finding some of those long lived people, whom they refer to as ‘the dreamers’, who appear very old but to be in a trance like state, to take back to his U.S. laboratory for further studies, causes an unstoppable series of events that lead to extinction of the turtles and other creatures, environmental destruction and the near complete collapse of native culture. At the heart of the text are a series of uncanny encounters between coloniser and colonised, between Western explorer and

resistant landscape, that collapse reverse or unhinge forms of knowing, structures of self-narration and narratives of progress that have initiated the expedition in the first place.

In this paper I will discuss the ways in which Yanagihara's text could be productively read as a form of postcolonial ecoGothic metafiction, continually drawing attention to different narrative and discursive modes that contribute to (neo)colonial discourses that underpin the production of ecocidal dispassion, and 'anthropomyopic' vision that characterises the U.S. scientist who narrates in her narrative. Anthropomyopic might be a term to characterise the difficulty of seeing the 'earth', a biosphere as Timothy Morton states, 'too large to see', so colossal that only a 'sidelong glimpse' is possible, where global warming and apprehensions of a climate in crisis can only be 'felt', in uncanny and anxious ways, not seen head on (Morton, 2016).

Yanagihara spent many years working as Condé Nast Travel editor, arguably at the vanguard of maintaining and reproducing orientalist discourses, and servicing entitled and colonising world views, enabling the Western or Global Northern traveller to see and consume its others.

When I began working on this book, I wasn't yet a travel editor, but a publicity assistant, in book publishing. This was almost eighteen years ago; I can however remember how the fictional island of Ivu'Ivu took shape for me. In 2007, I was sent on assignment to South America to write a story on the best beaches on the Atlantic coast. One of my trips took me to Angra dos Reis, the 300-something strong archipelago south of Rio, and as soon as the boat approached the island where I'd spend the night, I knew. This was Ivu'Ivu. I remember feeling there, as I hadn't felt anywhere else, how the jungle was so voracious, so all-encompassing, so pitiless. (Interview, The Independent, Jan 5 2005)

She takes a Brazilian archipelago, Angra dos Reis, as her model for one of the three islands (Ivu'Ivu) that make up U'ivu in her novel, and transplants the foliage and the intensity of the rainforest, lush and impenetrable, to be her natural landscape in fictional Micronesia. This move from the Pacific to the Brazilian rainforest appears to wrong-foot Yanagihara, seeking a landscape to cast for the tourist gaze she intimates quite the opposite, that the land is animated and hostile. Nature is not a backdrop for human action but a mode where the anthropocentric gaze is defeated.

We imbue deserts and the tundra with menace, because nothing, or little, grows there. But the same can be said of places that are so overwhelmingly fertile; I had the feeling that if I stood in one place long enough, green vines would grow up me and around me, choking me and claiming me for the land. (Interview, The Independent, Jan 5 2005)

The strange time and place of the fictional island setting, U'ivu, suggests that the story can be set neither in Hawai'i, Papua New Guinea, nor Brazil, but an uncanny metafictionalized juxtaposition of all three. Yanagihara not only enacts spatial disorientations associated with the Gothic genre, she also connects the colonial history of the genocide of Kanaka Maoli in Hawai'i with the post-war development of the U.S. military-industrial-scientific complex that incorporates the nation of Hawai'i into U.S. statehood. In doing so I would argue that she seeks to find a creative aesthetic that can adequately address the deep time frame of the Anthropocene, drawing both eras together to assert the agrilogistical dimensions of each, the slow violence of a dispersed set of behaviours across time and space, linking trans-pacific colonial, neo-colonial and globalising behaviours.

The text is arguably paradigmatic of globalising narratives and forces that are felt on a personal level by the author. Yanagihara was born in Los Angeles grew up and attended school in Hawai'i and now lives in New York but her ancestry is fourth generation Asian settler in Hawai'i, with Japanese and Korean ancestors who worked on the plantations in their younger days. As Andrea Aebersold notes in her study of environmental narratives of American identity, questions of landscape have been largely marginalised in discourses around Asian American identities, where mythologies of 'embeddedness' in the land are too often deemed not to apply to Asian American immigrant stories (Aebersold, 2015,12). She argues that reading Asian-American narratives of Hawai'i through an ecocritical lense 'offers an opportunity to advance the field through discussions of landscape and belonging', where many texts have not seemed to present themselves as particularly suited to an ecocritical enquiry (12). This approach might enable a reading alert to the ways that Yanagihara's text negotiates the often politically charged dialogues in Hawai'i between Kanaka Maoli scholars and activists, and those of Asian settler decent.

The different status of these two populations in Hawai'i in terms of political movements, personal identity claims, language use, frames of narrating belonging, notably around the disputed use of the term 'local', all contributes to an extremely fraught terrain for speaking and remembering. The tension between 'local' and Hawaiian as explored in Maxine Hong Kingston's writings is implicit in the creative choices that Yanagihara makes. As Aebersold notes in her study of Kingston's China Men and Milton Murayama's All I asking for is my Body 'landscape, believed to represent individual freedom becomes a site of alienation as the plantation owners controlled worker's movements, finances and living conditions' (Aebersold, 14). Jonathan Y. Okamura and Candace Fujikane attempt to acknowledge the multiple ways in which discourses of Asian settler identities might seek to avoid the recognition of settler

complicity in the colonial project through multiple discourses available to them. They acknowledge the use of the term 'local' as a site of contestation, one where issues of settlement are gradually erased and submerged into 'feeling Hawaiian' (Okamura & Fujikane, 2008, 5). In the production of a form of 'settler multiculturalism' the celebrated multicultural makeup of present day Hawai'i is seen to 'solve' the earlier expropriation of land and power, and mass extermination of Kanaka Maoli, masking indigenous specificity of relations to land in the process.

This perceived lack of embeddedness that Aebersold identifies, goes to the heart of colonial and 'agrilogistical' relations to land, which might partially account for the use of a globalised/displaced ecogothic as Yanagihara deploys it. Creating a fictional Micronesian island is a way to see Hawai'i otherwise, or sideways, it produces a glimpse not dissimilar the Morton's characterisation of the Anthropocene experienced as a sudden uncanny or gothic intimacy, an intimation or intrusion, that can never be fully brought to vision. Ivu'Ivu both more and less than Hawai'i drifts in and out of focus, as a real and imagined place, defeating the scientific laboratory gaze even as it is despoiled by relentless Western liquidation of its environment. What is potentially at risk, losing specificity, moving away from a historical approach, also deploys allegory to find a way to speak to the forces of globalisation and ecological devastation through insisting on the link between the immunologists clinical gaze as myopic, and the never fully visible effects of the Anthropocene as more visible, refracted through dizzying and dislocated forms of feeling, apprehensions of a world-ecology present in ecoGothic fictions.

In her seminal work, From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i, Haunani Kay Trask, Kanaka Maoli scholar and activist underlines the difficulties around Asian

avoidance of identification as settler, in the face of Kanaka Maoli assertions for return of land, cultural and political recognition and autonomy;

‘Ethnic histories written about Asians in Hawai’i demonstrate an investment in the ideal of American democracy that is ideologically at odds with indigenous critiques of U.S. colonialism. Although these historical accounts often recognise that Hawaiians have unique political status as indigenous peoples, they do not address the roles of Asians in the American colonial system’ (46)

They are a part, however nuanced their involvement, of the systems of the globalising colonising forces, what Timothy Morton terms agrilogistics (models of farming that are machine-like), and land reappropriation that deprives the Kanaka Maoli of land use, or traditional modes of agriculture and undermines social structures associated with this. Plantation Gothic, and/or Southern Gothic has a long tradition in the U.S. imaginary, as Elizabeth Russ notes, the plantation in literary terms is ‘not primarily physical but an insidious ideological and psychological trope through which intersecting histories of the New World are told and retold (Russ, 2009, 3). Her discussion offers possibilities for reading *The People in the Trees* as a text in which the place of Asian settler Hawaiian identities in is drawn in relation to the legacies of colonisation, through acknowledging plantation agrilogistics, and acknowledging the role of plantations in forming and erasing identities and relationships with land, alongside the annexation and loss of Hawaiian independence associated with US statehood ‘the socio-ecological production of nature, that operates as a total institution that structures an entire society’, as Sharae Deckard notes (2015, 35) citing James S. Duncan, ‘an agro-ecological system structured around the bio-political control of labour and bureaucratisation and commodification of space and bodies’ (2007, 67). This plantation history, written into the landscape of all plantation settler colonies operates as a spur to a form of ecoGothic, where the plantation legacy, toxic and vampiric, which is written palimpsestically over the older knowledges of native use of land and belonging to that land,



ghosts, unsettles and underwrites Yanagihara's ecoGothic allegory of the cultural, political and ecological devastation of Hawai'i. Plantation Gothic as Russ formulates it, would not depend on a text siting itself in a plantation, but would be a structuring of ideological relations to land, to the machinic destructiveness of what Timothy Morton terms agrilogistics, to the ruins or legacies of that plantation economy and culture. Yanagihara's text erases plantations entirely from her account of Oceania, but nonetheless plots a relation to land that evokes and reuses long hidden legacies of Polynesian Gothic as they relate to colonial explorers and settlers in the Pacific. The multiple forms and locations of tropicalized gothic also converge around a shared history of the plantation, and although Hawai'i falls outside the geographical scope of Edwards' and Guardini's project the island plantations of Hawai'i present an interesting for further exploring the relevance of the tropes of plantation and tropical gothic in relation to ecoGothic's crucial interest in the agrilogistical structures of human thought and world economic systems. In Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols, Tom Cohen et al comment that the (widely advertised, also contested) arrival of the Anthropocene era, must always be understood as a twilight concept, 'as a form of half-recognition that can only occur in the moment of waning' (2016, 13). They comment, 'we also wanted to signal that what appears as a moment of sudden loss or intrusion - "look, we destroyed the planet! Who would have thought!"- was there all along. There was always destruction, always ecocide, but "now" (for some) it has become readable (even if, for others, such destructive force was all too obvious, and human, all too human)' (2016,13).

In Yanagihara's text, Norton Perina's account of his lab foreshadows this to some extent. His impersonal and clinical account of his trials on mice, dogs and monkeys as they are experimented on until death, suggests he sees only the experiment and never the animal, something that will be borne out in his actions on Ivu'Ivu, where in his drive to pursue scientific answers he will again only see the puzzle to be solved, not the animals or the humans involved.

His confession to ecocide is late in the narrative, page after page of carefully noted examples, that catalogue the ecological devastation his visit has wrought.

Shall I tell you of Pfizer's sorrow, of Lilly's dismay, of Johnson and Johnson's agony, of Merck's rage? Shall I tell you of the years of feckless, fruitless desperate attempts to recreate the effect using every turtle on the planet? Of months waiting for the mice to continue beyond their natural lifespan, and then upon watching them die, beginning anew with a fresh batch, and a new Hawaiian sea turtle, a new leatherback turtle, a new Galapagos tortoise? Shall I tell you about trying to recreate the effect using every animal, every plant, every fungus, that could be harvested from Ivu'Ivu? The sloths, the hogs, the spiders, the vuakas, the toucans, the parrots, the hunonos, the manamas, the kanavas, the weird lizard like things, the fuzzy gourds, the palm leaves, the seedpods (266).

The published results of these studies ensures that the island is overrun by big pharmaceuticals, and their teams of biologists and neuroscientists. The 'science' of the project is revealed as having been little more than a cover for industrial level resource exploitation accompanied by a set of different destructive desires on both Perina and Tallents' part that destroys each of them in turn whilst devastating the entire ecosystem of the island that they have visited. In *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Timothy Morton argues that for the first time we in the anthropocene are able to see snapshots of what he terms hyperobjects ( which are vastly distributed and hard to locate) and that these intimations more or less will force us to 'undergo a radical reboot of our ontological toolkit' - the world that he argues has ended is a model of nature as natural 'a settling for agriculture, living in/on/out of -that world is a fantasy and is at an end.' Hyperobjects Morton acknowledges have always already been there but have frequently been ignored elaborately and structurally. Hyperobjects such as climate change become more visible to humans, but only glimpsed through reams of data -compelling us to think ecologically. 'Thinking ecologically would first require the

‘smashing’ of the aesthetic bubble we call a world. The end of the world is like waking up inside something big which penetrates you to the cellular level.’ For Morton there is no coziness in this experience, as hyperobjects abolish distance. We are left with only extreme intimacy, ‘pressed up against and riven through with objects, an oppressive claustrophobic horror of actually being inside it. What is left is a charnel ground that is like being in an emergency room, where people are dying and bleeding out all around us – a place of life and death, of death-in life and life in death, an undead place of zombies, viroids, junk DNA, ghosts, silicates, cyanide, radicalism, demonic forces and pollution’ (Morton, *Hyperobjects*)

Thus we might see Perina’s account of himself as the process of creating an archive of extinction following Claire Colebrook’s concern in *The Death of the Post-Human: Essays on Extinction*, where she argues that ‘the possibility of extinction has always been a latent figure in textual production and archives; but the current sense of depletion decay mutation and exhaustion calls for new modes of address’ (2014).

The mode of address Yanagihara adopts is that of perpetrator confession by Perina, writing from prison, after a conviction for the sexual abuse of one of his adopted sons.<sup>1</sup> The confessional mode, as Peter Brook’s notes, saturates Western culture and literature, and with the increasing secularization of the West, the literary text has become a prime site for confessional autobiography and fictions (2000, 2). It has also been variously deployed by postcolonial novelist such as Peter Carey and J.M. Coetzee as a key mode through which to explore and rewrite colonial histories. Like Coetzee, Yanagihara explores the limits of the confessional mode, voicing a perpetrator whose account of his crimes discursively reproduces many of the violences that he confesses to. The text emphasises that the epistemic violence which enabled ecological destruction, the anthropomyopic, lives on in Perina’s account.

Although he has been found guilty of child abuse, his crimes against the island and its life forms occupy a dominant part of the text. These actions have not been acknowledged by any legal or ethical framework, the gothic literary text must do this important work of ‘ecological unconscionization’ as Adrian Ivakhiv calls it, and it is his own slow unravelling of them that registers an ethical demand to account for himself (Ivakhiv, 2015).

Ecological awareness of the Anthropocene may ‘invite and generate confessional modes of address’, as Stefan Skrimshire notes, where the subject writes an open letter to the far off future, to an unknown or far away reader, or indeed to the past, and as such it may vacillate between confession and vindication, as it is always ‘too late’, coming after the events that it bears witness to. If it is necessary but futile to seek absolution the process of confession might perform more of a lament or elegy for ecological destruction that cannot be ethically defended and cannot be repaired (Skrimshire, 2016). This is a useful way to frame Yanagihara’s insistence on a belated and flawed confession from Perina that links colonial and neo-colonial practices, anthropology and ethnography to resource extraction and ecological damage. In this Yanagihara follows Rob Nixon who describes the neo-colonial encounter as one of competing or oppositional temporalities, where the short term temporality of neo-colonial agents, those who are employed to ‘extract, despoil and depart’ contrasts with that of the long term temporality of those who live in and alongside the resources of a region. The arrival of the despoilers is an intrusion that asserts a different temporality and different spatialized relation to demands from elsewhere, disrupting exchange systems values, land use, asserting globalizing demands, resulting in what Nixon terms “displacement without moving”; the land and resources are to all practical intents removed, leaving indigenous groups bereft of the relation to land that sustained them (Nixon, 2007, 2). The ideology of scientific enquiry is no different to that of the colonial adventurer, driven as Cheryl Edelson notes, ‘by the economic

impulse to liquidate indigenous bodies, natural resources and to ‘remove natural and cultural objects from their original context and re-place them in heterotopic institutions such as museums’ (2012, 86).

The framing of Perina’s confession with an (un)scrupulous editor, Ronald Kubodera, obsessed with and in awe of Perina, dramatizes this. Kubodera is as unreliable an editor as Perina is narrator, although he qualifies every remark with extensive documentation, to the extent that many pages at the end of each section are informational footnotes. Kubodera’s role as guardian of the archives is a ‘disgusting’ one, embodying the ‘sickness’ of the archives that Jacques Derrida notes in Archive Fever. Drawing on Freud, Derrida’s proposal is that the destruction drive or death drive is always present in the archive as an *archivolithic* force that leaves no trace and seeks to destroy the archive ‘it works to destroy the archive; on the condition of effacing but also with a view to effacing its own proper traces’ (1996,10). Kubodera performs his own desperate preservation of the discredited scientific laboratory gaze, an archiver who preserves and annihilates simultaneously, footnoting Perina’s account of his motivations and his guilt and in doing so making visible the complicity of the scientific community with effacing the abuse, enabling the ecological devastation of the island, editing the confession as it is turned into memoir. The archive is a ‘filthy’ confession of destructiveness and the death drive, yet it is preserved as a history, as the written history of the destruction it narrates, from the point of view of the one who potentially refuses all responsibility for it. It disgusts because it erases everyone and everything that it speaks about, an ‘extinction archive’ it annihilates, with an epistemic violence, that Gayatri Spivak has articulated in her work on subalterneity. As she argues, epistemic violence is crucially related to palimpsestic narratives of imperialism, a ‘writing over’ that erases what exists and produces ‘subjugated knowledge’ (Spivak in Nelson & Grossberg eds; 1988,25).

Yanagihara draws attention to the heavy hand of the editor, of the violent textuality of both memoir and confession as an overdetermined account of a 'great' man unscrupulously protected and entering the archive now seen as charnel house. She portrays the editor as highly motivated and the editing itself is a technology of masking, substituting endless details for the ones that are omitted, a smoke screen of inessential fact that endlessly defers the confrontation with his crimes. As such it warns of what is to come, of the ways in which the term 'unreliable' narrator might be a luxury, for this is an 'unacceptable' toxic narrator. Through her deployment of Perina's voice of 'Earth forgetting', Yanagihara's text gestures towards an ecological global consciousness, one that is unsettled by the legacies of colonialism's crimes as they impact on the Pacific region and intersects with what Rob Nixon terms the slow violence of neo-colonial ecocide in the present, a 'delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space' (2007, 1).

The text is divided into three distinct areas, that might be understood as three worlds where destruction can be unleashed, the life of the lab, the life of the island and the life in Perina's home in the U.S., all of which Perina negotiates with a clinical, murderous and unsympathetic eye. The reader is invited to triangulate his behaviour in these three distinct spaces and to reflect on the links between the clinical gaze, that produces a gothic experimental laboratory, the anthropological gaze haunted by the gothic presence of indigenous cultural meanings that animate the island landscape and that of the domestic home of the abuser, a repellent space of (un)homing that draws its logics from the colonial and the clinical worlds. As Perina moves from his lab to his living room, he has no need to shift registers. Perina's 'body snatching', involves both the 'dreamers' and adopted indigenous children, relocating them to the lab and

the domestic home, which are both revealed as sites sharing the logic of and complicit with an abusive and violating colonial project.

The text is also simultaneously a displaced and fictionalised account of colonisation of Hawai'i, with Yanagihara creating spatial and temporal paradoxes to blend a set of references to existing organisations and places and fictional ones. Yanagihara 'worlds' two events distant in time and place but proximate in ideological construct and physical effect – producing a scene of 'first contact' by a Western male with an imagined untouched island civilization, framing the neo-colonial encounter as a psycho-symbolic one that disinters other crucial colonising moments from a much earlier time in Hawaiian history and reanimating it to haunt a 1950's modern expedition by an anthropologist and an immunologist, that seeks to confirm the rise of the disinterested gaze of modernity as it roams the globe in the service of scientific knowledge. It is however impossible to separate the colonising gaze from the scientific one, their ideological embeddedness in one another is unavoidable.

If Rob Wilson's concept of 'earth forgetting' characterises Perina, then the experiences on Ivu'Ivu point to the power of ecoGothic to enable that which has been forgotten/hidden to haunt. The two men, along with their marginalised female companion, Esme, are simultaneously alarmed and attracted by the actual culture and the origin stories of the inhabitants of Ivu'Ivu. Perina's ability to keep his subjects at a clinical distance fails, as he enters an ambiguous sexual relationship with one of the native boys. Simultaneously a kind of radical de-distancing occurs as Tallent reveals his motivations for seeking out a 'lost tribe', where he no longer studies and rationalises indigenous creation stories, but accepts them as accounts of reality. Hence, at the heart of Perina's sanitised confession of his own story is the anthropologist Tallent's confession of his motives for making the trip. Tallent recounts a native

creation story to Perina, slowly revealing the three islands that make up the U'ivu archipelago are understood to be siblings, created by the gods, of sea and sun, which has at its heart the account of the Opa'ivu'eke turtle, and its relation both to creation and colonial destruction.

As he shares his secret motivations, his belief in the validity of the story and his search for the peoples of the turtle, Perina finds his scientific companion suddenly an uncanny other and his view of the landscape he is sitting on changes from a mute and passive natural background into presence, sentience. 'I am sitting on the child of a god, I thought. Two gods. It was preposterous and yet I felt, despite myself a tremor ripple thought me' (Yanagihara, 2013,72). This 'momentary derangement of perceptual apparatus' argues Daniel Seravalle de Sá is a key feature of tropical gothic, in which characters struggle to adjust their perceptions of sensory experience against the rational structures that sustain them in their world view (2012). This momentary derangement is also what Timothy Morton terms the experience of 'ecological awareness', where the biosphere which is too large to see, is suddenly proximate, it cannot be fully seen or represented, but is characterised by a sidelong glimpse, or uncanny feeling, a 'touch' instead of a vision.

As they journey further into dense jungle the environment becomes increasingly terrifying to Perina, he is unable to keep hold of his laboratory vision, and loses all distinction between nature and animal; fruits falling from the Manama trees high above his head seem to be slabs of meat, infested with worms, repellent and abject. Perina comments as Tallent slices one open, 'out of the cut squirmed a large writhing mass of grubs the approximate size and colour of baby mice, which fell from the fruit to the ground', the trunk of a tree appears graphically smeared in blood, until on closer inspection 'it was not blood but something living, so that it almost appeared a raw, exposed organ, as if the tree turned out to possess an anatomy of its own' (87).



These hallucinations merge bodies, flesh and wounds with tree trunks and fruits, producing a series of images of decay, repulsion and abjection. ‘Oh God, I thought, can nothing in this jungle behave as it ought? Must fruits move and trees breathe and freshwater river taste of the ocean? Why must nothing obey the laws of nature? Why must everything point so heavily toward the existence of enchantment?’ (88).

As Morton says of the hyperobject ‘when massive entities such as the human species and global warming become thinkable they grow near. They are so massively distributed we can’t directly grasp them empirically. We vaguely sense them out of the corner of our eye whilst seeing the data in the center of our vision’ it is an uncanny experience of proximity, that literature can attempt to render visible. The confession that Perina, makes, in itself may fail to bring him to account for his actions, but our reading of the damaging consequences of anthropomyopic thought can be repurposed in our attempt to undo the toxicity of ecocidal thinking and practice. To argue for a reading of Yanagihara’s first novel as global ecoGothic, is to attend to her attempts to signal the effects of slow violence on those ideologically ‘distant’ geographical locations, where violent degradation and aggressive resource extraction happen but evade visibility and hence admissions of responsibility. Her deployment of the perpetrator confession is aimed at exposing the ideological and discursive myopia that structures Perina’s own ventures, even his confession. Such an experience of structural myopia is connected to an inability to render, imagine or connect the often invisible structures of global exchange and economy as they impact on specific places. The ecoGothic mode of the text insists on linking recent and ongoing U.S. treatment of the Pacific as laboratory to the longer history of colonial resource extraction and plantation cultures, and the socio-ecological crises that result from this.

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<sup>i</sup> Though fictional, Perina, works at the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, and his perpetrator narrative is based on the real life case of Dr. Daniel Carleton Gajdusek, whose work on Kuru, a disease afflicting the South Fore people of Papua New Guinea, earned him a Nobel prize in 1976. Over his years of working on the disease Gajdusek took 56 mostly male

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children back from his visits to Papua New Guinea and they lived with him in the U.S. as his adopted children. He was charged with child molestation in 1996, with his diary incriminating him. Gajdusek's public disgrace intersects with Yanagihara's private world as a child, and the aftershocks of the revelations; her father was a scientist working alongside Gajdusek in the 1950s. For Yanagihara this is not merely an account of the disgrace of a symbolic man of science, it is an interrogation of the structures of meaning that she grew up with and the certainties that she steered her childhood by; she comments in interview, 'In my house Gajdusek was a hero. If you worked in virology, immunology, medical anthropology or paediatrics. He was one of these great colourful men of science. People really adored him' (Interview with Yanagihara, [This Writing Life](#), Episode 22).