Killer Plants and Gothic Gardeners: Gendered ecoGothic monsters as cultural representations of eco-social anxieties in literature and film from 1890-2015

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Abstract

Plant monsters in the popular imagination seem to be synonymous with two particularly iconic 'man-eating plants' narratives: John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and both versions of *(The) Little Shop of Horrors* (1960 and 1986). The present study situates these texts within a broader chronology that illustrates the development of such memorable plant monsters. Although these texts have been explored as Cold War invasion narratives and commentary on capitalist consumerism, studies of the plant monsters themselves are few and/or of limited focus. Beginning with the weird man-eating plant tales of the late nineteenth century, this project traces the earlier iterations of these iconic plant monsters and the anxieties they represented, re-examines these key texts and their various adaptations through a different lens, before considering post-millennial re-appropriations of plant monsters for their contemporary context.

Building on the recent ecoGothic approach that applies ecocriticism to Gothic narratives, this study develops a material ecoGothic framework, drawing ecocritical concepts together with gothic theories. Within this framework, cultivated vegetable monstrosities alongside the relationship between plant and gardener are explored as eco-monsters that reflect their contemporary anxieties, establishing plants as eco-*femmes fatales* figures, illustrating hypermasculinity through a gothic trans-corporeality and identifying an eco-body horror that can result in an ecoGothic posthuman figure.

Women and nature have a long association in Western philosophy that has traditionally contributed to the construction of femininity in the male imagination. This study uses a material ecoGothic framework to highlight how the plant monster has been used across the long twentieth century to reflect anxieties and attitudes to gender as they change according to their socio-political landscape. Indeed, as these troublesome plants and their meddlesome gardeners illustrate, in transgressing the boundaries and dispelling the nature/culture divide, close ties between gender anxieties and environmental concerns are, in fact, inseparable.

297 words

Keywords: ecoGothic, gender, monster, trans-corporeality, body horror, posthuman, masculinity, femininity, transgression, nature, culture

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This is for my family: both the human and nonhuman.

This study has blossomed from a small seedling of an idea that plants, flowers, trees and gardens feature significantly in gothic literature for a reason. I became curious as to why wisteria appeared in so many American gothic tales but found no critical insights. Suddenly, the vegetal world was very visible in similar narratives and was merely beginning to attract attention of ecocritics and gothicists alike. In fact, during this research, where I started with only one set of dedicated critical essays, there has been a distinct rise in ecogothic and ecohorror interest.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Elizabeth Nolan and Dr. Emma Liggins for their unwavering support and enthusiasm throughout this project, without whom I may have explored far too many paths and picked too many flowers. Their questions and suggestions along this journey have been invaluable. My thanks also to Dr. Sue Edney for signposting the garden path of material ecocriticism, suggesting appropriate critical reading, and helping me refine my editing skills. Thank you to Dr. Xavier Aldana Reyes and Dr. Emily Alder for enthusiastically agreeing to read my efforts. I am equally grateful to the various academics who planted up-to-date critical material at my garden gate, listened and responded to presentations, and discussed my research with me.

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Chapter 1: Landscaping - Introduction

'Ecognostic jigsaws are never complete.'
Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology*[1]

Most of us rarely consider the flowers and plants around us in the everyday – and if we do, it is usually to admire a neatly-kept garden and/or the gardener's green-fingered achievements. We praise the adeptness that has mastered this control of nature, simultaneously admonishing the *laissez-faire* neighbour and his encroaching "weeds" when that hidden nettle reaches out and slaps you with its nasty sting. Nature will have its revenge, it seems. But what if those gardens hid a plant more dangerous, more cunning, more vengeful, than a simple stinging-nettle? Since the nineteenth century, authors have been imagining just that, with hundreds of tales of plant monsters that poison, strangle, exsanguinate, and otherwise kill and consume those seeking to control nature: the human. In fact, 'the plant monster has proven an enduring object of fascination in literature and film, appearing everywhere from traditional folklore … to hard science fiction'.[2] Yet, plant monster fiction itself has received scant attention from literary critics other than post-colonial or Darwinian interpretations of adventure narratives.[3] This may be because plant monster fiction itself transgresses the boundaries of genre, classified alternatively as Weird, Gothic and/or Science Fiction; like that infamous nettle, it has escaped the weeding. The current project will address this oversight by exploring how the plant monster trope embodies the intersection of gender and nature in tales of cultivated vegetal monstrosities within Western culture and develops over the long twentieth century (1890-2015) as perspectives change. Given the vast number of plant monster narratives available, a fully comprehensive overview is outside the scope of the current project, which asserts that a material ecocritical gothic enquiry of the cultivated plant monster offers new ways of considering gender, just as the gendering of these eco-monsters informs ways of reading

[1] Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p.6.
[2] T. S. Miller, 'Plants, Monstrous', in *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters*, ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014), pp.470-475 (p.470).
[3] Cheryl Blake Price, 'Vegetable Monsters: Man-Eating Trees in *Fin-de-Siècle* Fiction', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 41 (2013), 311–327; T. S. Miller, 'Lives of the Monster Plants: The Revenge of the Vegetable in the Age of Animal Studies', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 23.3 (2012), 460-479.

nature that develops a perspective of plant-being or vegetal thinking at the heart of contemporary ecological debate.

This project is among the first to trace the significant developments of the plant monster trope as it engages with the emergence of the New Woman in the proliferation short stories of the *fin de siècle*, through modernity and the destabilisation of social boundaries as female independence gained traction in texts of the war periods, to early Cold War novel and film depictions of conflicting cis-gender ideologies of traditional behaviours, modern expectations and the crisis of masculinity, and screen adaptations as the Women's Liberation movement of the sixties and calls for equality of the sexes in the seventies and eighties come into focus, towards contemporary post-millennial texts championing non-binary and LGBTQ+ identities. Focusing on the relationship between plant monster and gardener, gender and nature are read through each other to reveal the changing perspectives from strict binary logics and patriarchal pre-occupations with distinctive cis-gender constructs of the late-Victorian period to the non-binary ecological thinking of the twenty-first century. Through a chronological appraisal of cultivated plant monster narratives this project is among the first to offer an alternative perspective on how patriarchal perceptions of femininity and flowers are employed to challenge contemporary ideologies, becoming more progressive as gender politics change. Moreover, this project contributes to the emerging ecoGothic discussions in developing a specific material ecofeminist gothic framework to interrogate the human-plant relationship as the discursive site for gender-nature intersectionality.

In the age of the Anthropocene, social changes coincide with environmental concerns, suggesting the plant monster is a significant metaphor for multiple anxieties. Although there are substantial debates contesting the timeline of this epoch, the Anthropocene is generally accepted as the period in which humans have significantly impacted the planet through social changes such as industrialisation, urbanisation, conflict, mechanised large-scale agriculture, nuclear energy, and chemicals. For Timothy Morton, however, '[t]he Anthropocene doesn't destroy Nature. *The Anthropocene is Nature* in its toxic nightmare form … waiting to emerge as catastrophe' (italics in original).[4]

[4] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, p.59.

Understanding the potential scope of the plant monster as an eco-social metaphor in the Anthropocene invokes Morton's ecognosis: a coexisting of human and nonhuman that establishes a profound interconnection; a strange becoming that reveals an uncanny ecological awareness through a weird loop.[5] Ecognosis, he asserts, is largely associated with ecofeminist theories through an interconnectedness that implies 'being and appearing are intertwined', adding that '[f]lowers provide an excellent opportunity to study [this]'.[6] Indeed, this dualistic interwoven state is most evident in plant monster fiction and is used by writers to highlight the double-edged sword of eco-social change: the anxieties change brings alongside the excitement of progress. For clarity, this project understands eco-social to be the combination of environment and society insofar as it principally explores the intersection of the constructs of nature and gender. For as the epigraph suggests, understanding the multiple interconnected aspects of the plant monster metaphor is a complex jigsaw; while this project goes some way to piecing it together, it also highlights opportunities to research specific plant species, nature as commodity, race/nature connections and plant-human intersectionality within wilderness settings.

More specifically, this study argues, monstrous vegetation cultivated in controlled environments charts the move from dualistic attitudes to gender identity constructs towards non-binary thinking. Given the vast quantity of plant monster fiction and established research of some texts in relation to Postcolonial and Imperial Gothic studies of the wilderness, this project has chosen to limit its scope to examples of plant monsters that have been cultivated within an established human-controlled space (garden, greenhouse, porch) as a way of interrogating afresh the destabilising of nineteenth-century social boundaries, the subsequent redefining of constructs, and eventual calls to dispel divisions of all sorts (gender, class, race, nature). Underpinned by the etymology of 'cultivate' having the same origins as 'culture',[7] I will explore vegetal monsters as cultural tropes: eco-monsters that use gender constructs to transgress the nature/culture divide, reinvigorating debates around identity and highlighting contemporary ecological concerns. Focusing on the relationship between plant monster and human gardener demonstrates

[5] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, p.5.
[6] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, pp.98-9.
[7] 'culture', 'cultivate', in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, ed. by Douglas Harper (2001-2021), *etymonline.com*, [accessed 22 January 2021].

how these tales engage with contemporary views surrounding changing gender identity construction and role expectations even as we rethink attitudes to nature. While most authors of plant monster fiction and directors of plant monster films are men, female writers have been included where possible for clarity and a balanced perspective. It is worth remembering, however, that authors of both genders championed (or criticised) feminism. Moreover, the texts explored here demonstrate the paradoxical attitudes to change through the interactions of gendered vegetal and human protagonists in these narratives as social boundaries shifted across the long twentieth century. The relationship between plant and gardener has hitherto been overlooked in literary criticism and offers a new avenue to explore the myriad of social movements from civil rights and counterculture to feminist and environmental. By focusing on the gender-nature association across the long twentieth century through a material ecofeminist gothic this project contributes to critical plant studies in charting the development of the plant monster trope from feminine imagery to ecological posthuman champion.

Just as nature adapts to its environmental circumstances, plant monster species morph for their time and medium. While the short story form of Weird fiction remained popular well into the 1940s,[8] the Gothic novel was also particularly popular in the late Victorian period together with Science Fiction narratives in response to the transformative social changes of the Industrial Revolution.[9] From greenhouse exotics in short stories such as H. G. Wells' 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid' (1894) and H. R. Garis' 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant' (1905), to ancient vines and trees in established gardens of Edith Nesbit's 'Pavilion' (1915) and Ulric Daubeny's 'The Sumach' (1919), plant monsters of this early period exhibit a gendered vampirism of their gardeners that initially interrogates patriarchal anxieties brought about by rising feminism, changing social structures and urbanisation, continuing as female independence took firm hold. With the development of both the small and silver screen and its increasing popularity in the mid-twentieth century, Gothic/Science Fiction monsters were brought to life with the help of emerging special effects. Texts such as John Wyndham's novel, *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and Roger

[8] China Miéville, 'Weird Fiction', in *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould, Andrew Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint (London: Routledge, 2009), pp.510-516 (p.510).
[9] Arthur B. Evans, 'Nineteenth Century Science Fiction' in *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould, Andrew Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 13-22.

Corman's film, *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960), engage with masculinity in crisis and the post-War conflicting gender ideology through the cannibalism of their iconic commercialised plant hybrids. These texts produce stock plant monsters that are reworked, revamped, adapted to film, and alienised as fixed binary categories begin to slip, drawing on corporeal invasion to chart rising activism as civil rights, sexual equality and environmental movements punctuated a growing counter-culture from the 1960s onwards. Plant monsters are deemed both galactic and earthly other in latter twentieth century and post-millennial texts that bestow the monstrous vegetal with sentience and intelligence. With greater environmental awareness and as the category of human replaces notions of gender come into focus, concepts of Becoming-Plant offer a distinctive, if somewhat unsettling, non-binary perspective. Texts such as A. J. Colucci's *Seeders* (2014) and Barry Rosenberg's 'Finding His Roots' (2014) offer a new way of reconsidering the coexistence of plant and human through monstrous body horror that creates a truly ecoGothic posthuman figure, engaging not only with progressive non-binary gender constructs but also prompting a re-conceptualisation of nature. Although plant monsters are most prolific in the short story form, they have equally invaded novel and film, alongside other media such as art, poetry, the graphic novel, manga and video-games. The current study, however, is limited to British and American prose and screen across the long twentieth century as offering the most insight into the development of the plant monster trope as a figure for encapsulating the fears and excitement of eco-social change. Furthermore, it focuses on plant monsters that have been cultivated, rather than discovered in the wilderness, as such stories provide an established human/nonhuman relationship for ecoGothic reconsideration of vegetal monsters as the intersection of gender and nature. As gendered eco-monsters that warrant in-depth critical consideration, this project develops a material ecoGothic approach that draws together material ecofeminist concepts and Gothic theories to explore how nature offers new ways of considering gender beyond binary constructs and how gendering nature provides a crucial step towards vegetal thinking.

1. DEVELOPING A MATERIAL ECO(FEMINIST)GOTHIC FRAMEWORK

1.1. Material Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism, or feminist ecocriticism, focuses on understanding the 'connections between' aspects of the environment to 'include associations among several objects of oppression (animals, people of color, women, gays and lesbians, nature)' in ways that articulate our relations to the nonhuman as reflections of 'the countercultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and decades of activism and thought in feminism'.[10] While feminist theory has attempted to separate the gendered dualist constructs of woman/nature, female corporeality nevertheless continues to be 'strongly associated with nature in Western thought'.[11] Rather than consider the subject/object frame of women and nature, ecofeminist enquiry should, Donna Haraway asserts, focus on the 'continuity, connection, and conversation' between species.[12] For Haraway, understanding the human-animal relationship is the first step to redressing Western capitalist attitudes that commodify nature and objectify animals (and by extension, women). Acknowledging the traditional identification of women with animals and nature, Haraway argues for the need to break 'the analogy to other objectifications so often invoked in radical discourse', yet inevitably human-animal relations historically demonstrate the 'unequal relationship' of the human-animal world, particularly through domestication, despite the fact that '[a]nimals have been active in their relations to humans, not just the reverse'.[13] While Haraway's work focuses on the human and animal interconnections, there is scope to expand her theories to plants. However, given the traditional associations of flowers and women that became firmly entrenched during the nineteenth century and has proven difficult to disentangle, the human-plant interconnections often persist in interrogating gender issues. As Stacy Alaimo argues in *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (2000), nature continues to be aligned with the female body, including in feminist literary and

[10] Greta Gaard, 'Vegetarian Ecofeminism: A Review Essay', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 23.3 (2002), pp. 117-146 (p.118).
[11] Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), p.5.
[12] Donna Haraway, 'Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms', in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.157-87 (p.179).
[13] Haraway, 'Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms', p.177.

political texts where nature is invoked as an agent of resistance for both environmentalism and the Women's Movement.[14] Within this study, the plant monsters certainly illustrate the power relations of *domestication* through the *cultivation* and control (with the subsequent loss of it) over nature that focalises ecological concerns about our relationship with nature alongside an ever-changing gender landscape.

The recent material turn in both feminist theory and ecocriticism to explore the 'endless ways' the more-than-human world is connected 'in a constant process of shared becoming' has seen a focus on the materiality of the body (both human and nonhuman).[15] The connection between human and non-human, according to Karen Barad, is seen as the intra-action of material agents whereby the non-human world is 'an active participant in the world's becoming'.[16] In her posthumanist account, '[a]ll bodies, not merely "human" bodies … are material-discursive phenomena', through which it is 'possible to acknowledge nature, the body, and materiality in the fullness of their becoming'.[17] Crucially, she asserts, '[n]ature is neither a passive surface awaiting the mark of culture nor the end product of cultural performances. The belief that nature is mute and immutable and that all prospects for significance and change reside in culture is a reinscription of the nature/culture dualism that feminists have actively contested'.[18] The authors of plant monster fiction, I argue, recognise nature's vibrancy in providing complex metaphors to engage with the ever-changing eco-social landscape, hyperbolising associated fears within their own cultural context in anticipation of progress. Nature in such texts is most certainly not static and never mute, with or without a physical voice in some cases. Barad's intra-action of material agency across all bodies offers an alternative perspective with which to investigate these plant monsters beyond simplistic patriarchal anxieties. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari challenge traditional dichotomies of Western philosophy described as an arboreal structure, which reduces our view of the

[14] Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000).
[15] Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, 'Introduction: Stories Come to Matter' in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp.1-20 (p.1).
[16] Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.120-54 (p.122).
[17] Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', pp. 141, 130.
[18] Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', p. 145.

world to binary linear logics inherent in patriarchal hierarchies.[19] Suggesting an alternative perspective of multiplicities as key to truly understanding our world, their rhizome theory, an 'acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system', can be drawn on to analyse ceaseless 'connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles'.[20] Using the reproductive and regenerative nature of a plant rhizome (bulbs and tubers) to illustrate the interactions between semiotic, material and social flows, they suggest that plants, 'even when they have roots, … always … form a rhizome with something else—with the wind, an animal, human beings'.[21] Indeed, by analysing the intermingling of agencies, material forms and forces, of both human and non-human life, as Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann argue, 'nature and culture can be read and thought through one another in laboratories, gender politics, or hybrid collectives of humans and nonhumans', in a 'shared becoming' that informs us about ourselves and the world we live in.[22] More recently, Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder in *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives*, consider the implications of 'becoming-plant' within a philosophical sense as a way of reconsidering our existence with the natural world.[23] They concur that it is difficult, although not impossible, to dispel traditional binary thinking through vegetal musings that nevertheless have recourse to lingering associations of gender and femininity. Exploring the material interconnections between gardeners and their plant monsters, this study reveals these uncanny florae are more than mere interpretations of phallocentric fears of femininity but draw on complex gendering to discard biological cis-gender assertions for concepts of vegetal becomings as non-binary sexual and gender identities emerge into the mainstream.

Arguing that the material self is interconnected and inextricable from the wider environment, Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality explores various ways in which 'the materiality of human bodies and nonhuman natures' is 'emerging in many disciplines' such as environmental philosophy, corporeal feminism and transgender theory, to analyse 'the

[19] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi (London: Continuum, 1987).
[20] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp.7, 21.
[21] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.11.
[22] Iovino and Oppermann, 'Introduction: Stories Come to Matter', pp.1 and 3.
[23] Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual'.[24] Alaimo focuses on the material transit across human and non-human bodies, charting how the 'stuff of matter generates, composes, transforms, and decomposes'.[25] Such focus in itself offers a gothic resonance, but when applied to living, sentient, often gendered bodies within plant monster narratives, trans-corporeality offers a way to re-evaluate perceptions of their contemporary attitudes to a changing social and natural world. Similarly, Nancy Tuana argues that human corporeality and the non-human world are subject to 'complex networks of relations' with 'permeable and shifting' divisions that reveal 'sites of resistance and opposition'.[26] Through her concept of 'viscous porosity', Tuana asserts that the various boundaries that establish dualisms around social, cultural, political, racial, natural discourse and even skin, flesh or garden fences are porous membranes through which complex material interactions occur. These material ecofeminist approaches investigate a clear environmental understanding that dispels attitudes towards nature as purely a resource and commodity and call for societal attitude changes that recognise the impact nature and culture have on each other. To mirror Vicki Kirby's question: 'what if culture was really nature all along?', binary logics of nature/culture, male/female, cultivated/wild are destabilised through a trans-corporeality when 'attributing agency and intelligent inventiveness (culture) to the capacities of flesh and matter (nature)'.[27] These interconnections are challenged within a gothic context, becoming key to understanding how plant monsters engage with nature and gender as all sorts of boundaries are subverted, re-constructed and disintegrated. In particular, mapping the material 'routes from human corporeality to the flesh of the other-than-human and back again', trans-corporeality emphasises a material feminist interconnectedness in the practical process of eating, 'whereby plants or animals become the substance of the human'.[28] Trans-corporeality, Alaimo asserts, through the act of consuming, reveals how

[24] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, pp.3, 7.
[25] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.143.
[26] Nancy Tuana, 'Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina', in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.188-213 (pp.189 and 194).
[27] Vicki Kirby, 'Natural convers(at)ions: or, what if culture was really nature all along?' in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.214-236 (pp.216-7).
[28] Stacy Alaimo, 'Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature' in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.237-64 (p.253).

pollution and other toxins are (perhaps unwittingly) absorbed and ingested, transforming the human body as they manifest into cancers and other diseases, demonstrating a material agency that undermines human assertions that man is separate from nature.[29] In breaking down the human/nonhuman, culture/nature divide, applying the concept of trans-corporeality to plant monster fiction, not least when the human gardener is being considered as food, offers an alternative gendered reading that underlines the weird, uncanny ecological loop intrinsic to Morton's *Dark Ecology*.

1.2. The Seeds of ecoGothic

With the growing environmental concerns about climate change and the devastating effects of global warming, ecocriticism experienced a gothic turn at the start of the twenty-first century. Beginning with Simon C. Estok's theorising of the hatred of nature which he terms 'ecophobia' (2009),[30] Tom J. Hillard's 'Gothic Nature' (2009)[31] added the element of fear as well, opening the field of ecocriticism to include representations of nature beyond the pastoral tradition. Building on this, Timothy Morton's 'dark ecology' (2010) called for polluted and toxic environments to be considered by ecocriticism as gothic spaces.[32] Refining ecophobia further, Estok argued it encompasses the perceived threat of the nonhuman world that holds 'imagined challenges to our existence', evoking fears 'about the transience of our corporeal materiality', revealed in the 'contempt and fear we feel for the agency of the natural environment'.[33] Hillard's Gothic Nature implores ecocritics to apply aspects of Gothic criticism to representations of nature as a method for re-focusing ecocriticism on ever-growing environmental anxieties through our fear of nature. Similarly, Morton's dark ecology requires ecocritics to encompass the uncanny, weird, and even disgusting fringes of the world around us in order to deconstruct the cultural concept of Nature as picturesque aesthetic.

[29] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.12.
[30] Simon C. Estok, 'Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia', *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 16.2 (2009), 203-35.
[31] Tom J. Hillard, '"Deep Into That Darkness Peering": An Essay on Gothic Nature', *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 16.4 (2009), 685-95.
[32] Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
[33] Simon C. Estok, 'Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia' in *Material ecocriticism*, ed. by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), pp. 130-140 (p.131).

Mirroring the gothic turn in ecocriticism, in 2013 the Gothic has equally experienced an ecocritical turn with the emergence of an ecoGothic: a theoretical framework that 'explor[es] the Gothic through theories of ecocriticism'.[34] Work in this field is growing steadily as attested by the three Gothic Nature conferences (2017, 2019, 2020) and related academic journal dedicated to explorations of ecoGothic and ecohorror.[35] For one of the editors of the *Gothic Nature Journal*, Elizabeth Parker, 'eco-horror … is a *genre* … [with] a clear and immediate sense of Nature's *revenge* on humankind … [that] deliberately seeks to *raise environmental awareness*' (italics in original).[36] Although Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles argue 'ecohorror is both a genre and a mode',[37] there is a general consensus that ecoGothic is a critical approach 'through which we can examine our darker, more complicated cultural representations of the nonhuman world … our ecophobic anxieties, our fears of Nature'.[38] Such Gothic explorations, Parker asserts, began in examining 'the relationship between human and nonhuman Nature' by focusing on landscape or natural spaces rather than 'engag[ing] directly with some of the more detailed or intricate theories of ecocriticism'.[39] Although this is changing as ecoGothic frameworks emerge, the current study develops a material feminist ecoGothic that draws material ecofeminist theories together with Female Gothic and monster theories as a distinctive framework with which to interrogate plant monster tropes in British and American literature and film as ecological representations that offer a new perspective through gender of socio-cultural boundaries as these are broken down and rebuilt.

While ecocriticism investigates the relationship between the human and nonhuman world and how it changes throughout human cultural history,[40] the monster, according to Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, is 'that which threatens understandings of the world, the self, and the relations between the two – and these are understandings that vary depending

[34] Andrew Smith and William Hughes, 'Introduction: defining the ecoGothic', in *EcoGothic*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp.1-14 (p.3).
[35] Gothic Nature Conference I (2017), II (2019), III (2020) and *Gothic Nature: New Directions in Ecohorror and the EcoGothic Journal*, launched in 2017, https://gothicnaturejournal.com/.
[36] Elizabeth Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic: The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p.34.
[37] Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles, 'Introduction: Ecohorror in the Anthropocene', in *Fear and Nature: Ecohorror Studies in the Anthropocene*, ed. by Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), pp.1-20 (p.3).
[38] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.36.
[39] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.19.
[40] Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (Oxon: Routledge, 2004).

upon time and place'.[41] So too, in 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', Jeffrey Jerome Cohen outlines monsters as transgressive, ambiguous beings that 'ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, [and] our tolerance toward its expression'.[42] Plant monster narratives, therefore, lend themselves to gothic enquiry since, according to Donna Heiland, '[g]othic fiction at its core is about transgression of all sorts: across national boundaries, social boundaries, sexual boundaries, the boundaries of one's own identity', challenging established constructs and foreshadowing anxieties of impending change.[43] As Cheryl Blake Price has argued, 'although "man-eating plant" stories are usually categorized as Science Fiction, their strong ties to gothic adventure signify an ambivalent status within both genres', enhanced by the many plant monster narratives that feature 'frightening new evolutionary hybrids' combining animal and plant characteristics.[44] Furthermore, T. S. Miller acknowledges Cohen's assertion that the monster is transmutable, declaring '[l]ike all monsters, the monster plant comes in many guises and reappears in many places'.[45] These vegetal fiends are certainly transgressive, being a mix of mythically bizarre (weird), supernatural (gothic) or genetically modified, if not galactic alien (science fiction) and, as this work outlines, often ambiguously gendered. As ecological monsters, they challenge contemporary cultural assumptions, and are explored here with a focus on their engagement with changing gender identities, behaviours and expectations.

While Gothic monsters such as the vampire, werewolf, ghost, chimera and zombie have been, and continue to be, well scrutinised,[46] plant monsters have only recently stepped out of their liminal borders with the help of the ecoGothic spotlight. Exploring iconic vegetal horror through an ecoGothic approach, Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga's (eds.) *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film* (2016), Elizabeth Parker's *The Forest and the EcoGothic: The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination* (2020), and Sue Edney's (ed.) *EcoGothic Gardens in the Long Nineteenth*

[41] Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, 'Introduction: A Genealogy of Monster Theory 1' in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp.1-36 (p.3).
[42] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp.37-56 (p.52).
[43] Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p.3.
[44] Blake Price, 'Vegetable Monsters: Man-Eating Trees in Fin-de-Siècle Fiction', pp.318 and 325.
[45] Miller, 'Lives of the Monster Plants: The Revenge of the Vegetable in the Age of Animal Studies', p.462.
[46] Weinstock, 'Introduction', p.31.

Century: Phantoms, Fantasy and Uncanny Flowers (2020) illustrate the rapidly growing interest, over the last five years, in literary plants and flowers as gothic representations.[47] Both the essay collections and monograph highlight how gothic nature can, and should, be read as distinctive representations of changing eco-social attitudes. In her introduction to *Plant Horror*, Dawn Keetley argues that plants have figured as monstrous in fiction and film not only due to their 'absolute strangeness *and* in their uncanny likeness' but also in our inability to accept 'the stark fact that we become fodder for plants' in the long run (italics in original).[48] Yet despite the plethora of plant monster fiction available and recent developments in ecoGothic critical frameworks, none consider plant monsters as gothic protagonists, which this current study aims to address in illustrating how their inherent alien Otherness engages with emerging re-definitions of femininity, masculinity and gender identity.

Some recent and concurrent explorations of plant monsters have focused on representations of exotic flowering plants purely within a Victorian context of degeneration and evolutionary fears. Jim Endersby, for example, has explored the Darwinian influence and Victorian obsession with orchids as inspiring their monstrous representations of fears of degeneration in gothic fiction.[49] Similarly, Jane Desmarais' *MONSTERS under GLASS: A Cultural History of Hothouse Flowers from 1850 to the Present* considers exotic flowers as historical metaphors for sexuality and modernity, but mainly in poetry and art.[50] In terms of gothic metaphors, Cheryl Blake Price and T. S. Miller offer ecophobic representations of the Victorian man-eating plant. Blake Price situates nineteenth-century plant monster fiction as a sub-genre of Imperial Gothic underlining fears of degeneration, stating there is a 'cluster of gothic fiction featuring animated carnivorous plants' that include 'vampiric

[47] Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga, eds., *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Elizabeth Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic: The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination* (London/Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Sue Edney, ed., *EcoGothic Gardens in the Long Nineteenth Century: Phantoms, Fantasy and Uncanny Flowers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020); a version of a section of chapter two of the current study is part of this latter collection.

[48] Dawn Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror; or, Why Are Plants Horrifying?', in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, ed. by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.1-30 (p.5). Italics in original.

[49] Jim Endersby, 'Deceived by orchids: sex, science, fiction and Darwin', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 49.2 (2016), 205–229.

[50] Jane Desmarais, *MONSTERS under GLASS: A Cultural History of Hothouse Flowers from 1850 to the Present* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2018).

orchids and carnivorous vines' alongside the 'endless appetite of the man-eating tree'.[51] While her main argument focuses on man-eating trees within a colonial context as representations of ecophobic imperialism and fears of Victorian consumerism, T. S. Miller explores the anthropophagic plant monster through plant studies in terms of Darwinian evolutionary anxieties.[52] Both focus on man-eating vegetation discovered in exotic locations (colonial jungles) by the hapless adventurer or plant collector, underlining the commodification of nature but without wider ecocritical discussion. While there is some inevitable overlap in the current project's coverage of late-Victorian plant monster fiction, this project, in contrast, takes an ecoGothic approach to analogous floral and vegetal protagonists together with their later reincarnations or adaptations, tracing the development of the plant monster trope as it engages with contemporary gender concerns at significant moments of change across the long twentieth century, thus broadening the scope of vegetal horror beyond Imperial Gothic.

Given the numerous plant monster texts available and the myriad of discussions these monsters may represent, this study limits its scope to the cultivated vegetable monster in conjunction with their corresponding – and somewhat equally monstrous – gardener. Cultivated plant monsters are notoriously difficult to contain within specific borders; they are truly transmutable, displaying a variety of gothic monster features that befit their contemporary context as hybrids that transgress not just the boundaries of monstrosity, but also that of human and nonhuman. This research develops a material ecofeminist gothic framework to consider how the type of plant monster varies to engage with changing gender construction even as ecological concerns are underlined by the gendered human-plant interaction throughout the long twentieth century (1890-2015). To demonstrate why the plant monster has endured and continues to be a gendered eco-monster re-invented for its time, it is necessary to draw material ecofeminist theories, Female gothic theories on the monstrous female and concepts of becoming-other together in unique ways, revealing a body of fiction that engages with uncertainty at significant moments of social change. With gardening and plant imagery in Victorian fiction

[51] Blake Price, 'Vegetable Monsters: Man-Eating Trees in *Fin de Siècle* Fiction', p.312.
[52] Miller, 'Lives of the Monster Plants: The Revenge of the Vegetable in the Age of Animal Studies', pp.460-479.

contributing distinctly to gendered identity construction,[53] female-nature associations (including gardening, flowers and plants) have remained constant throughout literary history.[54] This study analyses the plant monster as a key protagonist wherein deeply-embedded gender-nature associations are foregrounded to enable contemporary progressive or subversive commentary, while gothicising material ecofeminist concepts offers a route to understanding the cultural significance of plant monsters as sites for reinvigorating gender debates.

1.3. Female ecoGothic: eco-*Femmes Fatales*

Gothic fiction itself emerged as a popular genre of Victorian literature in response to industrial and social changes that were 'challenging the authority'.[55] Antithesising the association of nature with femininity, Gothic narratives have codified the wilderness and flora as a female monstrous Other – 'a menacing alterity of the natural environment' at the heart of ecophobia.[56] For Jack Halberstam, these monstrous others embody the 'threats to nation, capitalism, and the bourgeoisie' of 'race, class, gender, and sexuality'.[57] Halberstam adds, that '[w]ithin the nineteenth-century Gothic, authors mixed and matched a wide variety of signifiers of difference to fabricate the deviant body', forming a monstrous other that becomes 'available for any number of meanings'.[58] With traditional Western gender-nature associations notoriously hard to dispel, interpreting the plant monster as symbolising phallocentric anxieties is often combined with the monster's infamous appearance at times of crises. Perhaps because it is predominantly the domain of the male writer, plant monster fiction, particularly from the Victorian through to the post-War period, depict their monstrous flowers and plants as *femmes fatales* – a Gothic figure that allows for a gendered reading. These monstrous female figures are shown to represent patriarchal anxiety in coping with the social changes of modernity. They are subsequently

[53] Celine Grasser, "Good Girls versus Blooming Maidens: The Building of Female Middle- and Upper-Class Identities in the Garden, England and France, 1820-1870", in *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960*, ed. by Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Soland and Christina Benninghaus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp.131-146.
[54] Garrard, *Ecocriticism*.
[55] Heiland, *Gothic and Gender*, p.3.
[56] Estok, 'Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia', p.130.
[57] Jack Halberstam, 'Parasites and Perverts: An Introduction to Gothic Monstrosity' in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp.148-169 (p.150).
[58] Halberstam, 'Parasites and Perverts: An Introduction to Gothic Monstrosity', pp.150 and 149.

adapted in response to the re-establishing of traditional binary gender roles, equality of the sexes and female empowerment, until they are re-rooted for today's uncertainty in navigating non-cisgender identities.

The trope of the *femme fatale* emerges, according to Rebecca Stott, 'from a phallocentric point of view' as the dark, chaotic, irrational, wild side of femininity.[59] French for 'deadly woman', the *femme fatale* has long been a figure in literature of the wicked seductress and sexual enchantress, who narcissistically manipulates the men around her for her own rewards; a monstrous Other within the dichotomous perspective of idealised/vilified woman in the male imagination. As Kelly Hurley argues, 'Victorian representations of women tend to polar extremes', rendering females as symbols of either 'domestic happiness or unnatural monsters'.[60] This dichotomous rendering of the female is projected onto carnivorous plants, in *fin de siècle* fiction particularly, as preoccupations with what was predetermined acceptable as feminine and masculine began to change. Indeed, the *femme fatale* motif is equated with a 'praying mantis, a vampire, a siren or a wanton courtesan', with 'sexual cannibalism and predatory instincts … predominant characteristic[s] of the fatal woman'.[61] I argue that the plant monster should be added to this list.

As 'a female subject of violence poses a serious challenge' to a gender role that should 'eschew violence, destructiveness, and cruelty, except in self-defense (sic) or rebellion,' Adriana Craciun argues that this image of woman as bacchante was used by men 'to justify restricting women's rights even further' while women writers employed the *femme fatale* character as a revolutionary figure to serve their own interests 'as liberation from the constraints of domesticity'.[62] As a manner of addressing unpalatable social changes, the *femme fatale* is a subversive figure that threatens cultural, social, sexual, and/or political stability, portrayed at any one time as 'prostitute, suffragette, New Woman, virago, degenerate, Wild Woman, Free Woman', or witch.[63] This 'predatory

[59] Rebecca Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death* (Basingstoke and London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1992), p.38.
[60] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.121.
[61] Malgorzata Luczynska-Holdys, *Soft-Shed Kisses: Re-visioning the Femme Fatale in English Poetry of the 19th Century* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), p.4-5.
[62] Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.22, 41.
[63] Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale*, p.49.

female' is often presented as 'alluring and deadly'; exotic women found at the intersection of discourse about invasion and the 'preoccupations with the all-powerful New Woman' against a backdrop of foliage and flower.[64] In the late Victorian era 'an independent woman was castigated as unfeminine or even openly presented as masculinised'.[65] Such demonising of femininity often saw women portrayed as admixed creatures like the classic mythological Gorgon,[66] with Medusa heralded as 'queen of the pantheon of female monsters'.[67] As *femme fatale* figure and misogynistic icon, Elizabeth Johnston suggests, 'Medusa has been used to criticize powerful women' persistently throughout history, 'haunt[ing] Western imagination, materializing whenever male authority feels threatened by female agency'.[68] The change from feminine beauty to predatory violent masculinity nascent in the *femme fatale* is portrayed through these early plant monsters as epitomising contemporary fears of the emerging figure of the New Woman and the dissolving boundaries of modernity.

According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'the monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection', one that 'incorporates fear, desire, anxiety' as a representation of the feminine and the hypermasculine.[69] For Dana Oswald, the trope of exaggerated stereotypical male behaviours (hypermasculinity) is not only 'marked by inflated physical traits' but includes 'performances of aggression and domination'.[70] As ambiguously gendered monsters, homicidal plant protagonists are 'occupied by excessive, particularly cannibalistic, consumption'.[71] Such plants become a metaphor that reveals 'the fragility of the category of masculinity and the ways in which [it] may be feminized'.[72] By considering plant monsters as *femmes fatales* through a Female ecoGothic framework, they can be

[64] Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale,* pp.124-5.
[65] Luczynska-Holdys, *Soft-Shed Kisses*, p.11.
[66] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p.118-119.
[67] Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', (1986, 1999) in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp.211-25 (p.211).
[68] Elizabeth Johnston, 'The Original 'Nasty Woman'', *The Atlantic*, 6 November 2016 [last accessed: 12 January 2021].
[69] Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', pp. 38, 41.
[70] Dana Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and The Monstrous*, ed. by Asa Simon Mittman with Peter J Dendle (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), pp.343-363 (p.347).
[71] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', p.350.
[72] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', p.347.

established as gendered tropes that reflect uncertainty surrounding their contemporary social, environmental and political change and are adapted, morphed and reinvented as attitudes alter throughout the long twentieth century.

As Jane Desmarais points out, 'Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* offers a conception of female sexuality as something to be both desired and feared', aligning woman and flower as the paradoxical fatal woman: 'a sensual goddess … but at the same time she is predatory and cruel'.[73] Combining treacherous women with poisonous exotic flowers, this *fleurs du mal* imagery has perpetuated patriarchal associations of flowers/plants as female and fatal women as wild, uncontrollable nature. Investigating the 'predatory female as invading Other', Rebecca Stott positions the *femme fatale* at the intersection of discourse surrounding sociocultural anxieties about invasion and female independence by aligning native females in colonial encounters with the natural landscape as exotic *femme fatale.*[74] Using Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Stott highlights that 'the native women are framed and held by the jungle' and most importantly, 'they are like carnivorous jungle plants – *fleurs du mal* – alluring and deadly'.[75] Drawing a direct and clear association between foliage, flower and female through Conrad's description of the jungle as a 'devouring femininity', Stott develops a compelling link between the *femme fatale* and exotic (carnivorous) plants as a means of addressing socio-political concerns through gender.[76] Yet, despite countless examinations of the *femme fatale* figure in Gothic literature, with many aligned to this natural imagery, the focus has been on the human rather than the plant as *femme fatale* monster. Given the variety of gothic and weird tales featuring deadly flowers at the *fin-de-siècle*, the lack of a gendered reading that interprets these plant monsters in this way seems remiss. Perhaps criticism of feminist essentialism has hindered a gendered reading of plant monster narratives, given how obvious the gender-nature association is. Throughout this study, gender is indispensable in understanding plant monsters as metaphors that reflect the changing eco-social attitudes of the long twentieth century. Combining the *femme fatale* figure of the 'sexually

[73] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass*, p.170.
[74] Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale*, pp.124-5.
[75] Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale*, p.128.
[76] Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale*, pp.137, 126-162.

expressive modern woman'[77] with deadly flora that seek human blood/flesh bridges the gap in gender studies by examining exotic killer plants as *eco-femmes fatales* that target their human (male) gardeners.[78] This transgressive metaphor also underlines the dissolution of boundaries, both female/male and plant/human when explored through a material ecoGothic perspective that inverts trans-corporeal models to consider the human flesh as food.

1.4. Towards a Gothic Trans-corporeality: ecoGothic Body Horror

It is in mapping the transit and transformation of nonhuman matter within and through the human body, eventually returning to nonhuman matter in decomposition that Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality emphasises the environmental message that we are part of the natural world we seem intent on destroying. Demonstrating the material cycle through the process by which plants absorb matter from the soil, rain, and air, are subsequently ingested by humans and animals (some of which are also consumed by humans) and become part of the human body (with a return to nonhuman matter through excretion and bodily decomposition in death), trans-corporeality highlights how the direct impact humans have on the environment has an indirect one on humans themselves. While trans-corporeal reflections on our material interactions with nature through the food-cycle (from dirt, to plant, to food, to human, to dirt) may seem uncanny and gothic enough in itself, applying an inverted (or gothic) trans-corporeality to plant monsters, where the *live* human becomes the source of food for plants, these authors demonstrate a keen awareness of the human ties to nature. Drawing on gothic, weird, uncanny imaginings of the vegetal world to highlight concerns about the impact of the modern Anthropocene, plant monster fiction uses contentious gendering and sexuality to underline the cultural implications of human acts on the natural world.

When the act of eating involves the consumption of the human body, transgressing the boundaries of social norms through issues of cannibalism, vampirism, and invasion, trans-

[77] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass*, p.167.
[78] I have used this term previously in a similar piece of writing; see: Teresa Fitzpatrick, 'Green is the New Black: Plant monsters as ecoGothic tropes; vampires and *femmes fatales*', in *EcoGothic Gardens in the Long Nineteenth Century: Phantoms, Fantasy and Uncanny Flowers*, ed. by Sue Edney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.130-47; Jane Desmarais refers to similar plant monster tropes in art and poetry as '*fleurs fatales*' see: Desmarais, pp.150-78.

corporeality becomes gothic. The implications of absorbing the human materiality when the consumption of human flesh is by vegetation generates an uncanny plant monster that challenges a range of dualistic boundaries. A gothic trans-corporeality reveals how consuming, subsuming and commingling of human flesh by and with plant bodies not only interrogates the cultural impact of a swiftly changing society on the natural world but reinvigorates interpretations of contemporary attitudes to gender within Western socio-cultural history. Where the plants are predatory and humans are the food source, dichotomous boundaries of nature/culture (and by association, male/female) are collapsed in plant/human-becomings that underline changing natural and social (particularly gender) landscapes as urbanisation, war and industrial agriculture influence the land and equality reforms and counter-culture brought about significant social transformations. Through a genealogy of plant monster types and how they interact materially with their human counterpart, this study traces the development of the plant fiend as a gendered eco-monster that challenges established boundaries and hyperbolises perceived anxieties about the destabilising effects of changing gender identities and behaviours.

In subverting human superiority, as these plant monster narratives illustrate, a gothic trans-corporeality manifests as a very physical horror. In *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film*, Xavier Aldana Reyes outlines that body horror is about the mutation, transformation, even mutilation of the corporeal form through 'gruesome imagery' and 'extreme representations of the body'; reconfigurations that end in posthuman states through 'corporeal and visceral engagement' with a 'gothic mode [that] develops horrors that speak of the anxieties of its time'.[79] The visceral fragmentation and material disintegration of the human body reveals the corporeal innards – that which is normally invisible to the naked eye – with a sense of revulsion that Julia Kristeva refers to as abjection. For Kristeva, abjection arises from that which 'disturbs identity, system, order' through transgression of 'borders, positions, rules', by '[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite'.[80] Although Kelly Hurley has argued

[79] Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), p.57.
[80] Julia Kristeva, 'Approaching Abjection', (1982) in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp.95-107 (p.97).

this abjection is often inscribed onto the female body as monstrous,[81] the abject-Other of plant monster fiction can best be illustrated through a gothic trans-corporeality that not only brings the fragility of the human body unsettling to the fore, but can be used to interrogate changing gender identities. While 'corporeality is part and parcel of the gothic mode because of its investment in sensations and thrills',[82] the visceral horror exhibited in plant monster tales not only concerns the transgression of gendered boundaries, but as plant and (hu)man merge through trans-corporeal commingling, ecophobic anxieties are underlined in a visceral abjection of human/nature. Besides the visceral trans-corporeal imagery of man-eating plant monsters, the metaphysical becoming-plant demonstrates an ecoGothic body horror that material ecofeminism reveals as the discursive site of gender concerns. David Del Principe defines the ecoGothic as 'taking a nonanthropocentric position to reconsider the role that the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear'.[83] 'In short', he declares, 'the EcoGothic examines the construction of the Gothic body – unhuman, nonhuman, transhuman, posthuman, or hybrid – through a more inclusive lens'.[84] The monstrous merging of human and vegetal in post-millennial texts create posthuman hybrids through progressively more explicit gothic trans-corporeal horror, invoking ecophobic fascination to explore the dissolution of boundaries in response to non-binary gender identities and understanding our responsibilities towards the non-humans we share our world with.

Scholarship on body horror often focuses on the monstrous metamorphoses of the human body either through the psychological horrors of torture porn, the degenerate cannibal, or cross-species experimentation, for example in the work of director David Cronenberg. Critical examination of monstrous human mutations tends to focus on the animal-human hybrids in a similar vein to other mythological half-human creatures. In exploring the visceral transformations of the human body by plants (albeit often depicted as alien life-forms), this study offers scope for broadening the field of body horror into the ecological. In deconstructing the (live) human body viscerally into plant food, or into fertile

[81] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*.
[82] Aldana Reyes, *Body Gothic*, p.170.
[83] David Del Principe, 'Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century', *Gothic Studies*, 16.1 (2014), 1-8 (p.1).
[84] Del Principe, 'Introduction', p.1.

substrate for hosting the vegetal, the plant monster narratives of this project underline the disturbing material aspect of the human form, providing a more specific ecoGothic body horror. While emerging ecoGothic criticism is beginning to explore examples of body horror that involve the vulnerability of the human form, this study focuses on the trans-corporeal body horror of plant monster narratives as ways of engaging with ecological anxieties of the modern Anthropocene through a gendered lens, paving the way for further explorations of ecoGothic body horror.

An ecoGothic approach that considers the 'interchanges and interconnections' between the human and nonhuman through a gothic trans-corporeality explores 'the intersection of gender … and environmental conservation' to reconsider the semiotics of a female/nature construct.[85] The Gothic process of othering, monstrous nature, and the transgressive bodily interchanges of trans-corporeality combine to interrogate established gender/nature constructs and challenge social boundaries that allow contemporary gender identity, roles and behaviours to be re-examined through monstrous vegetal becomings.

1.5. Monstrous Plant-Becomings: Hybrids and Posthumans

Concepts of becoming-Other are a facet of the Gothic and monstrosity used to convey anxieties about change to socio-political norms that, despite more recent critical plant studies, has not been applied to plant monster fiction in any depth. Deleuze and Guattari explore a becoming-Other (principally becoming-animal, although also becoming-woman) within their rhizome theory as a state of inbetween, of the symbiotic relationship between entities that reflect multiplicities, defying boundaries of power.[86] 'Science fiction' they declare, (and its cousin the Gothic) 'has gone through a whole evolution taking it [the concept] from animal, vegetable, and mineral becomings to becomings of bacteria, viruses, molecules, and things imperceptible'.[87] While there is significant criticism available centred around becoming-animal,[88] becoming-woman, general becoming-Other and more

[85] Emily Carr, 'The riddle was the angel in the house: towards an American ecofeminist Gothic', in *Ecogothic*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp.160-176 (p.160).
[86] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp.232-309.
[87] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.248.
[88] Fabienne Moine, ed. 'Becoming Animal', *Cahiers victoriens et edouardiens*, 85 (2017).

recently, becoming-fungus,[89] the concept of becoming-plant is only emerging with eco-feminist criticism, recent critical plant studies, and more prominently within philosophy.[90]

Both philosophical and material becoming-plant provide an ecoGothic context that raises questions around gender and sexuality, not least through a physical, monstrous transformation of human into plant foregrounded in mid-twentieth-century plant monster texts. Exploring the variety of ways in which the plant monsters interact with their human gardeners, this study demonstrates the androcentric and ecophobic perspectives of becoming-Other that writers display through plants consuming and/or subsuming the human form. While anthropophagus plant monsters reveal trans-corporeal plant-becomings through displays of human qualities after ingesting the toxic human-food, other plants subsume the human body as the gardener experiences a physical becoming-plant. As plant and human merge, human (and gender) identity recede once the corporeal greening takes control, illustrating an ecoGothic plant-becoming that reflects the eco-social tensions of early Cold War narratives, engaging with contemporary anxieties around the environmental effects of nuclear war and atomic energy even as issues of conservative social (gender) conformity are advanced. Drawing on Deleuze's theory of becoming and Luce Irigaray's theory of sexual difference, Rosi Braidotti asserts that a person's identity is defined within a shared becoming-Other, arguing that 'cultural fascination with monstrous, mutant or hybrid others expresses … a deep anxiety about the fast rate of transformation of identities' which she connects with a 'corporeal feminism of sexual difference'.[91] In exploring trans-corporeal plant-becomings illustrated by plant monsters and their gardeners, this study highlights how issues of changing gender (and sexual) identity constructs are navigated through persistent associations of nature and (female) gender in Western ideology.

Incorporating an ecoGothic body horror with visceral and sexual imagery, the trans-corporeal merging of human and vegetation reveals uncanny plant-human hybrid monsters

[89] Anthony Camara, 'Abominable Transformations: Becoming-Fungus in Arthur Machen's *The Hill of Dreams*', *Gothic Studies*, 16.1 (2014), 9-23.
[90] See for example, Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) and Michael Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
[91] Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Malden, MA. And Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p.5.

that reflect Bakhtinian constructions of the grotesque, developing ideas of the 'monstrous other' through the focus on physical deformity. Bakhtin suggests that being in opposition to the aesthetics of the classic body, the grotesque is transgressive in that it challenges normative forms of representation and behaviour, allowing writers to explore gender and sexual identity.[92] A Classics term, the grotesque stems from Greek and Roman depictions of human-animal and human-plant hybrids in art and architecture as representations of mythologies. The trans-corporeal plant monsters that see vegetation transforming the human body as a form of plant-becoming demonstrate a grotesque hybrid that draws on this Classical depiction. While grotesque animal-human figures perhaps hold more fascination for audiences and have been made popular in recent times through texts such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series, plant-human hybrids have always embodied more sinister impressions. The alien plant-becoming-humans of Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* and DC Comic's plant-human character Poison Ivy, for example, are two such plant villains that unsettle category boundaries, disrupt corporeal identities, and tap into the ecophobic consciousness. This sort of plant-human grotesque has its origins in the folkloric Green Man.

The legendary Green Man figure is 'an ancient, pre-Christian man-plant hybrid':[93] a foliate head depicting 'a face with vegetation bursting from (or perhaps penetrating into) the nose and/or mouth'.[94] The horror this image perpetrates is the reminder that 'we are (already) matter, and will always become vegetal matter'.[95] Since traditional Western philosophy often aligned plant and vegetal musings with the feminine, wild, chaotic human aspect,[96] the male figure-head of the Green Man symbol, through the abandonment of nature/culture dualisms, evokes a sense of anxiety about indistinct gender roles. It is this grotesque figure and our ecophobic attitude towards it which Adam Knee has argued

[92] Sarah Gleeson-White, 'Revisiting the Southern Grotesque: Mikhail Bakhtin and the Case of Carson McCullers', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 33.2 (2001), 108-123.
[93] Angela Tenga, 'Seeds of Horror: Sacrifice and Supremacy in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Wicker Man*, and *Children of the Corn*', in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, ed. by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.55-72 (p.59).
[94] Keetley, 'Introduction', p.2.
[95] Keetley, 'Introduction', pp.3 and 7.
[96] Michael Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

'underpins the conceptualization of the "little green men" of the [science fiction] genre'.[97] Hardly surprising then, that some of the plant aggressors that consume or subsume humans are not always genetically modified or evolutionary anomalies but have other-worldly origins.

Although the alien plant is not always explicitly gendered, an underlying monstrous Nature/feminine association 'challenge[s] notions of the body and of gender, blurring the boundaries created by humans to exert some kind of control over the unwieldy world around them'.[98] Alongside the physical blurring of bodies, the alien plant monster equally exhibits a hypermasculinity that characterised the *eco-femmes fatales* man-eaters of pre-War narratives. Cinematic plant monsters from the mid-twentieth century onwards particularly emphasise a hypermasculinity that underlined category crisis as modern masculinity was perceived as being feminised,[99] a concern that loomed large in the post-War period as gender categories were redefined amidst conflicting conformist ideology. As predominantly male protagonists are rendered plant-like through alien transformations, these vegetal beings transgress boundaries as they consume and subsume the human form. Ambiguously gendered, more violent and animalistic than their predecessors, they offer a becoming-plant that collapses the nature/culture divide as an interrogation of gender fluidity in their cultural moment.

There is a distinctive shift in post-1950s iterations of plant monsters and their domination over their human gardener. While previous plant monsters trans-corporeally consumed the human flesh transgressing the nature/culture divide by exhibiting anthropomorphic features of plant-becoming-human, those adapted for film are often more sinister, trans-corporeally dominating the human host in a becoming-plant that challenges cultural assumptions about nature and gender. As the gardener merges with their vegetal charges, their human identity is lost in a material trans-corporeal shift towards plant as the superior agency. The loss of control over nature in these plant monster narratives underpins ecophobic anxieties initiated by the Green Man figure that contest

[97] Adam Knee, 'Vegetable Discourses in the 1950s US Science Fiction Film' in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, ed. by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.145-162 (p.151).
[98] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender', p.344.
[99] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender', p.350.

redefined gender identity constructs. As gender boundaries are negotiated, accepted and continually re-drawn, the plant monster offers a becoming-plant that has hitherto been under-considered within Deleuzian criticism, re-gendering interpretations of the Green Man symbol and opening up debates about posthumanist thinking.

While later iterations of iconic plant monsters offer a predominant environmental commentary on a posthuman interaction, there continues to be a gender undercurrent. This project offers a contribution to emerging perspectives of posthuman monstrosity by considering plant monsters as an alien vegetal-borg. For Anna Powell, '[t]he concepts of becoming, assemblages, anomalies and the genetic are particularly suggestive for thinking posthuman monstrosity',[100] however, much posthuman criticism focuses on the impact of technological science on the human body, with significant monstrous readings of human/machine or human/animal hybrids. In one of her foundational feminist posthuman texts, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Donna Haraway suggests, cyborgs are key figures that transgress the boundaries of nature/culture divides suitable for a post-gender era.[101] While this is a useful starting point for examining the posthuman concepts of becoming in plant monster narratives, it is still primarily techno-posthumanist. Acknowledging these limitations, Stacy Alaimo argues for an environmental posthumanism that considers 'the flows, interchanges, and interrelations between human corporeality and the more-than-human world'.[102] In response, Rachel Fetherston offers 'an ecological posthumanism informed by ecophilosophy and ecocritical theory' to explore environmental ethics in science fiction texts, focusing on the genetic creation of a posthuman in response to environmental catastrophes.[103] Likewise, Serpil Oppermann develops a posthuman ecocriticism as 'a critical prism' for scrutinising the 'animal-machine hybrids, cyborgs, cloned animals, aliens, synthetic matter and toxic bodies' that populate

[100] Anna Powell, 'Growing Your Own: Monsters from the Lab and Molecular Ethics in Posthumanist Film', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television*, ed.by Michael Hauskeller, Thomas Drew Philbeck and Curtis D. Carbonell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.77-87 (p.78).
[101] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
[102] Alaimo, *Bodily Nature*s, p.142.
[103] Rachel Fetherston, 'Evolving a New, Ecological Posthumanism: An Ecocritical Comparison of Michel Houellebecq's *Les Particules élémentaires* and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy', in *Ethical Futures and Global Science Fiction*, ed. by Zachary Kendal, Aisling Smith, Giulia Champion and Andrew Milner (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp.99-118 (p.99).

twenty-first century narratives.[104] Vegetal-human hybrids are notably absent from this list and other eco-posthuman enquiries. Exploring the concept of becoming-plant in early twenty-first century texts, the current study offers these plant monstrosities as ecoGothic posthuman figures that engage with post-millennial recognition of non-binary gender identities and ecological concerns in the age of the Anthropocene. Both posthuman and material feminist approaches require 'imagining the human body not as male or female, straight or queer, white or black, but as a site of constant negotiation… for thinking outside the restrictive categories of capitalist biopolitics'.[105] These trans-corporeal posthuman plant monsters challenge Western phallocentric anxieties towards gender, sexual and racial identities and undermine human superiority over other species. As plant-human hybrid, these posthuman vegetal figures use gender and species transgression to highlight the intersectionality of identity construction in an era of non-binary genders and heightened environmental awareness. In adding the vegetal-human hybrid monster to the list of posthuman figures, this study contributes to the emerging development of an environmental posthuman monstrosity through trans-corporeal plant-becomings that interrogate the agency of Other for a changing world.

While many of the plant-human hybrids are the result of alien invasion from space, twenty-first century plant monster narratives often involve home-grown incongruity, emphasising the interrelations between human and plant as an alien alterity on Earth. These ecoGothic posthuman figures draw on gender identity constructions to highlight environmental concerns in an age of climate change, biodiversity loss and pandemic whilst equally underlining persistent othering of non-binary genders through trans-corporeal discarding of gender and species boundaries. Plants are already seen 'as an alien force',[106] according to eco-philosophers and plant neurobiologists who assert they are 'very distant from us, alien, to the point that sometimes it's even hard for us to remember they're

[104] Serpil Oppermann, 'From Posthumanism to Posthuman Ecocriticism' in *Relations. Beyond Anthropocentrism*, 4.1 (2016), 23-37 (p.31).
[105] Dan Hassler-Forest, 'Of Iron Men and Green Monsters: Superheroes and Posthumanism' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television*, ed.by Michael Hauskeller, Thomas Drew Philbeck and Curtis D. Carbonell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.66-76 (p.68).
[106] Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p.125.

alive'.[107] Just as nineteenth-century authors drew on Darwinian scientific findings to create their floral monstrosities,[108] so too, early twenty-first century speculative fiction writers are inspired by developments in environmental enquiry. Modern science has determined that plants have cognition, memory, and even 'communicate with other organisms',[109] while emerging eco-philosophies call for humans to decentre their thinking towards what it means to be part of the planet through nonhuman, and particularly plant, being.[110] Exaggerating the sentience of the plants around us evokes Estok's ecophobia as authors draw on science and philosophies that acknowledge vegetal behaviour as an alternative life-form. As this study reveals, turn-of-the-millennium writers of plant monster narratives bring the horror of human hubris to the fore in their imaginings of what it would mean if plants could truly connect and communicate their desires with the human gardener. Creating plant-human monsters, these eco-posthuman figures reflect contemporary insecurities around the introduction of a spectrum of non-binary gender identity constructions even as they highlight the need to recognise the impact of the Anthropocene on the world around us.

Although not strictly a plant, the mycorrhizal fungi of twenty-first-century plant monster fiction play a synonymous role in vegetal-becomings. As Daisy Butcher asserts, although 'classified in their own kingdom' they are nevertheless 'part of the same conversation and elicit the same fear as the man-eating plant'.[111] Aside from explorations of mushrooms in connection with folk- and fairy-tales,[112] fungal metaphors in literary and ecocriticism have also been sorely neglected.[113] Despite the equally vast number of Gothic

[107] Stefano Mancuso and Alessandra Viola, *Brilliant Green: The Surprising History and Science of Plant Intelligence*, trans. by Joan Benham (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2015), p.125.
[108] Kelly Hurley, 'The Modernist Abominations of William Hope Hodgson' in *Gothic Modernisms*, ed. by Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp.129-149.
[109] Richard Karban, 'Plant behaviour and communication', *Ecology Letters*, 11 (2008), 727–739 (p.733).
[110] See: Irigaray and Marder, *Through Vegetal Being*.
[111] Daisy Butcher, 'Introduction', in *Evil Roots: Killer Tales of the Botanical Gothic*, ed. by Daisy Butcher (London: The British Library, 2019), pp.7-10 (p.9).
[112] See for example: Frank M. Duggan, 'Fungi, Folkways and Fairy Tales: Mushrooms and Mildews in Stories, Remedies and Rituals, from Oberon to the Internet', *North American Fungi*, 3.7 (2008), pp.23-72.
[113] This is beginning to change, with a few articles delving into literary uses, such as: Anthony Camara, 'Abominable Transformations: Becoming-Fungus in Arthur Machen's *The Hill of Dreams*', *Gothic Studies*, 16.1 (2014), pp. 9-23; Leah Heim, 'On Fungi, Future, and Feminism: An Ecofeminist Analysis of M. R. Carey's *The Girl With All the Gifts*', *Digital Literature Review*, 5 (2018), pp. 84-98; and Peter Henning, 'Romantic Fungi and Other Useless Things: Arnold, Tieck, Keats', *Romanticism*, 26.3 (2020), 292-302. As a metaphor for eco-political discussion, see: Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the*

stories and growing number of eco-horror films featuring mushrooms, a detailed investigation is outside the scope of the current study. There is, however, an overlap with this plant-associated species kingdom that does concern this study: the underground fungal networks. In considering the twenty-first century eco-posthuman, the plant-human hybrid is often facilitated by/through a fungal connection. In his ground-breaking study on fungi, *Entangled Life*, Merlin Sheldrake explores the real-world symbiotic relationship of the mycorrhizal networks and plants in the way they communicate.[114] Besides releasing 'plumes of volatile compounds' to convey information (like the perfumes of nineteenth-century *eco-femmes fatales*), plants also communicate 'via a shared fungal network', an idea he suggests is expanded and illuminated in James Cameron's (2009) *Avatar*.[115] As Karen Houle suggests, becoming-plant involves more than a shared experience, but rather is a 'heterogenous alliance' with the non-human vegetal.[116] This plant symbiosis, with the assistance of a mycorrhizal network, is a key catalyst in a number of post-millennial plant monster texts. Unlike the ecologically positive interconnections of *Avatar*, the tales explored in this study envisage an invasive plant-fungal network that evolves the human body into a new hybrid species through uncanny ecoGothic body horror. A physical plant-human commingling that dispels dichotomous boundaries of both nature/culture and binary gender continues to evoke a deep-seated fear of the vegetal within. After all, it is in 'imagining threats to human control' by 'nonhuman agency' that is at the heart of ecophobia.[117]

Trans-corporeal becomings have hitherto been limited in focus to ecocritical analyses, making this study among the first to apply trans-corporeality within a gothic context, offering an avenue of enquiry that could be incorporated within the wider ecoGothic framework. One aim of this study is to demonstrate the various monstrous forms within plant monster fiction and explain how they reappear at moments of gender identity crises.

Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015). For an ecological perspective, see: Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures* (London: The Bodley Head, 2020).

[114] Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures* (London: The Bodley Head, 2020).

[115] Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, pp. 182 and 171.

[116] Karen F. Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics as Extension or Becoming? The Case of Becoming-Plant', *Journal for Critical Animal Studies,* IX.1/2 (2011), 89-116 (p.97). [last accessed: 21/08/2018].

[117] Estok, 'Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia', p.135.

Moreover, using material ecofeminism to explore the 'changing relationships' of 'human corporeality [that] is dangerously entangled' with 'material agents' of nature,[118] gender constructs and environmental science collide as issues of control over non-heteronormative behaviours and nature are reflected ecophobically through the act of gardening. The relationship between monstrous plant and monstrously human gardener, revealed through a material ecoGothic framework, not only makes a clear case for these plants to be explored as gendered eco-monsters on an equal footing with other Gothic monsters, such as vampires, ghosts, and zombies but exploring the material connections between gardeners and plant monsters requires both to be considered as key protagonists within the tales. As protagonists (and therefore, not necessarily always the villain), plant monsters are used within gothic narratives in sustained dialogue about changing gender attitudes and increasing ecological anxieties across the long twentieth century through material corporeality as a gothic body. Drawing female corporeal Gothic theories together with material ecofeminism that considers the agency of matter and the interconnectedness of the human and nonhuman world, this critical ecoGothic framework interprets plant monsters and gothic gardeners as gendered metaphors seated at the intersection of ecocriticism and the Gothic. As Nature tropes, they not only help us articulate change through which we displace our struggles with alterity,[119] but offer a reassessment of otherness wherein deep-rooted cultural associations of gender and nature are deconstructed and realigned for their contemporary context.

1.6. Mapping the Plant Borders: Genres, Gardeners, and Liminal Spaces

Beginning with the Weird short stories of the late nineteenth century, this study traces the plant monster in its various forms as it is re-worked and revised in Gothic novels and Science Fiction film of the twentieth century, through to the graphic body horror of the early twenty-first century visual and written texts. As the following chapters illustrate, gender-nature associations, particularly femininity, are strongly linked to the plant monster form as floral or hothouse exotics, with both plant monster form and gendering gradually

[118] Estok, 'Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia', p.130.
[119] Haraway, 'Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms', p.159.

becoming more progressive as gender and sexual identities are re-defined. Popular in the late nineteenth century with the industrialisation of the printing press, the short story form burgeoned with the increasing circulation of magazine collections including strange tales of unusual colonial discoveries.[120] Beginning with Frank Munsey's *Argosy* magazine in 1896, American pulp magazines such as *Amazing Stories*, *Wonder Stories*, *Fantastic Adventures*, *Weird Tales* and Britain's *Pall Mall* magazines and the *Strand Magazine*, (to name the best known) hit their peak from the 1920s to 1950s. Dubbed Weird fiction for its uncanny subject-matter, the genre is defined by China Miéville as a macabre combination of 'a dark fantastic ("horror" plus "fantasy") often featuring non-traditional alien monsters (thus plus "science fiction")'.[121] This genre was particularly popular from the 1880s onwards, when it reflected the Victorian obsession with the exotic, absurd and obscure. Attracting writers, artists and readership through the established semiotics of exotic hothouse flowers (see Chapter 2), the German equivalent of *Weird Tales* was titled *Der Orchideengarten* (*The Orchid Garden*, 1919-1921).[122] Inhabiting the liminal genre space between the Gothic and Science Fiction (with elements of both often also present), the Weird is often typified through its obsession with the tentacle as a primordial monstrosity that signalled fears of regression,[123] a feature persistently recurring in association with plant monsters. Gothic fiction also tapped into the latent fears of progress and change of a 'debilitating Victorian culture'.[124] As a 'narrative reaction' against "core" values of their time, the Gothic not only challenges the desire for nostalgic indulgence in the face of change, but 'assaults rather than affirms' the 'civilizing centrality' of societal norms through 'encounters with monstrosity'.[125] Similarly, Science Fiction challenges the boundaries of realism, sharing with the Gothic 'a common fascination with the ruination of the idealised image of the [human] species' through 'repeated encounters with the monstrous', using the fears of the past projected onto the future.[126] As genres that engage in challenging the body politic and

[120] Blake Price, 'Vegetable Monsters: Man-Eating Trees in *Fin-de-Siècle* Fiction', pp.311–327.
[121] Miéville, 'Weird Fiction', p.510.
[122] Mike Ashley, *The Time Machines: The Story of the Science-Fiction Pulp Magazines from the Beginning to 1950* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp.15-6.
[123] Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, 'Introduction' in *The Weird: A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories*, ed. by Ann VanderMeer and Jeff VanderMeer (London: Corvus Books, 2011), pp.1-143 (p.3).
[124] Fred Botting, *Limits of Horror: Technologies, Bodies, Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 141.
[125] Lucie Armitt, 'Postmodern Gothic' in *Teaching the Gothic*, ed. by Anna Powell and Andrew Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 78-92 (pp. 80-81).
[126] Botting, *Limits of Horror*, pp. 133-44.

predominant ideologies through Gothic monsters, in transgressing the boundaries of these slippery genres, vegetal monstrosity clearly has more to offer than mere background greenery. As this study shows, the plant monster as a gendered Gothic Nature trope reappears in response to specific moments of eco-social change, from Victorian industrialisation and urbanisation, political upheaval of two World Wars, social change and economic freedom of the 1950s and 1970s, the mass consumerism of the 1980s and 1990s, and the global recession following the Financial Crash of 2007-8 to climate crisis and world-wide epidemics of the second decade of the twenty-first century. Each of these monumental societal shifts has bred its own popular form of monster, from otherworldly (ghosts, spectres), other reality (vampires, werewolves, zombies), to very real (psychopathic killers), or in more recent times, other planetary (aliens) and invisible (virus) monsters, which have, among other themes, often provided a platform for gender debate through theories of monstrosity. Plant monsters can, and should, be added to this list as truly uncanny eco-monsters that span all eras of social change, using ecophobic attitudes towards nature to interrogate gender construction as social and cultural boundaries are destabilised and redrawn with each momentous change. From exotic eco-*femmes fatales* of the late nineteenth century and vampiric vegetation of the War periods to predatory plants and space-alien invading flora that consume human flesh or subsume human form of the Cold War era to the plant-human hybrid results of the eco-eccentric gardeners of the twenty-first century, plant monsters, like nature itself, adapt to reflect their cultural moment, defying species borders and gendered boundaries alike.

While there are a significant number of vegetable monsters from outer space – Jack Finney's *The Body Snatchers* (1955) being one of the best known and discussed in Chapter 3 - the texts included here involve the complicity of a human gardener. As the selected narratives reveal, often the human is as monstrous as the plants they nurture or aim to control. A key figure, the gardener is often the lynchpin in escalating human demise with their botanical science, assuming the role and function of the mad scientist. A distinctive Gothic Science Fiction figure that is '[a]lmost always male' and 'is typified by unwavering arrogance' that his work is 'beneficial to humankind as a whole',[127] the mad scientist

[127] Sian MacArthur, *Gothic Science Fiction: 1818 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.25.

embodies the behaviour of the typical Gothic villain: 'imperious, a law unto themselves', a danger to others, a powerful father-figure, a transgressive hero, who is also *usually male*.[128] While Xavier Aldana Reyes '[does] not see all mad scientist films or settings as necessarily Gothic',[129] Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska assert that these maniacal protagonists 'carry the gothic legacy of Dr Frankenstein and Dr Jekyll'.[130] They add that mad scientists 'have a habit of spawning monsters, sometimes intentionally, … sometimes unintentionally, … com[ing] to suffer at the hands of [their] unnatural creation'.[131] Gothic gardeners of the long twentieth century follow this same path, either unwittingly cultivating murderous flowers or losing control of their horticultural experiments, situating them as mad botanist figures. In their protectiveness towards their prize plants - either refusing to let them be destroyed, or displaying no antagonism towards them, despite attempts by these vegetables to kill/eat the botanist – the gardeners exploit the 'tension between what may be properly done in the name of science and the impact of obsessive research on those involved'.[132] As mad botanist fiction that initially 'juxtaposes a "masculinised" science to a "feminised" nature or otherness',[133] the gardener is also a contentiously gendered figure set alongside their transgressive plant monsters that equally becomes more progressive across the twentieth century.

One of the oldest mad botanist figures is Dr. Giacomo Rappaccini from Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story, 'Rappaccini's Daughter' (1844), who cultivates both poisonous plant and toxic daughter within the ambiguous sphere of his botanical garden to assert his control over nature. Although Jim Endersby suggests this tale 'blends the girl and the flower back into a single, sinister image of untouchable toxicity',[134] and it includes many of the themes explored here,[135] it situates the human daughter as the *femme fatale* monster

[128] Emma McEvoy, 'Gothic and the Romantics', in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp.19-28 (p.24).
[129] Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Gothic Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), p.34.
[130] Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema: From Outerspace to Cyberspace* (London: Wallflower Publishing Limited, 2000), p.46.
[131] King and Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema*, pp.46-7.
[132] Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: a Cultural History of the Horror Movie* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989), p.29-30.
[133] King and Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema*, p.38.
[134] Jim Endersby, *Orchid: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p.136.
[135] Hawthorne's narrative can be read through a gothic trans-corporeality in the material exchange of toxins that transforms Beatrice into a *femme fatale*. Her empathy with the 'sister flower' suggests a becoming-

rather than the plant. Hawthorne's mad botanist remained relatively unique until the 1890s when writers began to revisit and develop the gothic gardener as a mad scientist/Gothic villain figure, with Darwin's widely-circulated publications on plants offering ample material for the Victorian imagination.[136] Just as the plant monster morphs to reflect its contemporary cultural context, so too the gardener's curiosity shifts from simply *cultivating* the plant's uncanny carnivorous nature (with unfortunate results for the human) in the late nineteenth century towards scientifically *creating or manufacturing* monstrous nature for specific purpose (with similarly unfortunate human demise) in the mid-twentieth century and *transplanting and nurturing* invasive species (to the detriment of humankind) in the late twentieth century, before evolving into a darkly-ecological, villainous gardener in the twenty-first century. The gardener's controlling attitude towards nature underlines them as botanical scientist rather than horticultural hobbyist and corresponds to fears surrounding modernisation and scientific progress, as much as gender equality and environmental degradation.

Gardening as science equally re-focused male attention towards botany as more than female hobbies of flower-pressing and arranging, but as scientific endeavours to cultivate (and control) nature. While many of the gothic gardeners are male, this does not preclude women from the role. When the gardener is female, both human and plant further challenge species associations and gender assumptions of their time. Pre-Darwin botany 'had been popularly considered a feminine science', only being reclaimed as 'a new, supposedly more manly style' of scientific pursuit in the late nineteenth century.[137] The (re-)gendering of sciences provokes an ambiguity in the gardener, engaging with modified definitions of masculinity and femininity as attitudes towards gender identity, roles and behaviours changed. Binary identities often become confused within the gothic gardeners, as human and plant engage with their gendered cultural context. Female gardeners/botanists are even more dubiously gendered than their male counterparts, depending not on the sex/gender of the author, but on whether they are championing or

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plant, experienced via a viscous porosity within the confines of the garden, both challenging and re-affirming its contemporary social (and gender) boundaries.

[136] In particular, Charles Darwin, *Insectivorous Plants* (London: John Murray, 1875), *On the Movement and Habits of Climbing Plants* (London: John Murray, 1875) and *The Power of Movement in Plants* (London: John Murray, 1880).

[137] Endersby, 'Deceived by orchids: sex, science, fiction and Darwin', p.206.

parodying feminist achievements, similar to the lampooning of the New Woman figure in magazines such as *Punch*.[138] Often 'ambiguously positioned in the societies in which they live', female gardeners demonstrate a particular 'intimacy and kinship' with the plant monsters they encounter.[139] Whether male or female, noted or amateur botanist, cognisant or hapless cultivator, misogynist or idealist, ecophobic or ecophilic, their role can be seen as equally monstrous as they transgress social and scientific boundaries, conducting their villainous botany in liminal spaces.

The hothouses, conservatories, porches, and gardens within which the interactions of gardener and plant monster occur also carve out gendered spaces. Céline Grasser, for example, offers the garden as a domestic space in nineteenth-century English and French literature wherein female gender roles are pedagogically formed within a patriarchal construct.[140] Victorians perceived the garden as an extension of the house, Grasser argues, providing an arena for younger females to develop nurturing skills using flowers and plants as surrogate children, redolent of their gender roles as housewife and mother.[141] Michael Waters too, notes, '[i]n Victorian imaginative literature, women are frequently presented in the company of flowers … to heighten their femininity'.[142] Even in non-fiction, women and nature are used synonymously by male writers, with the likes of John Ruskin perpetuating the feminine flower imagery in his lectures on sexual politics of the period, declaring of women that '[s]he grows as a flower does', and later replacing the word 'women' altogether: 'flowers that have thoughts like yours, and lives like yours.'[143] The garden was presented as a 'coming-of age' training ground where appropriate adult relationships between genders were forged and femininity was emphasised. Yet, despite the numerous publications of Jane C. W. Loudon[144] and later other female gardening

[138] Cartoons such as 'Passionate Female Literary Types' by George du Maurier, *Punch*, 1894; E. H. Shepherd's 'What a Charming Surprise …' cartoon of a man discovering his wife and mother-in-law have taken up cycling, *Punch*, 1895.
[139] Shelley Saguaro, '"Tentacular thinking" and the "abcanny" in Hawthorne's Gothic gardens of masculine egotism', in *EcoGothic Gardens in the Long Nineteenth Century: Phantoms, Fantasy and Uncanny Flowers*, ed. by Sue Edney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.114-129 (p.119).
[140] Grasser, 'Good Girls versus Blooming Maidens', pp.131-146.
[141] Grasser, 'Good Girls versus Blooming Maidens', pp.131-146.
[142] Michael Waters, *The Garden in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1988), p.135.
[143] John Ruskin, 'Of Queens' Gardens', *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), pp.34, 53.
[144] Jane Loudon targeted her gardening literature at the amateur, female gardener with *Practical Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* (1841), *Botany for Ladies* (1842), *The Ladies' Magazine of Gardening*

writers, Mary Von Armin,[145] Edith L. Chamberlain and Fanny Douglas,[146] encouraging women to take an active interest and role in amateur (and later professional) gardening beyond the domestic space towards the public sphere, even Jane Loudon re-iterates that, kitchen-garden aside, the 'management of the flower garden … is pre-eminently a woman's department'.[147] Maintaining that corrupt modernity is encapsulated in the cultivated and managed English countryside, Kelly Hurley argues the garden also allows the distinction between masculinity and femininity as essential identities.[148] The interplay of cultivated and managed green spaces and taming the wilderness provides a platform for patriarchal stereotyping of gender identities with the fictional garden becoming a cultural site wherein social constructs such as gender identity and changes to contemporary social structures are negotiated. Plant monster narratives may dissolve boundaries of nature and culture, but they also demonstrate that gender and nature cannot be discussed in isolation despite ecocritical calls for non-anthropocentric views.[149] Indeed, it is this study's argument that plant monsters highlight the intersectionality of gender and nature with each informing the other through a pervasive liminality. Shifting concepts of what is deemed masculine and feminine are navigated through liminal cultivating spaces and the plants within them.

Communities experiencing the grimy environs of the growing industrialised urban centres developed the desire for green space and Victorian exclusivity of owning a garden and a glasshouse for cultivating 'exuberant exotics' were 'signs of entrepreneurial efficiency as well as colonial power'.[150] Being neither or both house and garden, the outside brought inside, glasshouses, conservatories and porches in plant monster fiction become liminal spaces, where issues of gender are questioned, blurred, or transgressed. Designed originally to produce 'early and high-flavoured fruits' for 'the opulent',[151] rather than importing these from Holland and Flanders, the development of the greenhouse closely follows social progress and can be plotted from the Orangerie of the Restoration nobles, to

(1842), *The Ladies' Companion to the Flower-Garden* (1858) all re-published in several editions demonstrating the popularity of her writing theme among contemporary women.

[145] Mary ("Elizabeth") Von Arnim, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* (1898).

[146] Edith L. Chamberlain and Fanny Douglas, *The Gentlewoman's Book of Gardening* (1892).

[147] Mrs. Jane C. Loudon, *Practical Instructions in Gardening for Ladies* (London: John Murray, 1841), p.253.

[148] Kelly Hurley, 'The Modernist Abominations of William Hope Hodgson', pp.142-145.

[149] Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p.37.

[150] Waters, *The Garden in Victorian Literature*, p.123.

[151] John C. Loudon, *Remarks on the Construction of Hothouses* (London: J. Taylor, The Architectural Library, 1817), p.8.

the 'highly decorative, social status' glasshouse of the Victorians.[152] The expense of owning one signified affluence and prominence during this time of rapid social change. Due to their proximity to the house, palm houses and covered winter gardens (heated conservatories) 'were private places in which the owner and his friends could become encircled and submerged in the stillness of the plant world',[153] and were seen as an extension of the home, often with a direct connection to the ladies' salon,[154] consequently, a female domestic space for entertaining or relaxation. Indeed, Jane Desmarais claims the hothouse, as these glass structures containing tropical birds, fish and flora were known, is 'depicted as a feminine space, enclosed, ornamental and often dangerous' due to the metaphorical associations of the hothouse with brothels and bedrooms of *femmes fatales,* since *serre-chaude* (hothouse) was 'a term for brothel' up to the 1850s.[155] Despite this insightful link, the hothouses featured in plant monster fiction re-work traditional associations to depict these edifices as masculine spaces in which patriarchal anxieties towards female sexuality and changing gender roles of modernity are projected. In his history of the greenhouse, Kenneth Lemmon has asserted that 'as a structure specially devoted to the cultivation of plants' and importantly, 'not attached to any other building', greenhouses from the late nineteenth century onwards became once more a scientific, and therefore a male space 'very much the concern of the research stations' such as Kew, Wisley, Oxford and Cambridge.[156] In the plant monster fiction selected here, hothouses (and similar garden edifices) are separate from the main dwelling and are presented as the botanist's laboratory and therefore as a spatial metaphor for man's scientific endeavours to control nature, and often by association, women, bringing a new perspective to these cultivated spaces as sites where contemporary gender politics are negotiated.

Whether the innocent victim of a cunning plant intelligence or the mad scientist figure in the form of a gardener, the relationship between plant monster, human gardener and spaces is precisely where a material ecofeminist framework in this study can help re-evaluate the Gothic monstrous other. Andrew Smith and William Hughes argue that

[152] Kenneth Lemmon, *The Covered Garden* (London: Museum Press Limited, 1962), p.121.
[153] Georg Kohlmaier and Barna von Sartory, *Houses of Glass: A Nineteenth-Century Building Type* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), p.2.
[154] Kohlmaier and von Sartory, *Houses of Glass*, p.31.
[155] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass*, pp.38-9.
[156] Lemmon, *The Covered Garden*, pp.179 and 256.

'[e]cocriticism also acknowledges a number of theoretical paradigms that help to critically reinvigorate debate about the class, gender and national identities that inhere within representations of the landscape'.[157] While the essays in their *Ecogothic* collection explore these debates in terms of relationships with the Gothic landscape, the current project develops a material ecofeminist Gothic framework to interrogate changing gender-nature associations by examining the intersectionality of plant and human monster. This approach interweaves the concepts of trans-corporeality, porosity, vegetal becomings, and material agency together with gothic monstrosity, vampirism, cannibalism, the fatal woman, posthuman hybridity and body horror to open the literary plant world to wider critical interpretation as 'more entity than setting'.[158] This study asserts that plants in these tales are not mere backdrop, but protagonists that engage with major cultural issues. Women and Nature in Gothic narratives have been systematically codified as a monstrous 'other' challenging the 'norms, prejudices and values' encompassed in 'ideological constructions of identity, gender, race and class',[159] but this study's ecoGothic exploration of how, in transgressing boundaries of all kinds, plant monster protagonists within these strange tales also demand a re-assessment of (cultivated) space and (domestic) place. The plant monster's reappearance over the extended twentieth-century period points towards key moments in the history of identity construction and our changing perspectives on gender and nature. Pivotal to this study is how the iconic triffids from John Wyndham's novel, *The Day of the Triffids*,[160] and Roger Corman's classic anthropophagic Audrey Jr. in *The Little Shop of Horrors*,[161] were influenced by late nineteenth-century plant monster tales and are, in turn, re-visited and re-worked according to their contemporary context, not just as adaptations of the original but as inspiration themselves for other plant monsters. Charting the development of plant monsters over the decades, this project re-evaluates contemporary attitudes to gender/nature associations and marks how concepts of these have evolved as we move towards understanding our place in a diverse world and universe beyond. Nature and gender are navigated through each other within these complex plant

[157] Smith and Hughes, 'Introduction: defining the ecoGothic', p.4.
[158] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.7.
[159] Botting, *Limits of Horror*, p.15.
[160] John Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1951, Penguin Classics reprint, 2000).
[161] *The Little Shop of Horrors*, dir. by Roger Corman (Santa Clara Productions, 1960).

monsters and their relationships to the human gardeners that have, to date, not received any scholarly focus. In contributing to emerging critical plant studies and evolving ecoGothic critical frameworks, this study asserts that while a material ecofeminist Gothic offers new ways of considering gender, it equally reveals that gendered readings of nature are key for considering ecocritical concepts of plant-being.

1.7. CHAPTER SUMMARIES and TEXTS

Chapter 2 begins the journey through the plant monster world with the Victorian fascination with hothouse plants and flowers. The vampiric vegetal *femme fatale* of H.G. Wells' short story, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid' (1894) and the monstrous flesh-eating pitcher plant of Howard R. Garis' tale, 'Professor Jonkins' Cannibal Plant' (1905), illustrate the late-Victorian Gothic monstrous female that combines sexuality and gender identity to underline growing issues of modernity. These eco-*femmes fatales* provide anthropomorphic metaphors for patriarchal concern with the rise of feminism and the New Woman. Aligning these exotic flower monsters with the figure of the fatal woman, fears surrounding the destabilising effects of modernity on all sorts of social boundaries are hyperbolised in the explicit transgressive gendering of plant, gardener and space. Gender-nature associations of femininity and the emerging independence of women are challenged as issues of control are queried through these subversive trans-species relationships. 'The [late-Victorian Gothic] monster is the product of and the symbol for the transformation of identity into sexual identity through the mechanism of failed repression', according to Jack (as Judith) Halberstam,[162] clearly demonstrated by the fatal woman and vampire traits of the plant monsters in these texts. Vampiric vegetation within the domestic garden setting in Edith Nesbit's 'The Pavilion' (1915) and Ulric Daubeny's 'The Sumach' (1919) continues to demonstrate an eco-monstrosity that engages with the conflicting ideologies of post-WWI reconstruction of gender roles. Advancing feminist ideas bolstered by the needs of the war effort compete with old patriarchal ideals in the face of a perceived weakened masculinity. Within the apparent safe confines of the garden, old vampiric plants challenge these newly-defined modern gender aesthetics through their trans-species interactions. Despite the decline in fictional printed material in favour of war material, plant vampirism

[162] Jack (as Judith) Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p.9.

continues to feature as a gendered eco-monster in tales during and immediately after World War II. While still engaging with the re-defined modern parameters of femininity and masculinity, the increasing role of scientific advancement influenced much of plant monster fiction, with experimental hybrids of particularly animalistic bloodlust reflecting the horrors of the War and crimes against humanity and nature revealed in the aftermath. The tentacled plant chimera motif used in the American tales of Harl Vincent's 'The Devil Flower' (1939) and Leroy Yerxa's 'The Garden of Hell' (1943) draw on the earlier vampiric orchid and vine to underline the dysfunction of traditionally constructed gender roles in response to the demands of the war period. As established social boundaries are destabilised by modernity, the emergence of feminism and its calls for the redefining of gender expectations are envisaged as a material vampirism. Re-exploring this gender vampirism through a material ecofeminist gothic framework, Chapter 2 illustrates how anxieties surrounding issues of modernity were cautiously hyperbolised using traditional associations of nature and femininity to create an eco-*femme fatale* figure. These vampiric exotic plant monsters establish the trope as a gendered eco-monster that challenges social and species boundaries of modernist ideology that have to date, been under-explored.

Chapter 3 first outlines the American and British shift towards a Gothic Science Fiction during the 1950s and 1960s in response to cultural anxieties, with gender issues discussed against a backdrop of Cold War ideologies that sought to redefine concepts of both masculinity and femininity. Whilst most Science Fiction writers of the nuclear age were male and envisioned apocalyptic ends to humanity, female writers redefined the 'masculine and technical focus … to explore feminine and domestic responses'.[163] The narratives in this Chapter illustrate the ways in which the plant monster is used in contemporary speculative fiction to contest the oscillating boundaries of gender definitions and are often ambiguously gendered themselves in response to their interaction with the human protagonists. Beginning with a Weird tale by Mildred Johnson, 'Cactus' (1950) underlines the conflicting concepts of masculinity and femininity of 1950s American suburban ideology through both human and non-human protagonists as well as the liminal space of the porch. The eponymous plant is not only itself dubiously gendered but challenges the conservative and modern gender identities of the human characters with

[163] Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p.99.

conflict a key issue throughout a narrative situated within the liminal spaces of porch and suburbia. By the mid-1950s, Martin Halliwell notes, 'masculine identity was [also] in crisis',[164] and fears of effeminacy in the redefining of gender roles are expressed through a material ecoGothic reading of Arthur C. Clarke's 'The Reluctant Orchid' (1956) and ideas of becoming-plant. Both human and plant protagonists are gendered interchangeably, drawing on exaggerated characteristics from earlier parodies of the New Woman. As Clarke's tale unfolds, the contradictory attitudes towards new definitions of masculine and feminine roles are lampooned through the human-plant relations, stressing the ambiguity of biological-assigned (natural) sex and socially-constructed (cultural) gender identity. In becoming-plant by the end of the tale, Clarke's narrator comically emphasises the breakdown of dichotomous gender roles. Becoming-plant takes on a more physical aspect in Roger Corman's film *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960) and John Wyndham's novel *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), both featuring strange hybrid plant protagonists that not only revitalise the Victorian man-eating plant to engage with issues of changing gender attitudes but through a more physical interaction between human and nature a trans-corporeal body horror underlines the growing concerns of the scientific and nuclear impact of the Cold War era. These anthropophagus plant monsters are the result of human scientific interference, with the revenge of nature narrative hyperbolised through trans-corporeal consumption of the human body that disrupts species and gender boundaries. In both texts the gothic trans-corporeal becomings reveal the discursive site of gender and ecological concerns, emphasising the material interconnectedness of culture and nature through consumption of human flesh. As the plant monster moves from the short story format to Gothic Science Fiction novels and cinema, the material body (not always female though) becomes a key focus. The plant monster is depicted no longer as a traditional *femme fatal*e, but as a melange of plant species that highlights the gender-role confusion of the period.

Chapter 4 explores how plant monster narratives are portrayed on television and the big screen during the counter-culture of the 1960s, and the social and environmental movements of the later twentieth century. It identifies how plant monsters have morphed from their origins as outlandish results of scientific manipulation in literary narratives to space alien life-forms intent on overthrowing humanity on screen. By considering film

[164] Martin Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.41.

adaptations of the previous iconic plant monsters from Corman and Wyndham, this chapter considers how the plant monster shifts from a gendered transgressive to a seemingly neutral-gendered alien species. This change is charted as a deliberate move by fiction writers, not only in response to the Hollywood space age audience, but as a trope that engages with the explosive social movements and activism (women's, civil rights and environmental) that suffused the politics of its time. Together with an episode of the British TV series, *The Avengers*, 'The Man-Eater of Surrey Green' (1965), the alien (hu)man-eating plants highlight these cultural changes and the dissolution of traditional boundaries through the concepts of hypermasculinity, the Green Man mythology and the monstrous feminine that a gothic trans-corporeality unveils. Alien plant monsters provide a distinctive re-working of the Green Man through an interactionist ontology that draws on a becoming-plant in the hybridisation of human/alien, man/plant, male/female underlining the intersectionality of the eco-social changes of the period. Such material hybridity that sees 'the rich interactions between beings' stemming from 'the viscous porosity of our bodies', Tuana argues, visualises the human body as a site of resistance that nevertheless, continually absorbs and subsumes material entities through the apparent boundaries of the flesh: our skin, airways and pores.[165] A Gothically visible, physical interpretation of Tuana's viscous porosity can be seen in Philip Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), where the alien pods create clones of, and replace, the city's residents through a process akin to grafting. The pod exudes tendrils that attach to the human body, allowing the alien life-form to replicate and given the lack of human detritus at the end of the process, absorb the corporeal human, generating a hybrid. Despite the gender reference to a Green Man, the alien-other of plant monster narratives in science fiction cinema allude to an underlying monstrous feminine, not least in the duplication process of the pods as they present a 'profoundly feminine' image of 'replicants emerging from their vegetal shrouds'.[166] As this chapter demonstrates, the alien plant monster may be perceived as gender-neutral but nevertheless uses gender-nature associations to navigate a cultural moment expounding social, racial and gender equality. Stephen King's 'Weeds' (1976) and the TV adaptation, 'The Lonesome Death of Jordy Verrill' (1982), dir. by George Romero,

[165] Tuana, 'Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katarina', p.188.
[166] Natania Meeker and Antónia Szabari, 'From the Century of the Pods to the Century of the Plants: Plant Horror, Politics, and Vegetal Ontology', *Discourse*, 34.1 (2012), 32–58 (p.47-48).

also demonstrate the viscous porosity of the human body when the alien space plant discovered by the protagonist infiltrates his body and spreads until both man and plant become an amalgamation. Producing a re-worked Green Man, these texts illustrate a plant-becoming that engages with contemporary gender equality, intensive agriculture, and nuclear/chemical effects through the trans-corporeal breakdown of human/nature boundaries, offering a new perspective on the intersection of gender and nature.

As millennial society negotiates gender reconstruction that dispels binary biological affiliations, plant monsters are revived and re-worked to reflect contemporary attitudes towards both gender identity and the environment. Chapter 5 focuses on the ways in which becoming-plant in post-millennial texts is predominantly seen through a visceral trans-corporeal merging of human and vegetation in response to climate change fears, global networking and recognition of non-binary genders. Both literature and film adaptations provide a perspective of changing attitudes to monsters and difference. Drawing on ideas of the monstrous feminine, hypermasculinity and queer theory, such becomings not only dispel the binary gender boundaries through an ecoGothic body horror but demonstrate an uncanny vegetal agency that underline eco-social change. The triffids are updated for the new millennium in Simon Clark's *Night of the Triffids* (2001) as an evolved intelligent species that attack with military precision. A trans-corporeal perspective concludes that by ingesting their human victims they have absorbed human traits as these evolved triffids begin to deliberately murder and no longer just hunt and kill humans for food. In a terrifying display of vegetal agency, the novella by Evans Light, *Arboreatum* (2013), depicts ancient anthropophagous apple trees, graphically outlining the penetration of tree roots into children's bodies as they merge with and draw them viciously underground. The human flesh becomes but nutrients for the tree in the material gothic trans-corporeality of this unsettling narrative that acknowledges a need to abandon past traditions in a century concerned with its planetary future. Based on current scientific research, the narrative plot of A. J. Colucci's novel, *Seeders* (2014) illustrates vegetal agency exerting control over humans in a growing genre of eco-horror. While becoming-plant here echoes the subsuming of Jordy Verrill, these decidedly normal plants invade and take over the human body whereby gender stereotyping underlines the destabilised environmental message generating the narrative's eco-horror. The plants use a fungal symbiote to commune with

the human protagonists creating an eco-posthuman that interrogates contemporary gender-nature associations. Although not itself a plant, fungus provides the trans-corporeal bridge between plant and human enabling the commingling through mutation of the human body. Often included in the same dialogue as plants, fungal/plant-human monsters in both Jeff Vandermeer's *Annihilation* (2014) and M. R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014) dispel taxonomic (and other) boundaries through explicit ecoGothic body horror, challenging discrimination of LGBTQ+ (and other) identities through their uncanny hybridisation. All three novels (and their adaptations where relevant) challenge twenty-first century ecological awareness and social advances through bodily transgression and uncanny gender associations, suggesting the human must change radically if eco-social aspirations are to succeed. Ending as we began with the renewed popularity of the short story format, in a selection of tales from Alex Hurst's (ed.) *Growing Concerns* (2014), the exaggerated eco-material outlook of the gothic gardener produces an eco-posthuman through a gothic, often visceral, trans-corporeal plant-becoming. Echoing Dawn Keetley's assertion that we are disconcerted by the notion that we are, in material terms, ultimately plant food,[167] the commingling of vibrant vegetal beings with the human body (one not always void of life), provides for unsettling environmental narratives that revisit the shift in power dynamics through ever-broadening gender identity construction. Becoming-plant takes an even greater sinister turn in Jeff Strand's 'Specimen 313' from Christopher Golden's (ed.) *The Monster's Corner* (2011), which places importance on the plant in a reversed narrative perspective that sees the human body treated purely as a food source, demonstrating through a vegetal monstrosity that gender is key to understanding vegetal musings.

Each chapter establishes how plant monsters are adapted in any given era to engage with changing attitudes to gender roles and identity construction alongside growing environmental awareness of the uneasy relationship humans have with nature. While a gothic trans-corporeal becoming in this study may not 'disentangle *woman* [gender] from *nature*', it is by no means a study of feminist essentialism; rather it calls for ecoGothic frameworks to 'oust the twin ghosts of biology and nature … [by] endow[ing] them with

[167] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', pp.2-3 and 7.

flesh' to better understand our relationship to both.[168] What this study reveals through a gothic trans-corporeal becoming-plant is that the gendering of this 'flesh' is not rigidly female, but morphs as attitudes to gender (and sexual) identity change, in turn helping us to re-address our perceptions of nature. It is important to note that gender is just one major thread within a rhizomatic web of metaphoric meanings that plant monsters hold, just as there is scope for more detailed ecoGothic explorations of specific plant and fungal monsters within other thematic contexts, however, a comprehensive examination would be outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, this study should be seen as the start, and part, of a larger body of literary criticism within the field of the ecoGothic and plant monster narratives exploring ecological and social changes across the long twentieth century, indicative of the way plant monster tropes can reinvigorate debates surrounding gender and the Anthropocene. Investigating monstrous plants in terms of female constructs through the long association of nature and gender and as Gothic figures offers a unique overview into this well-established trope as a significant convention for engaging with substantial eco-social changes of their contemporary moment. Using gendered eco-monsters, these narratives challenge us to reconsider the world through a non-binary logic, allowing, as this study demonstrates, gender and nature to be re-explored through each other.

[168] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, pp.5-6.

Chapter 2: Planting the Seed

2. Killer plants of the fin-de-siècle *and modernist writing (1894-1945).*

'You like orchids?... Nasty things. Their flesh is too much like the flesh of [wo]men, their perfume has the rotten sweetness of corruption'.

General Sternwood (Charles Waldron)[1]

It is within the Gothic and Weird narratives of the late-Victorian period where some of the prototypical monstrous figures like the vampire, 'rehears[e] contemporary questions of gender, sexuality, immigration and imperial power',[2] in response to anxieties of modernity. Together with the dichotomous ideas around the female figure, and the long association of women with nature and concepts of monstrosity, vampirism becomes a key aspect within the tales of these early floral fiends as they engage with the unsettling social and environmental changes at the turn of the century and across two World Wars. While nineteenth-century anxieties about changing social structures and cultural adjustment have often been projected onto the figure of the vampire,[3] in this chapter the desire of these plant monsters for (human) blood, which have not, to date, been explored in any depth, expands representations of the vampire and revitalises debates about gender and nature from the *fin-de-siècle* to the mid-twentieth century. The emergence of the New Woman brought impending changes to the definitions of femininity and masculinity, destabilised further by major conflicts, while the pinnacle of Imperialism increased the commodification of nature. Drawing on Female Gothic theories of monstrosity and by focusing on the interaction of plants and gardeners, this chapter demonstrates how exotic floral *femmes fatales*, Medusa-hybrids, and homicidal vegetation as vampires offered

[1] *The Big Sleep,* dir. by Howard Hawks (Warner Bros., 1946).
[2] Alexandra Warwick, 'Victorian Gothic' in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.29-37 (p.36).
[3] Andrew Smith, 'Vampirism, Masculinity and Degeneracy: D. H. Lawrence's Modernist Gothic' in *Gothic Modernisms*, ed. by Andrew Smith & Jeff Wallace (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp.150-166 (p.164).

alternative ways for writers to navigate changing definitions of femininity and masculinity in a period of major upheaval.

With the growing interest in exotic plant collecting after the Great Exhibition of 1851, the hothouse and its inhabitants became 'a powerful metaphor of metropolitan life, sexuality and being' as the effects of modernisation highlighted female sexuality, scientific progress, and cultural degeneration (alongside other issues such as falling birth rates, evolution, disease, immigration, and colonial expansion).[4] However, they equally suggested, like *The Big Sleep*'s General Sternwood above, the 'process of decay and death' and the 'lurk [of] rot and corruption'.[5] As Jane Desmarais points out, in the Victorian popular imagination, '[t]he hothouse becomes a paradoxical space, … of safe containment and dangerous confinement', a site of 'seductive danger', engaging 'both conservative and modern' ideas, that contains 'beauty and horror'.[6] The late-nineteenth-century tales of this chapter show how the hothouse 'is a space where opposites attract' where the 'exotic plant represents a monstrous, often hybridized, version of nature' that, being '[h]ighly perfumed (sometimes repellently so …), artificially cultivated and often lasting for only a short time', signify both beauty and rot.[7] Patriarchal associations of flowers with femininity are initially emphasised through the exotic vegetation as female protagonist, only to be undermined through their monstrous vampirism in attacking their human (male) gardener. Both flowers and women are objectified in these hothouse scenarios as issues of modernity are navigated through nature. Explored through a feminist ecoGothic approach, the vegetal *femme fatale* protagonist not only engages with ideas around the emerging New Woman, but equally challenges man's illusions of controlling nature, emphasised through gendered spaces and vegetal-human interactions.

Beyond the hothouse flower imagery of the *fin-de-siècle*, vampiric vegetation in tales of the inter-war period employ conservative gender associations that threaten the social boundaries of domesticity, gender, and sexual identity as they engage with contemporary socio-political instability. The masculine aggression of these plant vampires attests the brutality experienced in World War I alongside challenging the gender power-

[4] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass,* p. 7.
[5] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass,* p. 8.
[6] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass,* pp. 9-10.
[7] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass,* p. 10.

shifts wrangled during the upheaval as the successes of first-wave feminism strengthened and women gained independence and value through war work. These ancient vampiric plants demonstrate an opposition to modern ideas through their attacks on specific humans (quasi-gardeners) within their spheres. Using Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality and the material flesh of the gendered body that considers the human as food to examine the vampiric tendencies of trees and vines within the domestic space of the garden helps to dispel any clear-cut boundaries between nature and culture, thereby challenging Western notions of control through the intersection of plant and gender. Gardeners become plant food that sees Karen Barad's 'intra-action of matter, discourses, and cognitions'[8] reflect the disintegration of contemporary edified gender roles through a co-emerging body. Trans-corporeal and spatial transgression combine as these seemingly innocuous-yet-deadly plants undermine stable, conservative traditions they appear to represent within the benign domestic garden space. In a momentary reflection of modern anxieties, plant, human, and gender boundaries become temporarily blurred during the sexually inflected vampiric act that highlights contemporary desires to re-establish traditional gender roles amid fears of growing (homo)sexual freedoms, female independence and wavering masculine ideals.

By World War II, the Weird motif of the tentacle becomes firmly entwined with the tendrils of vampiric hothouse plants in vegetal hybrids scientifically created by gardeners with nefarious intent. As Emily Alder points out, '[t]entacles are notoriously prominent in depictions of weird monsters', used to 'stage progressive or subversive possibilities',[9] in a genre that was prevalent throughout the modernist period as a form that 'engaged with the extremes of [modern] life, including the horrors of war'.[10] Weird writers began to develop tales that included, according to H. P. Lovercraft, 'malign and particular suspension or defeat of [monsters that defy] … fixed laws of Nature', developing a monstrosity that represents 'a revolution of sorts against old ideas'.[11] Plant monster narratives are

[8] Serenella Iovino, 'Bodies of Naples: Stories, Matter, and the Landscapes of Porosity', in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014) pp.97-113 (p.103).
[9] Emily Alder, *Weird Fiction and Science at the* Fin de Siècle (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp.14 and 16.
[10] Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, 'Introduction', p.xvi.
[11] H.P. Lovecraft, (1927), quoted in Ann and Jeff VanderMeer, 'Introduction', pp.xv and xvii.

notoriously difficult to categorise, appearing as they do across multiple genres.[12] What allows these plant monsters to exist on all sides of the genre-garden fence is a preoccupation with monstrosity. As Fred Botting explains, in giving 'form to a sense of otherness, a strangeness which is difficult to locate: monstrosity appears in the future [science fiction] and the past [gothic]'.[13] As key conventions that bind gothic, weird and science fiction narratives, otherness and monstrosity in these hybrid teratological plants underline contemporary preoccupation with changing gender constructs, roles and behaviour. As Marie Mulvey-Roberts has argued, 'femininity itself has been demonised in Gothic literature by way of the *femme fatale*, man-made monster, vampire and Medusa',[14] all of which are encapsulated in the cultivated plant monsters explored in this chapter. Alongside the general antipathy towards military science and technology offered by tales of plant teratology, these blood-thirsty vegetal Medusa figures of the Second World War period illustrate a monstrous feminine nature that transgresses species, racial and gender boundaries as a discursive site for emerging definitions of femininity and masculinity in the wake of war and advances by the Women's Movement. By exploring the intersectionality of these vampiric hybrid plant monsters through a gendered relation to their victims, this chapter offers an alternative perspective on the commodification of nature that engages with uncomfortable ideas of men as resource and biological experimentation.

Analysing these cultivated plant monster stories through a trans-corporeal Female Gothic approach provides a new way to consider how attitudes to the New Woman, First-Wave Feminism, and modern attitudes to masculinity and sexuality were conveyed. When examined this way, weird tales that have been previously overlooked as simply unsettling or explored purely in terms of modern consumerism or Imperialist commodification, now reveal plant monsters as complex characters that engage with contemporary concerns about identity and category crisis. As this chapter outlines, traditional gender-nature associations are initially emphasised only to be subsequently undermined through species,

[12] Miller, 'Lives of the Monster Plants', pp.460-479.
[13] Fred Botting, *Gothic Romanced: Consumption, Gender and Technology in Contemporary Fictions* (London: Routledge, 2008) p.131.
[14] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, 'The Female Gothic Body' in *Women and the Gothic, An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2016), pp.106-119 (p.108).

boundary, and gender transgressions entreating contemporary society to renegotiate impending social changes.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first of these sections will consider the orchid and other exotic hothouse plants as an *eco-femme fatale* figure to investigate the dichotomies of women's changing roles and fears of degeneration during the late Victorian period. Rebecca Stott has demonstrated that the *femme fatale* and vampire figures have been used to represent the New Woman,[15] suggesting the gendering of plant monsters is used to express contemporary concerns about new-found feminism. Selecting stories from both a British and an American author to illustrate similar attitudes to gender, H.G. Wells' 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid' (1894) and Howard R. Garis' 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant' (1905) employ tropical hothouse plant monsters as eco-*femmes fatales* to engage with patriarchal concerns surrounding women's movements throughout Western society. The predatory eco-*femme fatale* embodies contemporary ideologies of femininity while gendering the plant as an aggressive female perpetrator and the male gardener as the victim clearly disrupts phallocentric gender roles in a reversal of hero-villain-victim (usually male-male-female) within a Gothic context. Wells' story was published in the *Pall Mall Budget*, August 1894 – a more affordable weekly magazine digest of the contents of the *Pall Mall Gazette*,[16] while Garis published his *Professor Jonkin* series and many other stories in the *Argosy* - a weekly boys' magazine until 1896 when it switched to an adult readership.[17] That both these stories were published in magazines targeted at middle-class male readership on either side of the Atlantic provides a compelling gendered metaphor of the fatal woman for re-analysis that addresses the issue of the New Woman at the *fin-de-siècle*.

Section two investigates the vampiric vine and tree as expressing the unstable gender boundaries of the inter-war period. Whilst exotic flowering plants are depicted as the fatal woman, trees appear to challenge this interpretation. Cheryl Blake Price has

[15] Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian* Femme Fatale, pp.52-87.
[16] Mike Ashley, *The Time Machines: The Story of the Science-Fiction Pulp Magazines from the beginning to 1950* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p.10; The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, '*The Pall Mall Budget*', *SFE online* (2014) [accessed 29 July 2017].
[17] Ashley, *The Time Machines*, p.25; The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, '*The Argosy*', *SFE online* (2015) [accessed 29 July 2017].

argued (in a colonial context), that although man-eating trees are not necessarily gendered, interactions with their victims often depict a male domination over female victims.[18] She claims authors personify these plants through 'a direct link from the plant to its human counterpart' with the violence representing 'the darkest aspects of humanity',[19] establishing them as protagonists. Despite deeply embedded associations of women and woods,[20] this section substantiates claims that individual anthropophagus trees are male-inflected, while the sinuosity of vines re-assert feminine associations. In Edith Nesbit's 'The Pavilion' (1915) and Ulric Daubeny's 'The Sumach' (1919), the vampiric vines and trees illustrate an ambivalence towards redefined gender roles in Britain around the period of the Great War. These plant monsters demonstrate a physical masculine violence mirroring the conflict even as it challenges the uncertainty of gender expectations in the wake of World War I with both the plant antagonists and their gardening victims challenging the established dichotomies of Western ideology. Transgressing the boundaries of male/female and nature/human, these vampiric vegetal fiends bring contemporary instability of gender definitions and roles into focus through a gothic trans-corporeality.

Section 3 examines the hybrid plant monsters drawing on images of Medusa as grotesque (female) Other to interrogate the emerging re-definitions of masculinity and femininity resulting from changing gender roles during the Second World War, alongside uncertainty about scientific progress appropriated for military use. In *The Gothic Body*, Kelly Hurley examines the demonisation of femininity as a monstrous corporeal Other through the Medusa image.[21] Such female grotesque creatures as the Gorgons (female body and serpent hair) and the Sphinx (a lion's body with a woman's face) were synonymous with female identity since the nineteenth century in the male imagination.[22] With their tentacled appendages reminiscent of Medusa's serpent-hair, the man-made vegetable monstrosities of these weird tales are also vampiric, attacking and draining the blood of principally male protagonists as a commentary on fears that conservative ideals of masculinity c/would be eroded by female independence, cultural revolution and the effects

[18] Blake Price, 'Vegetable Monsters', pp.311-327.
[19] Blake Price, 'Vegetable Monsters', p.318.
[20] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.28.
[21] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*.
[22] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p.118-119.

of war. The Medusa plant in Harl Vincent's 'The Devil Flower' (1939) will be examined within an equally contentious gendered space of clinic and greenhouse laboratory as a story that responds to early feminism and emancipation in pre-World War II America, while Leroy Yerxa's 'The Garden of Hell' (1943) offers a murderous tentacled plant hybrid that corresponds to contemporary immigration and gender role concerns of America during the Second World War. These cultivated hybrids also pave the way for the anthropophagus plant monster of Cold War science fiction explored in Chapter 3.

2.1. Imported Killers and Greenhouse Monsters (1894-1915): Orchids and Exotics as Vampiric eco-*Femmes Fatales*[23]

Following the success of Joseph Paxton's design of Crystal Palace (1851), tropical plant and greenhouse ownership became symbols of wealth and success amongst the Victorian nouveau riche. The adventures of professional plant hunters in acquiring the prize exotic flora amidst the wilderness of colonial territories for these glasshouse owners became the focus of many a tall tale, which have been frequently critiqued as gothic interpretations of imperialist anxieties surrounding reverse colonisation. Victorian obsession with 'normality' and the ostracising of social deviants developed alongside emerging scientific fields of evolutionary biology, criminology, phrenology and sexology, that witnessed debates on degeneration in fiction projected onto monstrous Other identities.[24] However, although often associated with a Female Other, such criticism has not focused on the plants themselves, their specific monstrosity, or the importance of gendering nature in challenging prevailing ideologies. This section explores how transgressive nature within these tales as vampiric plant undermines patriarchal stereotyping in response to concerns about the growth of capitalism (with it the increasing commodification of nature) and the influence of social reform (and the objectification of women). An ecofeminist gothic approach to plants as vampires and *femme fatale* figures provides new ways of considering gender identities and changing definitions of femininity and masculinity.

[23] A version of this section appears in: Fitzpatrick, 'Green is the New Black: Plant Monsters as ecoGothic Tropes; Vampires and *Femmes Fatales*', pp.130-47.
[24] For more on how these sciences erupted into Gothic/Weird fiction, see: Alder, *Weird Fiction and Science at the* '*Fin de Siècle*'.

The struggle to cope with modernity and change in social identities as they refer 'to nation, to race, to gender, to sexuality', Andrew Smith argues, resulted in fears of degeneracy and concerns about capitalism, colonialism, urbanisation and changing social structures transposed onto the figure of the vampire.[25] Moreover, the 'unprecedented and explosive changes' of modernity, according to Kelly Hurley, 'transformed the texture of everyday life' meaning 'social identities were dissolved and remade' with evolutionary theory providing 'a particularly rich source for Gothic plotting' and strange identities.[26] Indeed, reconfiguring the flower as a sexualised and vampiric body renders the situation and the plant truly uncanny in that the familiar positions of both flowers and women are rendered alarming and strange. It is amid these concerns about social mobility and modernity that anxieties about gender and sexuality – the New Woman in particular - are depicted through the vampirism of exotic hothouse flora in plant monster fiction. As Gina Wisker asserts, the vampire figure challenges the 'power of the Victorian patriarch' where the notion that 'women must appear pure and virtuous angels in the home' is undermined by turning them into 'a voluptuous, voracious, immoral seductress' in the male imagination.[27] This paradoxical view of female identity became deeply embedded through figures of the *femme fatale* and Medusa as vampire, underlining contemporary anxieties of what Jane Donawerth terms 'First Wave Feminism'.[28] Encouraged by liberating legislation, women's movements began to formulate suffrage campaigns (with support from both genders), viewed by traditionalists as militant attempts to undermine patriarchal social structures. As the emancipating impact of the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, allowing women to own property and retain some of their earnings, became evident,[29] the monstrous feminine figure was fuelled by a changing legislative landscape that liberated wealthier women of this period from patriarchal dependency. The uncertainty about changes to women's position in the public arena was further compounded by conflicting ideologies amongst women's circles. Societies such as 'the

[25] Smith, 'Vampirism, Masculinity and Degeneracy', p.164.
[26] Hurley, 'The Modernist Abominations of William Hope Hodgson', p.131-133.
[27] Gina Wisker, 'Love Bites: Contemporary Women's Vampire Fictions' in *A New Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by David Punter (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp.224-238 (p.225).
[28] Of Donawerth's four distinct movements, 'First Wave Feminism' of the 19th century focuses on women's political rights and suffrage. Jane Donawerth, 'Feminisms' in *Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould, Andrew Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 214-224.
[29] Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale*, p.12.

Girls' Friendly Society and the Mothers' Union produced an ideal of motherhood and femininity', while simultaneously the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and the Women's Movement were influential in gaining social and political equalities.[30] This proactive and independent New Woman was often vilified by traditional patriarchal mindsets, with members of the Women's Movement often lampooned publicly as monstrous and masculine despite many, in fact, being famously beautiful and feminine, such as British actress and suffragette, Cicely Hamilton. The New Woman, Jane Desmarais argues, is seen as '*a vampire figure* sapping the life-blood of her victims' (my emphasis),[31] embodying perceived unpalatable social changes to traditional patriarchal gender roles as a subversive *femme fatale* figure in the form of an alluring female vampire.

Combining the vampire figure together with well-established gendered associations of nature in anthropophagus and vampiric hothouse plants creates alternative fatal women that engage with contemporary feminist discourse and socio-political concerns about emerging new freedoms. The vampire figure after all, Nina Auerbach states, mutates according to the needs of contemporary society, reflecting concerns about sexual identity, the duality of Victorian society, and anxieties around changing gender role expectations.[32] While the orchid especially held a particular fascination for collectors, with many bulbs raising significant prices at auctions,[33] appropriating a beautiful exotic flower as vampiric plant Other, as this section asserts, not only underlines the commodification of nature and the objectification of women but highlights the ambiguity of modern ideas of femininity through semiotics readily understood by the contemporary reader. As Desmarais states, '[b]earing an uncanny resemblance to the soft parts of (female) human genitalia, the tropical flower is the stuff of dream and nightmare',[34] and having aerial roots, epiphytic growth, fused sexual structures, and a symbiotic fungal relationship for germination,[35]

[30] Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale*, p.10.
[31] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass*, p.170.
[32] Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997).
[33] 'The retail trade in commercially grown orchids in the USA exceeds $150 million … Worldwide, the turnover of the orchid industry is valued at more than $9.5 billion, and the estimated tally of 150,000 artificially bred varieties is increasing by more than 200 a month', according to Richard Mabey, *The Cabaret of Plants* (London: Profile Books, 2015) p.284. This is a phenomenon that continues to this day, with a man-made hybrid orchid reportedly fetching £160,000 at auction in 2005, reports Asta Foufas, 'Top 5 Most Expensive Flowers in the World', *arenaflowers.com*, [n.d.] [accessed 14 January 2021].
[34] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass*, p.10.
[35] Joseph Arditti and Yam Tim Wing, 'Raising Orchids from Seed' in *The Gardener's Guide to Growing Orchids*, ed. by Charles Marden Fitch (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 2004), pp. 69-81 (pp.69-70).

orchids already offer Gothic potential. Aligning these long-lasting blossoms with female sexuality, the orchid's hothouse and tropical associations make it an ideal trope for evolving gender identities. Plants that escape the control and manipulation of the gardener, deemed wild and bacchante in their monstrous femininity, reflect contemporary fears of the modern woman 'widely perceived to be the cause of [social] degeneration'.[36] With the emancipation of women (and other social groups), writers employed the ownership and cultivation of exotic plant-life as metaphors for patriarchal 'fears about liberal female attitudes to sex and relationships',[37] triggering the monstrous feminine through the murderous intent of these uncanny floral (non-native) protagonists. Patriarchal concepts of the paradoxical female gender, through longstanding associations of flowers and femininity,[38] are embodied in the exotic flora as beautiful and benign nature turns seductive and dangerous, mirroring the growing fears of rising feminist movements. Depicting female aggression towards the male gardener, carnivorous and vampiric exotics 'demonize the female body as a locus of social and cultural degeneration',[39] and make a compelling argument for a gendered reading of these stories. Through the trope of vampirism (and cannibalism), these turn-of-the-century cultivated hothouse plant monsters embody contemporary concerns about modernity and its eco-social changes.

In blurring the boundaries between plants and animals, particularly in *Insectivorous Plants* (1875) where the sticky gland-tipped hair filaments of the sundew are referred to as 'tentacles',[40] Darwin's botanical investigations also helped provide inspiration for ways writers could reflect the shifting relationship between the sexes.[41] Darwin's various botanical studies offered, Jonathan Smith outlines, 'uncanny accounts of plant behaviour' that themselves read like sensation fiction in 'his depictions of botanical sex and violence, crimes and torture' associated with orchid, insectivorous and climbing plant species.[42] Indeed, that the cultivated plants of this chapter depict a monstrous female nature reflects

[36] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass*, p.163.
[37] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass*, p.165.
[38] Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p.24-25; Grasser, 'Good Girls versus Blooming Maidens', p.132; Michael Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.82-85.
[39] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass*, p.151.
[40] Charles Darwin, *Insectivorous Plants* (London: John Murray, 1875).
[41] Endersby, 'Deceived by orchids', pp. 205–229.
[42] Jonathan Smith, 'Darwin's plants and Darwin's gardens: Sex, sensation and natural selection' in *EcoGothic Gardens in the Long Nineteenth Century: Phantoms, Fantasy and Uncanny Flowers*, ed. by Sue Edney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.99-113 (p.102-3).

Darwin's own terminology in his assertion that 'cultivated plants have become so profoundly modified' as to be indistinguishable 'from monstrosities' and that flowers such as the wild rose are but 'seedlings escaped from culture'.[43] As this section shows, Darwin's studies and investigative methods are alluded to within these contemporary tales of hothouse plant monsters suggesting his work was popular beyond scientific circles. Using H.G. Wells' gothic short story 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid' (1894)[44] and Howard R. Garis' satiric 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant' (1905),[45] this section explores killer flowering exotics as *femme fatale* figures that engage with patriarchal concerns about the expanding roles for women.

Wells, who won a scholarship to the School of Science in London where he attended from 1884-1887, developed a strong interest in biology and evolution before embarking on a successful writing career. As well as being an active socialist and member of the Fabian Society, Wells wrote extensively on politics, technology and the future - a recipe that earned him recognition as one of the greatest science fiction writers of the twentieth century.[46] In 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid' (1894), Wells uses heightened sexualised femininity within a Victorian framework to depict the orchid in this tale as a an eco-*femme fatale* figure, drawing on the orchid's transgressive nature as exotic female Other and its attack on the male gardener to engage with the contemporary anxieties and political sensitivities surrounding the rise of feminism. In the tale, avid plant collector, Winter-Wedderburn's only preoccupation is his 'ambitious little hothouse'.[47] Care-intensive, expensive, and species-varied, orchids generally required heated environments (hothouses) to replicate original habitats. Predominantly domains of scientific enquiry and the conserve of plant explorers, greenhouses (a modern generic term for glasshouses, hothouses, conservatories, orangeries, and physic gardens) have an ambiguous

[43] Charles Darwin, *The Variation of Animals and Plants Under Domestication*, Vol. I (London: John Murray, 1875), p.322-3.
[44] H. G. Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', (1894), in *Flora Curiosa: Cryptobotany, Mysterious Fungi, Sentient Trees, and Deadly Plants in Classic Science Fiction and Fantasy*, ed. by Chad Arment (Ohio: Coachwhip Publications, 2013), pp.63-71.
[45] Howard R. Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant' in *Flora Curiosa: Cryptobotany, Mysterious Fungi, Sentient Trees, and Deadly Plants in Classic Science Fiction and Fantasy*, ed. by Chad Arment (Ohio: Coachwhip Publications, 2013), pp.113-22.
[46] H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography - Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain (since 1886)* (Read Books Ltd., 2016), Biography Page. [accessed 04 June 2017].
[47] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', p.63.

identification with the garden. Seen as an extension of the house/home, 'a lounge for exercise or entertainment in inclement weather',[48] hence a safe domestic space, transgressive acts occurring in the garden are rendered uncanny. Although conservatory work was considered recreationally 'suitable for the women of the household', the detached glasshouse construction (hothouses) became more botanical laboratory than indoor garden, that 'called for a monklike [sic] devotion' and included only 'one or two curious or ugly objects […] to show that there are such things'.[49] Botany, too, had previously been considered a feminine interest,[50] which became a manly pursuit of scientific enquiry during the nineteenth century with 'horticultural societies … composed of men of rank and influence … [who present] scientific discussion and valuable practical instruction … which gives man so proud a command over Nature'.[51] The greenhouse space in these stories then, 'is subverted. It becomes a site of anxiety and menace, sexual transgression and psychic suffering' where modern man projects his neuroses about gender and sexuality.[52] This is not a space that female (human) protagonists – if there are any - feel comfortable in. Rather it is a steamy, exotic, male space that implies sexual indiscretion. Situating feminised exotic plants grown by the male protagonist in a scientific (male) space underlines the phallocentric dichotomy of femininity. The gendering becomes uncanny when it is disrupted through the eco-*femme fatale* attack; when the domestic benign becomes aggressive.

Winter-Wedderburn purchases a particularly expensive, unlabelled, and shrivelled rhizome at auction, much to his housekeeper's disgust. Many exotic plants used as eco-*femme fatale* monsters grow from rhizomes (elongated tubers), significantly contributing to their interpretation as gendered metaphors for rising feminism of the late nineteenth century. Exploring rhizomes as a network of semiotic connections, Deleuze and Guattari argue, that modernity seen through a 'radicle-system' reflects a fragmented, chaotic world-view; '[t]he world has become chaos' while a 'rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles', and provides a way of understanding the

[48] J. C. Loudon, *Remarks on the Construction of Hothouses,* p.49.
[49] Lemmon, *The Covered Garden,* pp.133, 157 and 177.
[50] Endersby, 'Deceived by orchids', pp. 205–229.
[51] J. C. Loudon, *Remarks on the Construction of Hothouses*, pp.1-2.
[52] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass*, pp.32-3.

interconnectedness and increasing flux of cultural concepts.[53] This underground network of growth is inherently gothic in itself,[54] but also provides an apt context for discussing Victorian anxieties about the hidden impact of modern society. Networking and communication between women's organisations both nationally and internationally were cause for concern that gothic and science fiction writers reflected in a variety of ecological symbols, with plant monsters cultivated from rhizomes providing a compelling metaphor for the Women's Movement and the threat of growing female independence, with the orchid especially becoming a distinct trope for the female form in the male imagination.

As Winter-Wedderburn demonstrates, the 'mysteries of the orchid cultivator' involved an element of uncertainty, as his dubious rhizome could 'turn out to be a very beautiful orchid indeed', if it grew at all.[55] In early discussions of the rhizome with his housekeeper, the protagonist appears to suggest the male 'orchid cultivator' must appropriately guide the orchid as 'woman' into their patriarchally-constructed role. In 1888 the institution of marriage was described 'as the "hot-house cultivation" of women' by Mona Caird,[56] suggesting Winter-Wedderburn's appraisal of the orchid could easily refer to a potential young bride and moulding her into the perfect wife and mother. Grasser's suggestion of garden imagery as female educational preparation within a patriarchal society for their culturally gendered roles of wife and mother fits well with this idea.[57] Like a man with a new bride, Winter-Wedderburn is besotted with his orchid, describing its exotic beauty in overtones that would rival the sexual attractiveness of any *femme fatale*. He becomes 'singularly busy in his steamy little hothouse … having a wonderfully eventful time' and talking to his friends about it 'over and over again', invoking ideas of a mistress or brothel.[58] This is enhanced when he admires the 'deep glossy green' leaves 'with splashes and dots of deep red towards the base', spending his afternoons in the glasshouse with 'his new darling', and when the orchid blooms, '[h]e stopped before them in an ecstasy of admiration'.[59] The orchid clearly has no rival – plant or human - in Winter-Wedderburn's

[53] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* pp.5-6.
[54] The gothic association of the underground rhizomatic network comes under closer scrutiny in Chapter 5 within the context of mycorrhizal fungi and plant symbiosis.
[55] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', pp.66-67.
[56] Desmarais, *Monsters Under Glass*, p.166.
[57] Grasser, 'Good Girls versus Blooming Maidens', p.132.
[58] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', p.68.
[59] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', p.68.

eyes. He is described as 'worshipping' the flowers that 'were white, with streaks of golden orange upon the petals; the heavy labellum was coiled into an intricate projection, and a wonderful bluish purple mingled there with the gold.'[60] This exotic/erotic description situates the orchid as sexually ambiguous, confusing gender associations of full lips and protrusions, producing a strange, monstrous orchid. This ambiguity of the orchid's transgressive femininity, its uncertain origins and the housekeeper's disdain for both plant and Winter-Wedderburn's peculiar obsession with it also subtly engage with ideas of homosexuality. This is a 'strange' orchid, and Winter-Wedderburn asserts 'such queer things about orchids' in their propagation is unlike other flowers, 'some of them have never been found with seed'.[61] The orchid-flower's asexual identity together with the grotesque descriptions of creepy tentacles supplied by the housekeeper helps preclude a queer reading of transgressive gender associations. Cheryl Blake-Price has asserted, after all, that carnivorous plants suggest male predation in her postcolonial readings of man-eating *trees*, which is substantiated later in this chapter and engages with concerns about changing masculine ideology. However, the 'strange orchid' as exotic flowering beauty draws on associations with femininity, blurring the boundaries between beautifully benign and monstrously lethal through its transgressive vampirism and monstrous, animalistic attack on Winter-Wedderburn, creating a *femme fatale* that underlines anxieties about evolving gender roles stemming from the swift changes of modernity.

From the outset, Wells' story engages with contemporary gender instability through his middle-aged, bachelor gardener. Winter-Wedderburn is described as 'a shy, lonely, rather ineffectual man',[62] who shares his abode with his (tellingly nameless) housekeeper-cousin. Her dictatorial manner alongside Winter-Wedderburn's meek response challenge contemporary masculinity and femininity even as they re-affirm patriarchal gender roles in the face of radical change in the form of the New Woman (the orchid). The conservative matriarch dislikes this new pretender; she describes the aerial rootlets as 'little white fingers poking out … trying to get at you', reminding her of 'tentacles reaching out after something' in a weirding of this exotic flower as *femme fatale*.[63] Hurley identifies tentacled

[60] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', p.69.
[61] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', pp.67-68.
[62] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', p.63.
[63] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', p.67-68.

beings or insects as the main non-human monsters in *fin-de-siècle* tales, building on late Victorian obsession with the bizarre and fears of devolution inspired by mariner tales, and drawn from Darwinian theories that creatures such as the kraken were remnants of the ancient human ancestor.[64] China Miéville, too, notes that monsters of the weird tale are often 'disproportionately insectile/cephalopodic'.[65] Like the serpent-hair of the gorgons, the female housekeeper's sinister reference to the flower as 'that horrid orchid' with 'tentacles', contrasts with Winter-Wedderburn's patriarchally constructed association of nature and femininity, suggesting a *femme fatale* figure.[66] Seduced by the orchid's olfactory presence, ensnarled in its tentacle-roots as it exsanguinates him, Winter-Wedderburn is discovered just in time by the housekeeper. The combination of feminine nature, animalistic grotesquery and vampirism establishes the orchid as a *femme fatale* of nature, a figure that allows Wells to explore concerns about the increasing influence of feminist and social movements on established gender roles. This idea is subtly developed through the 'ineffectual' Winter-Wedderburn's modern male character and obsession with his 'new darling', as the 'insufferable scent', the 'new odour in the air, a rich, intensely sweet scent, that overpowered every other' first beguiles him before causing him to swoon.[67] Traditional conservative masculinity dissipates in the face of the fatal (woman) flower as it overpowers the gardener in an act of gender reversal.

Many Victorians were well-versed in the meaning of flowers indicating that the choice of plant used by Wells is particularly relevant to concerns about changing gender roles,[68] with the orchid signifying 'a belle' or 'capricious beauty'.[69] The housekeeper's dislike of the orchid can be interpreted as disgruntlement at the introduction of a younger female with progressive ideas into the conservative domestic sphere. As Stott has argued, the *femme fatale* is synonymous with the New Woman represented here by the orchid which attempts to kill Winter-Wedderburn in an act of defiance against patriarchal norms.[70] The housekeeper's reluctance to enter the hothouse affirms this space as

[64] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p.62.
[65] China Miéville, "Quantum Vampire", *Collapse* IV (2008), p.105, quoted in Alder, *Weird Fiction and Science at the* Fin de Siècle, p.14.
[66] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', pp.67-69.
[67] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', pp.68-69.
[68] Waters, *The Garden in Victorian Literature*, p.123.
[69] Mrs. L. Burke, *The Illustrated Language of Flowers* (London: G. Routledge and Co., 1858), pp.35 and 44.
[70] Stott, *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale*.

predominantly male, reflecting patriarchal and conservative concerns about expanding female roles within traditionally male domains. These anxieties are underlined in the description of the orchid's attack on the gardener and subsequent rescue. Upon finding the prostrate Winter-Wedderburn within the clutches of the orchid's 'exultant tentacles', the housekeeper tries to 'pull him away from the leech-like suckers' revealing the vampiric nature of the orchid.[71] Andrew Smith has argued that popular concerns about masculinity posed by modernist aesthetics implicitly draw on 'images of vampirism' that 'suggests that masculinity loses control both over itself and over a feminine Other'.[72] In addition, 'degeneration was associated with femininity (effeteness) and regeneration with masculinity (vital primitivism)'.[73] The male protagonist is 'ineffectual' while the female protagonists – both housekeeper and orchid - dominate and overpower him in turn. Smith indicates that 'degeneration was associated with social issues' with anxieties about family structures (gender) 'linked to the figure of the vampire'.[74] As a vampiric *femme fatale,* Wells' orchid encapsulates concerns about social degeneration and anxieties fuelled by the introduction of female emancipation and equality, perceived as weakening patriarchal traditions and control. Using Victorian associations of flowers and femininity, Wells displaces concerns about embracing modern ideas of gender (and class) equality onto the expensive orchid bulb suggesting that supporting, nurturing, and encouraging feminist ideology could lead to gender anarchy.

The struggle between conservative and progressive views on gender is evidenced toward the end of the tale where the housekeeper battles to free the gardener from the clutches of the orchid: '[s]he tugged now with renewed strength at Wedderburn's motionless body' yet the orchid 'still clung with the grimmest tenacity to its victim'.[75] Although arguably open to ambiguous interpretation, as a Fabian Society member, Wells' cautionary message is clearly addressed to the overtly militant women's movements, suggesting that an over-zealous activism could stifle progress in the face of conservative intervention. When Winter-Wedderburn's conventionally traditionalist housekeeper

[71] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', p.69.
[72] Smith, 'Vampirism, Masculinity and Degeneracy', pp.150-151.
[73] Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.159 quoted in Hurley, 'The Modernist Abominations of William Hope Hodgson', p.140.
[74] Smith, 'Vampirism, Masculinity and Degeneracy', p.154.
[75] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', p.70.

rescues him from the orchid's clutches (and hence, from these progressive ideas), she kills it by breaking the glass and exposing the orchid to the elements. The vivid imagery of a rotting corpse as the *femme fatale* orchid 'lay there, black now and putrescent', provides stark contrast to the rescued gardener as 'Wedderburn himself was bright and garrulous'.[76] Dichotomous gender ideology is restored through the separation of man and nature, suggesting the cultivated New Woman must not be unleashed on society, but be contained.

Exploring Wells' blood-thirsty orchid through Stacy Alaimo's (2008) trans-corporeality and Karen Barad's (2007) intra-action as a concrete embodiment of human and non-human interconnections generates an ecoGothic *femme fatale* trope that blurs the boundaries between the (female) plant and the (male) gardener. The orchid's act of vampirism materialises both the human and nonhuman gendered bodies, which 'fundamentally unsettles […] the liberal humanist conception of the human subject as the only intelligent agent with the ability to control nonhuman others'.[77] The deliberate targeting of the plant monster's victim demonstrates the orchid's agency as *femme fatale*, reflecting socio-political fears of the emancipated woman. Wells creates an eco-*femme fatale* in depicting a sexually deviant, female vampiric orchid that dispels the species and gender boundaries in sharing Winter-Wedderburn's blood, distinctly blurring dichotomies of nature/culture to engage with the contemporary changing gender politics. Although the creepy personification of nature as *femme fatale* vampire in a quasi-domestic setting may seem anthropocentric, Alaimo asserts, 'trans-corporeality denies the human subject the sovereign, central position'.[78] The orchid feeding on the human gardener exemplifies a gothic trans-corporeality, as 'the material interchanges between bodies (both human and non-human)',[79] serves to highlight (hu)man's relationship with nature and his desire for control over it in the form of gardening. The orchid's vampiric consumption of the (human) gardener reflects Nancy Tuana's notions of porosity, which 'discloses […] the flow of information and discursive practices through bodies. Phenomena such as gender, sexuality, class, social practices, *and their narratives* are filtered through […] coemerging bodies'

[76] Wells, 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', p.71.
[77] Serpil Oppermann, 'Introduction: New International Voices in Ecocriticism', in *New International Voices in Ecocriticism*, ed. by Serpil Oppermann (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), pp.1-24 (p.4).
[78] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.16.
[79] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.16.

(italics in original).[80] The gender complexity and rhizomorphic quality of the orchid as an eco-*femme fatale* along with its vampirism provide an uncanny body that encapsulates these intersecting cultural concerns. The anthropomorphic gendering of this predatory orchid seeks not only to question modernity's socio-political and cultural progressiveness but also to puncture the pervasive assumptions that (hu)man is superior and separate from nature and the environment, challenging commodification and objectification of nature and women.

In the end, the progressive New Woman (the orchid), feared by both men and conservative women, is defeated to restore a traditional gender power balance. Although the tale appears to 'conclude with the triumphant transcendence of "man"',[81] it is the orchid's exposure to the elements that kills it. The orchid is a *cultivated* body, blurring the nature/culture boundaries to become a transgressive monster that is accepted by neither. Reliant on artificial conditions provided by the male gardener in his hothouse laboratory, the female orchid is subjected to the agency of the natural world which intervenes to destroy the 'strange' as if issuing a warning against (hu)man's scientific interference with nature through artificial cultivation. Wells' uncanny orchid motif challenges normative constructions through the rhizomorphic and vampiric nature of the flower engaging with feminist ideals of progressive modernity. Despite being a human hors d'oeuvre, Winter-Wedderburn's lack of antagonism towards the man-eating plant monster suggests an acceptance of modernity's materialistic and progressive changes.

Vampiric orchids are not the only hothouse eco-*femme fatale* figures. Victorians were 'avid botanists' of the unusual and carnivorous, being 'keen to obtain samples of sundews, pitcher plants, and venus flytraps for their collections'.[82] In 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant' (1905) by Howard R. Garis, the eponymous botanist also focuses his attention on his newly acquired pitcher plant; another rhizomatic growth where plant gendering is used to engage with contemporary feminism. As a term signifying the 'struggle for women's rights' in both European and American Literature,[83] Garis' *femme fatale* plant monster parodies unease with changing gender roles resulting from the expanding

[80] Iovino, 'Bodies of Naples', p.103.
[81] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.16.
[82] Blake Price, 'Vegetable Monsters', p.312.
[83] Donawerth, 'Feminisms', p.213.

Women's Movement in an American context. In fact, turn-of-the-century Americans were so concerned about the effects of women's education on the established gendered professions and politics that 'supporters of women's education […] separated themselves and their cause from woman's rights, insisting that the well-educated woman longed only to enhance her sphere, not abandon it'.[84] With floral symbolism also popular in Victorian America,[85] eco-*femme fatale* imagery used by American authors equally voiced concerns about modernity and expanding female roles through education, as in Garis' short story.

Garis is better known for his children's tales about anthropomorphised animals,[86] making this tale an unusual exploration of the monstrous for him. The publication of his 'Professor Jonkin' series in the 'boys' pulp magazine *The Argosy*' suggests he had a male demographic readership in mind and unlike his usual work, this tale 'is far from fluffy'.[87] By 1896, editor Frank Munsey rethought his juvenile target audience and re-launched *Argosy* as an all-new pulp magazine containing a variety of fiction from adventure and cowboys to horror and science fiction, aimed at an adult (although still male) audience.[88] As a journalist with the *Newark Evening News*, Garis would have been familiar with the gender politics of his time,[89] and his choice to parody contemporary Darwinist obsession with carnivorous plants through Jonkin and his eco-*femme fatale* comments on the contemporary socio-political gender revolution for his male readers.

The narrator introduces Professor Jonkin as an experimental botanist who 'was continually striving to grow something new in the plant world'.[90] Jonkin is the Dr Moreau of botany, meddling with nature and scientifically creating workable fruiting hybrids. The professor's new acquisition to his conservatory is 'a small plant with bright, glossy green

[84] Despite access to higher education, many colleges continued to limit opportunities for women to nurturing or teaching professions, with others such as clerks and librarians becoming 'feminized' and subsequently seen by men as low-paid, dead-end careers. Lynn D. Gordon, 'Education and the Professions' in *A Companion to American Women's History*, ed. by Nancy A. Hewitt (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), pp.227-249 (pp.227 and 235-6).
[85] John H. Ingram, *Flora Symbolica; or, The Language and Sentiment of Flowers. Including floral poetry, original and selected* (London: F. W. Warne and co., 1869), p.7.
[86] Butcher, *Evil Roots*, p.147.
[87] Butcher, *Evil Roots*, p.147.
[88] Nathan Vernon Madison, 'The Argosy' in *The Pulp Magazines Project*, *pulpmags.org*, [accessed 16 June 2017].
[89] Biography: 'Howard Roger Garis, *25 April 1873 - 6 November 1962', openlibrary.org*, [accessed 16 June 2017].
[90] Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant', pp.113-22.

leaves mottled with red spots', a South American pitcher plant from 'what Darwin calls the carnivorous family of flowers'.[91] Garis parodies the influence of Darwin's theories and botanical writings which inspired many prehistoric monsters of contemporary sensation fiction to reflect real-life sexual scandal and criminal behaviour that underlined late nineteenth century anxieties.[92] Although Darwin's *Insectivorous Plants* did not include Nepenthes (pitcher plants),[93] his personification of plant behaviour in his botanical writings held implications for human sexuality and not simply horticultural interest.[94] These plants were likened to *femmes fatales* in both scientific writing and literature, described as 'lur[ing] their victims with enticing looks and tempting fragrances and empty promises of nectar, only to drown, dissolve, and dismember them'.[95] Jonkin's exotic plant is described in a similarly sensuous way to the orchid, with flowers described as female anatomy: '[h]e saw within a small tube, lined with fine, hairlike filaments'.[96] Like the orchid, it exudes 'some subtle perfume', and its prey is attracted 'by a sweet syrup that was on the edge of the petals'.[97] It is through this seduction and entrapment, ultimately of Jonkin, that the pitcher plant is seen as eco-*femme fatale.* Jokingly suggesting the professor might 'train it to come to the table and eat like a human being',[98] Jonkin's friend, Bradley Adams, implies a civilising cultivation of the pitcher plant as if the imported rhizome were a young aboriginal female who needs to be acclimatised for civilised society in a similar way to Wells' orchid. Like Winter-Wedderburn, the enamoured professor spends 'much time in that part of the glass house where the pitcher plant was growing', demonstrating a male obsession with the exotic *femme fatale* figure.[99] Patriarchal concerns about universal suffrage and allowing women equal opportunities are expressed when Jonkin's plant swallows him whole and almost eats him. '[A]s if drawn by some overpowering force' the professor topples 'into the maw of the pitcher plant!', where the 'filaments seemed to be winding about the professor's legs, holding him in a deadly embrace'.[100] The

[91] Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant', pp.113-4.
[92] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p.60.
[93] Darwin, *Insectivorous Plants* (1875).
[94] Jonathan Smith, 'Une Fleur du Mal? Swinburne's "The Sundew" and Darwin's "Insectivorous Plants", *Victorian Poetry:* Science and Victorian Poetry, 41.1 (2003), pp.131-150.
[95] Smith, 'Une Fleur du Mal? Swinburne's "The Sundew" and Darwin's "Insectivorous Plants", p.144.
[96] Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant', p.114.
[97] Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant', p.114.
[98] Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant', p.115.
[99] Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant', p.115.
[100] Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant', pp.119-120.

'overpowering' perfume and the 'deadly embrace' of an eco-*femme fatale* are once more evident as the professor is trapped inside. Although there are no tentacles here but 'filaments', this reflects Darwin's blurring of animal and plant boundaries in *Insectivorous Plants* where he persistently refers to this plant anatomy as 'tentacles'.[101] The fatal woman imagery of the plant's empowerment over the patriarchal botanist underlines conservative fears about changing gender roles. The professor encourages and admonishes the plant like a (female) child, hinting at debates surrounding the effects of higher education for women on their perceived gender roles in America (and elsewhere in Western society). As an eco-*femme fatale*, the pitcher plant also becomes a metaphor for the New Woman through its immense meat-eating appetite and giantism.

No-one is allowed into the greenhouse, and his assistant becomes concerned the professor has abandoned his vegetarian diet when he learns that vast quantities of meat are being delivered. Carole J. Adams argues that amid fears of degeneracy '[m]en who decide to eschew meat-eating [in the nineteenth century] are deemed effeminate',[102] undermining Jonkin's masculinity and parodying the perceived debilitating effects of the New Woman on conservative ideals of masculinity. Aligned with feminism, 'many individual men who endorsed women's rights adopted vegetarianism as well',[103] and the interaction and transgressive associations of both human and plant protagonists within this story equate the plant with an active feminist challenging patriarchal gender attitudes for a modern society. Alongside Adams, Nick Fiddes underpins Hegel's gendering of animal and plants that equate women with vegetarianism and men as carnivores.[104] Culturally aligned 'with strength and aggression', he argues, meat-eating symbolises a distinctly male ideology of domination over animals and nature, including by association, over women.[105] The small, relatively harmless, *feminized* pitcher plant already has a *masculine* carnivorous diet, while the *male* Professor is categorically a vegetarian, confusing gender associations and querying sexual identities. The excessive carnivorous nature of these hothouse exotics not only destabilises gender perspectives, but their penchant for humans as food upsets

[101] Darwin, *Insectivorous Plants*.
[102] Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: a feminist-vegetarian critical theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.34.
[103] Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, p.17.
[104] Nick Fiddes, *Meat: a natural symbol* (London: Routledge, 1991).
[105] Fiddes, *Meat*, p.11.

the balance of power between both gender and species categories. These transgressively gendered diets comment on the growing impact of educational opportunities for women and modern anxieties about the resulting female self-sufficiency alongside the growing 'pink collar' professions. The small plant, 'about as big as an Easter lily', increases exponentially to its augmented carnivorous diet 'until the top was near the roof of the greenhouse, twenty-five feet above'.[106] This rapid growth mirrors the socio-political achievements and influence of the Women's Movement on American access to higher education for women.[107] Andrew Tudor argues that 'abstract threat to stability and order finds immediate and concrete expression in the monster',[108] evidenced here in the gigantism of the pitcher plant and its increasingly uncanny taste for more substantial flesh. Feeding the giant pitcher plant one of its three-a-day porterhouse beef steaks, the vegetarian professor falls victim to the plant which attempts to eat him. For Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund, the enforced giantism and cannibalistic tendency of the pitcher plant form a satirical and 'comic grotesque',[109] underlining contemporary anxieties of plant collecting, scientific advancement, modernity, and the New Woman. Depicted as a grotesque carnivorous monster, the beautiful flower becomes inherently Gothic, challenging heteronormative ideals.

Rescuing the professor before he is consumed, Bradley Adams suggests naming it 'the cannibal plant instead'.[110] The term 'cannibal' refers to humans eating the flesh of other human beings or more broadly, consumption of the same species as food. Vegetal cannibalism blurs species and gender boundaries in a distinctly Gothic reflection of material feminist theory that focuses on 'the interchanges between human corporeality and the more-than-human world',[111] wherein a sense of equality between plant monster and human gardener acknowledges the Professor's vegetal subjectivity.[112] The plant is *cultivated* in the sense of training it to 'eat like a human being',[113] transgressing the

[106] Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant', p.118.
[107] Gordon, 'Education and the Professions', pp.227-249.
[108] Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, p.19.
[109] Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund, *Grotesque* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p.95.
[110] Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant', p.122.
[111] Alaimo, 'Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature', p.244.
[112] In his eco-philosophical overview, Marder argues that in aligning flowers with 'feminine sexuality' 'repressed femininity has always been at the bosom of phallogocentrism' in Western thought. Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant*, pp.206-7.
[113] Garis, 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant', pp. 115 and 122.

boundaries of nature and culture through the act of eating meat. As a 'cannibal', this monstrous eco-*femme fatale* challenges established dualisms through an interconnectivity that exemplifies a gothic trans-corporeality, further destabilising patriarchal constructs and questioning (hu)man's hubris in attempting to control the natural world. Like the horror fiction degenerate often depicted as eating raw flesh, as in director Wes Craven's film, *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977) and Alan B. McElroy's (creator; various dirs.) horror series, *Wrong Turn* 1-7, (2003-2021), the 'transgression of the cannibalism taboo' is heightened when the consumer is female.[114] Portrayed as a female cannibal figure, the cultivated, exotically attractive yet grotesque pitcher plant is firmly situated as an eco-*femme fatale* figure alongside the vampiric orchid.

It is the intermingling of nature (the plant as consumer and human as food) and culture (the gendering of plant, gardener, and space) that truly establishes these plant monsters as eco-*femmes fatales*. A material feminist ecoGothic reading of these plant monster stories allows gendered nature to be reconsidered, not as a dualistic other, but as a complex interconnection that engages with multiple concerns of modernity. Sensitive gender and social issues were often displaced in gothic texts onto a menacing otherness that allowed debates on feminism, homosexuality, and racial equality to challenge conservative heteronormativity. Like Wells, Garis projects contemporary concerns about feminism and other socio-political changes onto the pitcher plant as monstrous eco-*femme fatale*. The lack of any human female characters in the tale situates the plant as a female protagonist, whereby ambiguous gendering of plant and gardener engages with contemporary debates about expanding socio-political roles for both men and women. The carnivorous pitcher plant is already transgressive, making it a genuinely Gothic plant which is heightened further by the near-consumption of the human gardener. Gendering nature, role reversal and shifting power dynamics engage with concerns surrounding feminist movements and redefinitions of masculinity/femininity as gender and sexual identities were reassessed with the modern era.

Jonkin's cultivation and training of his eco-*femme fatale's* carnivory appears to be advocating the benefits of higher education for women and the feminisation of certain

[114] Fiddes, *Meat*, pp.89-90.

professions as a means of expanding women's role within their designated gendered sphere. Patriarchal fears that women's movements could put masculinity and male power at risk are parodied in this tale through Jonkin's near-consumption by his prized Nepenthes. Garis' tongue-in-cheek jibe at attitudes towards changing gender roles are evident in Jonkin's vegetarianism inasmuch as in the plant's gigantism and carnivorous diet. Although not vampiric, the pitcher plant's fleshy diet moves the argument forward in reading exotic man-eating plant monsters as eco-*femmes fatales* to engage with emerging feminist movements and contemporary gender debates. While Wells' strange orchid embodies the anxieties of emerging women's movements in the fight for financial and sexual independence through the vampire *femme fatale* figure, Garis' Professor and the giant cannibal pitcher plant, a decade later, uses meat-eating as a symbol for academia and vegetarianism as a feminising label for those in support of women's rights to access higher education within an American context. Anthropomorphising these hothouse flowers as transgressive *femme fatale* figures challenges phallocentric fears of the New Woman in parodying the perceived dangers of the emancipated female: confining them to the hothouse may well be man's own undoing.

Through a material feminist ecoGothic perspective, human gardener and plant monster become each other in an uncanny reflection of a narrative agency of matter as female nature gains the upper hand over male scientific endeavour. Dichotomous gendering of both protagonists and spaces are challenged alongside category confusion in these stories as the uncanny mirroring and bodily transgression of human and plant interaction blurs the boundaries of nature and culture. The interaction and subsequent overpowering of the male gardeners by the exotic eco-*femmes fatales* not only reflects anxieties about emerging gender power-shifts and how patriarchally-constructed identities are no longer stable but troubles species boundaries through bizarre relations that reassess (hu)man's place within the natural world as gardeners become food. These gardeners are rescued from ultimate demise to contemplate the dangers of entanglement with progressive gender ideals of modernity in the guise of the nonhuman both of which they attempt to control. While contemporary anxieties towards feminist movements seem to be projected onto nature as monstrous, portrayed as Female Other through the Gothic tropes of vampire and cannibal *femme fatale*, wider debate about changing attitudes to

masculinity, sexual identities, and gender roles and behaviours are negotiated through androcentric attitudes towards nature and patriarchal need for control over both nature and culture. Situating the exotic plant *femmes fatales* within a male assigned space of the scientific hothouse further underlines both contemporary concerns surrounding progressive modernity's obsession with controlling the environment and landscape, and the effects of expanding female roles within male dominated professions. The transgression of gender-assigned roles of both human and plant protagonists is distinctly Gothic, creating monstrous others within a gendered yet liminal space of the greenhouse, using established cultural constructs to underline the inextricable entanglement of human and nonhuman actors. Gothic nature and gender remain inextricably linked in collapsing established concepts of Other, particularly when the human 'gardener' loses control and becomes plant food. The blood drinking and meat eating hothouse eco-*femmes fatales* offer a new perspective in evaluating contemporary attitudes to emerging feminism and gender politics, with patriarchal concerns parodied while equally underlining cultural excesses of hothouse gardening and plant-collecting, consumerism, and objectification of nature and women.

2.2. Great War Attackers (1915-1920): Vampire Vines and Treacherous Trees

This section explores ideas around the ambiguous gendering of trees and vines within the boundaries of the garden in tales across the period of World War I. Focusing on the cultivated, managed planting within the domestic boundaries of garden, hothouse, conservatory, and specific to trees, the orchard, these liminal spaces of controlled Nature witness plant and place employ the ambiguity of civilising domesticity and savage wilderness as gendered metaphor that not only troubles dichotomous female identity in the patriarchal imagination but challenges a modern masculinity. Through the symbolism of orchards and apple blossom in poetry and art, Joanna Crosby argues that '[a]pple trees … were depicted as an element essential for the feminised garden' and, based on associations of Eden, 'an apple in the hands of a woman transforms her into a dangerously

ambivalent woman'.[115] Although Crosby falls just short of gendering individual trees, her work on apple trees in particular provides useful connotations of these specific trees as fatal women and the power invested in prehistoric plant mythologies.[116] Yet, while there are certainly some compelling arguments to suggest trees, vines and forests are 'female' as outlined later in this section, I argue that individualised trees are more often aligned with patriarchal concepts of masculinity.[117] Gender ambivalence and the vampiric tenacity of the inherited plant relics in Edith Nesbit's 'The Pavilion' (1915) and Ulrich Daubeny's 'The Sumach' (1919) challenge emerging redefinitions of masculinity and femininity resulting from the upheaval of wartime. Political conflict and public attitude to changing gender roles are entangled through a gendered nature that transgresses species and spatial boundaries. Through an ecofeminist gothic, the interaction and interconnectedness of human and nonhuman nature underline the destabilised gender constructions inherent in the destruction of geographical boundaries, environments, and social parameters through war.

Algernon Blackwood, prolific supernatural and weird fiction writer of the early 1900s, has compounded the association of feminine nature as Other. In 'The Willows' (1907), when Blackwood's erstwhile travellers of the Hungarian Danube become stranded on an island of willows, the narrator expresses a distinct ecophobia of the encroaching growth. The personification of the uncanny willows as eco-*femmes fatales* is compounded by the mysterious disappearance of companions ascribed to the willows, which exhibit 'bewildering beauty'; 'humble bushes, with rounded tops and soft outline, swaying on slender stems'.[118] In asserting, '[t]hese willows never attain to the dignity of trees; they have no rigid trunks',[119] the narrator simultaneously aligns pliability (such as willows and vines) with a female gendering of plants, while attributing the patriarchal ideals of masculinity to the rigidity of trees. Blackwood's uncanny and threatening withies reflecting

[115] Joanna Crosby, 'The Gothic orchard of the Victorian imagination' in *EcoGothic Gardens in the Long Nineteenth Century: Phantoms, Fantasy and Uncanny Flowers*, ed. by Sue Edney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.48-64 (pp.51 and 53).
[116] Apple trees and Edenic terror are revisited in more detail in Chapter 5.
[117] '[T]he tree is also the earth phallus, the male principle jutting out of the earth, in which the procreative character outweighs that of sheltering and containing … in contrast to the feminine forms of the fruit trees', Erich Neumann (1955), *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p.49.
[118] Algernon Blackwood, 'The Willows', (1907), in *Flora Curiosa*, ed. by Chad Arment (Ohio: Coachwhip Publications, 2013), pp.123-173 (p.123).
[119] Algernon Blackwood, 'The Willows', p.123.

a consuming female nature are in wild spaces though, and this study focuses on threatening nature within the garden, which Heholt suggests, is a transgression of the 'clear demarcation between the nonhuman wilderness and the human cultivated, domestic spaces'.[120] Similar in flexibility to the willow, with their uncanny strangling growth, and multiple long tendrils seen as tentacles and compared to Medusa's serpent hair, vines offer another monstrous eco-*femme fatale* plant protagonist that calls gender boundaries into question. In Edith Nesbit's 'The Pavilion' (1915), the over-grown (vampiric) vine that covers the old, abandoned summer house signals the threat of social instability and gender role dissolution in Britain at the start of The Great War. Equally vampiric, this consuming female nature highlights contemporary uncertainty surrounding gender roles and identity.

Like Garis, Nesbit was also better known as a children's author, and is one of the few women writers of plant monster fiction included here. 'The Pavilion', Daisy Butcher asserts, 'has distinct feminist undertones' that foreground a brave, independent female protagonist who challenges gender preconceptions.[121] As this section argues, however, this challenge is not limited to human characters as the vine also offers an alternative perspective for reading gender. Published in *The Strand* magazine shortly after the death of her husband and a change in fortunes that saw her move to Dymchurch in Kent, this plant horror story casts doubts on conceptions of masculinity at a time of war. Although Nesbit had a well-known fondness for the Kentish countryside, her previous family dwelling of twenty-two years was a 'three-storey home surrounded by orchards and farmland adjacent to a Tudor barn', a setting uncannily recreated in 'The Pavilion'.[122] As a close friend of Wells and other Fabian Society members, Nesbit's short story featuring a vampiric vine within a garden setting engages with the momentous social changes of war as concepts of appropriate gender roles became blurred.

With the advent of the First World War and voluntary conscription, opportunities for women increased within the traditionally male professions out of necessity. According

[120] Ruth Heholt, '"That Which Roars Further Out" – Gardens and Wilderness in 'The Man Who Went too Far' by E. F. Benson and 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved' by Algernon Blackwood', in *Ecogothic Gardens in the Long Nineteenth Century: Phantoms, Fantasy and Uncanny Flowers*, ed. by Sue Edney (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.82-98 (p.92).
[121] Butcher, *Evil Roots*, p.179.
[122] *The Edith Nesbit Society*, Biography, *edithnesbit.co.uk*, [accessed 17 February 2021].

to Angela K. Smith, many 'working-class women took over their husbands' jobs when they enlisted' while '[o]thers filled the vacancies left by men in public service industries, on trams and buses, or working on the land'.[123] While 'the war increasingly drew women from all social classes into new areas of work', seeing women in these roles 'captured the attention of a masculine society unaccustomed to such sights, inevitably drawing out some raw and mixed reactions'.[124] Female empowerment is on the rise but with it underlies phallocentric concerns about the dissolution of gender difference that plays out through the plot of the vine's attack in 'The Pavilion'. Although set in the 1860s, Nesbit offers a feminist eco-*femme fatale* that challenges assumptions of gender roles in response to the moment's social upheaval at the start of the First World War. As Catherine Spooner has argued, twentieth century gothic fiction 'often replays contemporary critical concerns within historical settings' to tackle sensitive issues at a critical distance and indicate a sense of nostalgia at moments of significant change.[125] Although Nesbit's vine itself is not specifically gendered, it does not just strangle its male victim but also exhibits its vampiric character, similar to that of Wells' vampiric orchid, when it leeches him. The vampire figure, Cyndy Hendershot argues, 're-emerges as a metaphor at historical moments in which traditional gender alignments are in flux',[126] and the vine's attack implies a threatening and consuming eco-*femme fatale* within the garden. As Linda Maynard has argued, the effects of the Great War disrupted not just domestic industry in converting for the war effort, but the social domestic as well, during a time when many families reliant on a male breadwinner experienced multiple family members responding to the patriotic call.[127] Set within the domestic sphere of the garden, as a metaphor for England,[128] the vampiric vine underlines the socio-political anxieties of the war on the effects of necessarily broadening roles for women, challenging public perception that emasculated those males who did not sign-up for military action as 'shirkers or slackers'.[129] For example, war journalism, Tracy

[123] Angela K. Smith, 'Introduction', in *Women's writing of the First World War: An anthology*, ed. by Angela K. Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.1-9 (p.4).
[124] Alan G. V. Simmonds, *Britain and World War One* (London: Routledge, 2011), p.129.
[125] Catherine Spooner, 'Gothic in the Twentieth Century', in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, ed. by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), pp.38-47 (p.43).
[126] Cyndy Hendershot, 'Vampire and Replicant: The One-Sex Body in a Two-Sex World', *Science Fiction Studies*, 22.3 (1995), 373-398 (p.374).
[127] Linda Maynard, *Brothers in the Great War: Siblings, Masculinity and Emotions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021).
[128] Heholt, '"That Which Roars Further Out"', p.97.
[129] Maynard, *Brothers in the Great War*, p.158.

Hargreaves indicates, was 'subject to censorship' and a 'feminizing' of a war narrative appropriate for 'non-combatants', which 'threaten[ed] a specific construction of masculinity'.[130] Such notions of feminising narratives, nation, and workforce are challenged by the vampiric vine within the domestic setting of the garden. The vine of this tale is no longer just *threatening* consumption; unlike its forebears, this plant monster attack *results in the death* (of a male victim) – a reflection of the very real experiences of a world at war.

This tale also involves a pavilion that was 'an observatory or laboratory' owned by 'an alchemist or something'.[131] An independent glasshouse structure, the vine-covered pavilion is a scientific male domain notably included within the female domestic space of the garden now that it is abandoned. The four friends lounge on its steps in the sun and contemplate its potential ghostly history. Appealing to (Amelia and) Ernestine's desire for a supernatural tale about the pavilion, the suspected villain, Eugene Thesiger, attempts to provide an unsettling history by recounting a story found in an old book in the library. Their host, Frederick Doricourt, counterclaims that the deaths in the pavilion of the old alchemist's friend and many others from strange wounds and mysterious blood loss, are attributed to local superstition. He reasons such ideas abound 'because there have always been so many rabbits and weasels and things found dead near it… simply because they get entangled in the Virginia creeper [a South American variety, we later learn] … and can't get out'.[132] Combining the abandoned pavilion, ancient alchemy, mysterious deaths and finding an old Latin historical tome, Nesbit strategically positions Gothic tropes in contrasting Victorian (Ernestine and Doricourt) and Modern (Amelia and Thesiger) ideas of gender identity while also suggesting Thesiger has nefarious plans. Linking the climbing plant as a logical explanation for the ludicrous stories subtly foreshadows the actual villain of Nesbit's tale – the vine.

Attempting to impress Ernestine with their bravery, the male protagonists compete by agreeing to take it in turns to sleep in the dreaded pavilion despite the tales of

[130] Tracy Hargreaves, 'The Grotesque and the Great War in *To the Lighthouse*' in *Women's Fiction and the Great War*, ed. by Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.132.
[131] Edith Nesbit, 'The Pavilion' (1915), in *Flora Curiosa: Cryptobotany, Mysterious Fungi, Sentient Trees, and Deadly Plants in Classic Science Fiction and Fantasy*, ed. by Chad Arment (Ohio: Coachwhip Publications, 2013), pp.275-292 (p.278).
[132] Nesbit, 'The Pavilion', p.279.

mysterious deaths. At the height of modernist aestheticism, Thesiger's challenge to Doricourt to spend the night in the overgrown pavilion engages with contemporary masculine attitudes towards those (men) who did not volunteer to soldier at the start of the Great War. Military ideals of masculinity often 'reinforc[ed] the bias against young men filling traditionally "feminine" caring roles' in public perceptions towards those who appealed conscription.[133] Although Nesbit's husband did not die because of the War, her eldest offspring would have been conscript age and she would certainly have known of such attitudes. Aware of the vine's nocturnal carnivory, Thesiger attempts to lure his competitor into the pavilion at the peak of its feeding frenzy, 'just before its flowering time … at dawn'.[134] However, Thesiger is the one found dead amid '[a] wave of green [that] seemed to have swept from the open window to the bench where he lay', his 'hands were full of the green crushed leaves, and thick twining tendrils were about his wrists and throat', with 'little white wounds, like little bloodless lips half-open … about the dead man's neck'.[135] Thesiger's hubris and bravado are not just challenged by the ancient vampiric vine but modern masculinity is dissolved in the attack. As a metaphor for war, the murderous vine invokes contemporary anxieties in its transgressive act of invasion. By entering the open window, it invades the boundaries of the pavilion in an unanticipated attack, before strangling and feeding on Thesiger's blood in a symbolic reflection of the effects of war. Thesiger's demise at the tendrils of the vine underline the economic loss of young men to war through the act of strangling him, while its vampirism provides a clear association with the fields of blood in war.

Nesbit's creeper exhibits a gothic revenant, 'brought here and planted in Henry the Eighth's time', encompassing fears of pre-historic origins and things returning from the past, but a gendered reading of the vine's spatial and bodily invasion also responds to contemporary ideas that feminism was aided by the war effort even as military masculine ideals were equated with patriotism. As Millicent Garrett Fawcett observed, the war 'revolutionized men's minds [about] the sort of work' women were capable of,[136] that

[133] Maynard, *Brothers in the Great War,* p.151.
[134] Nesbit, 'The Pavilion', p.290.
[135] Nesbit, 'The Pavilion', pp.289-90.
[136] Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *The Women's Victory – and After: Personal Reminiscences, 1911-1918* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1920), p.106.

similarly sparked a sense of unease about the boundaries of masculine and feminine roles. As women gained rights to financial independence and the professions they entered became increasingly feminised, the vine's invasion of pavilion and Thesiger correspond to reactionary fears of feminist movements and women within the workplace on masculine ideals. The vine's deliberate invasion of the abandoned male space of the pavilion reflects Suzanne Raitt's argument that 'women were liberated by the widespread absence of men from their domestic … lives'.[137] What unsettles the doctor who is called to certify Thesiger's death most, is that the creeper 'move[d] itself all that way, across the floor!' as if it was 'almost conscient' and 'knew what it was doing'.[138] The uncanny vegetal monster inspires ecophobia in its determined actions, suggesting that feminist activism has taken (must take?) advantage of the situation, leeching what masculine pride is left. With definitions of masculinity wavering and male presence in the social structure of the War years depleted by army conscription and European deployment, this blood-thirsty killer creeper evokes conservative fears about the feminising of a nation. Despite acknowledging that 'women were in reality in these new places [of work] simply as "substitutes," and, in nearly all, under a solemn covenant that it was solely for the duration of the War', Adelaide Mary Anderson declares, '[t]he War emphasised a very true and natural interchangeability of men and women',[139] that the interaction of plant and human emphasises.

While none of the protagonists are strictly gardeners cultivating the creeper's monstrous carnivory, Thesiger's plot to use his knowledge of this plant's blood-thirsty habit to his advantage rather than warn his fellows of its dangers, places him in a similar position to our greenhouse botanists. His demise at the tendrils of nature is a suitable reminder of man's hubris in attempting to control nature for his own purposes. This eco-*femme fatale,* however, is outside the greenhouse, covering it, disguising it. Just as the male space of the botanic laboratory pavilion is temporarily feminised by the vine covering and entering it during the attack, so too, many women were called upon to substitute for their male relatives across many professions that were previously deemed unsuitable.[140] Nesbit does

[137] Suzanne Raitt, '"Contagious ecstasy": May Sinclair's War Journals' in *Women's Fiction and the Great War*, ed. by Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.65.
[138] Nesbit, 'The Pavilion', p.291.
[139] Adelaide Mary Anderson, *Women in the Factory; An Administrative Adventure*, 1893 to 1921 (New York: E. P. Dutton and company, 1922), p.245.
[140] Fawcett, *The Women's Victory – and After.*

not directly attribute gender to the vine, but subtly draws on aspects of the fatal woman and monstrosity in how it conceals (and invades) the pavilion (to kill). Its exuberant growth means 'you can hardly see what it [the pavilion] is now, for the creeper', as the protagonists remark 'how fine and big it is'.[141] The vine's prolific growth anticipates the reach of contemporary feminism and expanding (female) gender roles at a time when definitions of masculinity were fluctuating. In covering the pavilion (male space), it marks the 'end of much of the society and culture of the nineteenth century' suggesting the war 'rendered obsolete much of the ideology upon which the prewar world had been based'.[142] The rhetoric of war creeps with the vine through the pavilion to strangle and drain the pre-war social constructs.

As a founder Fabian Society member, Nesbit was also an advocate of social equality and aware of the effects of the women's movement in advancing political and social change. Drawing on the fatal woman figure as a champion for feminist ideology, Nesbit advocates for women (and other social groups), through her vampiric vine, to take advantage of the moment. As Angela K. Smith indicates, the outbreak of War provided women with the 'opportunity to become involved in a completely different world as they took on the variety of jobs' required or vacated because of the conflict.[143] Like Nesbit's profuse creeper seeking blood before flowering, socialist and feminist societies had grown extensively, and the killing fields of Europe would provide the opportunity for women to expand their roles. This inevitable expansion would result in conservative patriarchal desires to return to pre-war gender constructs in post-war Britain.

If women and nature are synonymous in literature and identified with the wilderness as 'Other' in gothic, then surely trees and forests are female? Jack Zipes argues that the female figure of the fairy and goddesses have been associated with the forest since the Middle Ages, with tales involving a mortal male who discovers 'a fantastically beautiful fairy, *generally in a forest*, and falls in love with her' (my emphasis).[144] Lisa Kröger argues the forest is a female space offering 'solace, renewal, protection' for the Gothic heroine, being neither 'Church-dominated' nor the seat of 'aristocratic power', both of which are

[141] Nesbit, 'The Pavilion', pp. 278-9.
[142] A. K. Smith, 'Introduction', p.2.
[143] A. K. Smith, 'Introduction', p.3.
[144] Jack Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2012), p.31.

male inflected social constructs.[145] More recently, Elizabeth Parker's ecoGothic exploration of the forest also claims that 'the monstrously animate and sentient forest in our stories is bound firmly to a *woman*' (italics in original).[146] Both Kröger and Parker investigate wilderness and forest spaces as female in opposition to male civilisation. Nature, whether wilderness or garden, is recurrently configured as monstrously feminine in the male imagination across fantasy, traditional Gothic and the emerging ecoGothic frameworks. Parker particularly proposes considering 'the forest as a *consuming* threat' that underlines the close association of Nature and women, and consequently women with monstrosity.[147] While Parker acknowledges that trees, '[w]ith their vertical cores, which split into limb-like appendages and their various markings' have contributed to mythological and legendary metaphorical imaginings, she focuses her ecoGothic framing on the landscape of fear presented by the Gothic forest as a space and a single entity.[148] Without specifically gendering the forest, Ruth Heholt also argues the Gothic forests in Algernon Blackwood and E.F. Benson are depicted as singular consuming threats, that dispel the illusion of the garden as a safe space.[149] The over-cultivated gardens of the male protagonists, she argues, 'are always-already a part of the wildness that roars further out'.[150] Tales of plant horror beyond Blackwood and Benson equally illustrate the ambiguity of the garden as tamed Nature. While the menacing forest has been frequently identified as female, these spaces refer to the wild, self-sustaining, ancient woodlands that are monstrously feminised as similarly untameable and uncontrollable in the male imagination. Despite wild woods, forests and jungles depicted as female Other, individualised trees are more often aligned with patriarchal concepts of masculinity. For example: Summerisle's male folk in *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, dir., 1973) are named after trees (Oak, Beech, Alder, Rowan);[151] the sentient tree-people (the Ents and Old Man Willow) in J.R.R. Tolkein's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5) are male; Marvel's 1960 anthropomorphised tree-character, Groot,

[145] Lisa Kröger, 'Panic, paranoia and pathos: ecocriticism in the eighteenth-century Gothic novel' in *EcoGothic*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp.15-27.
[146] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.114.
[147] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.169.
[148] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.13.
[149] Heholt, '"That which roars further out"', pp.82-98.
[150] Heholt, '"That which roars further out"', p.96.
[151] William Hughes, ''A strange kind of evil': superficial paganism and false ecology in *The Wicker Man*' in *EcoGothic*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp.58-71.

animated in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (James Gunn, dir., 2014); even the interconnected weirwood trees with facial features in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* saga (1996-2008; see also HBO series adaptation, *Game of Thrones*, 2011-2019), all depict individualised trees as dignified masculine protectors. Clearly inspired by the Green Man figure of ancient pagan tradition, in contrast to monstrous feminine nature, trees (except for certain species, like apple trees)[152] are described with particularly masculine attributes. Even Algernon Blackwood's classic eco-philosophical tale,[153] 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved' (1912), provides a clear sense of forests as female but individual trees as masculine-inflected guardian. Blackwood's tale explores a oneness with the New Forest near the male protagonist's home as the trees eventually subsume him, blurring the physical boundaries of human/nature. Fears of degeneration are exhibited in this tale as Bittacy becomes mentally, emotionally, and physically overpowered by the seductive *femme fatale* forest, challenging heteronormative gender identity through the blurred sexual and species boundaries. The Bittacy home, however, is guarded by a solitary cedar that 'stands there like a sentinel – protective rather', which Bittacy refers to as an 'old fellow I respect', clearly assigning it male gender.[154] The forest 'could not advance beyond the cedar' until such time as the cedar, limb by limb, is eventually destroyed by high winds and the *femme fatale* forest claims Bittacy's soul.[155] As Heholt reiterates, '[t]he cedar is more associated with the human – it is *in the garden*, standing tall between the house and the Forest' (my emphasis).[156] A material ecocritical sense of becoming one with nature is portrayed physically in Blackwood's tale as the man (and more metaphorically, his masculinity) is swallowed by the (feminine) Forest, equally defeating the masculinised sentinel cedar.

[152] Through the symbolism of orchards and apple blossom in poetry and art, Joanna Crosby argues that '[a]pple trees … were depicted as an element essential for the feminised garden' and, based on associations of Eden, 'an apple in the hands of a woman transforms her into a dangerously ambivalent woman' (pp.51 and 53) Although Crosby falls just short of gendering individual trees, her work on apple trees in particular provides useful connotations of these specific trees as fatal women and the power invested in prehistoric plant mythologies. Apple trees and Edenic terror are revisited in more detail in Chapter 5. Crosby, 'The Gothic orchard of the Victorian imagination', pp.48-64.

[153] Following Ruth Heholt's argument that David Bittacy unconsciously desires to become-forest and his focus on the importance of nature, Blackwood's writing precludes an early example of emerging eco-philosophical thinking. Heholt, '"That Which Roars Further Out"', pp.82-98.

[154] Blackwood, 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved', p.209

[155] Blackwood, 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved', p.229.

[156] Heholt, '"That Which Roars Further Out"', p.90.

Reformed gender ideology and patriarchal desire to reinstate conservative cis-gender roles become apparent in the plant monster narratives that establish trees as masculine within the domestic sphere of the garden. Whilst many hankered for society to return to a pre-war normal, the world had changed and attitudes to gender construction became conflicted. As the menfolk returned home, women were expected to relinquish their new-found liberties and their jobs for their male relatives and return to their roles as housewife and mother. In Ulric Daubeny's 'The Sumach' (1919),[157] conflicting gender role ideology in the immediate inter-war period is evident in the transgressive human/nonhuman interactions with the monstrous tree within the garden.

Better known for his writing on orchestral wind instruments and church music, this British writer from the Cotswolds wrote a single collection of supernatural short stories, *The Elemental*, published in 1919 by George Routledge and Sons (London) and E.P. Dutton and co. (New York). Little is known about Daubeny's life nor have the stories of this collection been the focus of any in-depth study, with only 'The Sumach' appearing in anthologies, but the eponymous vampire tree is clearly used to highlight contemporary attitudes to gender in Britain post-World War I.[158] In this tale, the unfortunate Irene Barton almost falls foul of the unusual (unbeknownst vampiric) tree at the end of her garden – the new country home that Irene and husband, Hilary, have inherited from her cousin Geraldine. Situating the arboreal monster and the female character within the domestic sphere of the garden, 'The Sumach' exemplifies the traditionally patriarchal Gothic framework of isolated heroine, terrorized by a supernatural male-gendered force. Andrew Tudor claims the vampire as Other has been seen as a projection of repressed fears surrounding sexuality by focusing on the victimisation of innocent female characters.[159] Displacing the vampire role onto a tree confuses sexual and gender identities in a complex interconnectedness underlined by the sexual connotations associated with the tree's

[157] Ulric Daubeny, 'The Sumach', (1919), in *Flora Curiosa: Cryptobotany, Mysterious Fungi, Sentient Trees, and Deadly Plants in Classic Science Fiction and Fantasy,* ed. by Chad Arment (Greenville, Ohio: Coachwhip Publications, 2013), pp.293-303 (p.295).
[158] An electronic edition was published in 2019 by Black Heath Editions with the following disclaimer: 'Some stories in this book reflect attitudes which, although sadly prevalent at the time of original publication, may prove offensive to modern readers.' Kindle edition [accessed 21 February 2021].
[159] Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, p.20.

vampiric nature. Focusing on the interaction between Irene and the Sumach, gender and nature entangle to reveal post-WWI anxieties about the redefinitions of social structures.

During the night, the heroine subconsciously sits in the sumach tree, falls asleep and dreams vividly of embracing her returning husband – a dream which swiftly turns into a nightmare:

> [t]he sky grew strangely dark, the arms fiercely masterful, while the face which bent to kiss her neck was not that of her young husband: it was leering, wicked, gnarled like the trunk of some weather-beaten tree.[160]

On waking, she is 'still held rigid by brutal arms' and must fight to free herself from the tree.[161] Tree and husband merge in a scenario reminiscent of a returning soldier scarred physically and mentally by war. Yet each night she is lured into the tree's 'stick-like arms' that close upon her with a 'vice-like grip so tight she could scarcely breathe' while the 'awful head, rugged and lined by every sin, darting at the fair, white neck as a wild beast on its prey. The foul lips began to eat into her skin …'.[162] The personification of the sumach as a classic vampire reinforces the female victim/male domination dichotomy of the associated legend. This is further emphasised when she examines her 'bloodless, drawn face' in the mirror and notices the 'tiny trickle of dry blood' on the 'chalky pallor of her neck'.[163] Such a vivid visceral attack evokes anxieties of sexual indiscretion framed through the patriarchal Gothic tradition, where the isolated heroine is terrorized by a supernatural (typically male) force, explained in the discovery of a diary, ultimately to be rescued by the hero who restores order. Envisaging 'The Sumach' as a traditional Gothic vampire tale, such monsters Tudor warns, are 'temporally specific and need examination within that context',[164] suggesting it engages with discourse on inter-war gender politics. Depicted as a male gendered tree within the domestic sphere of the garden, the sumach is personified as a war-ravished husband reasserting his patriarchal role within modern society as emphasised by Irene's dreams/nightmares. Her conflicted interaction with the tree signifies how difficult reintegration was for returning veterans on their families as they adjusted to

[160] Daubeny, 'The Sumach', p.295.
[161] Daubeny, 'The Sumach', p.295.
[162] Daubeny, 'The Sumach', p.297.
[163] Daubeny, 'The Sumach', p.297.
[164] Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, p.20

physical disfigurement, mental volatility, and depression.[165] Indeed, 'British veterans existed on the periphery of society, unhappy reminders of a time best forgotten'.[166] Projected onto the vampire tree, husband Hilary is unrecognisable, draining his wife of her life-force and energies in the hope for a return to 'normal' that Irene appears to resist. Rehabilitation is eventually successful when Hilary is brought to face the vampire tree, 'dark and menacing' with leaves 'a hideous, mottled purple', and decides to burn it down.[167]

Stephen Shapiro's exploration into how the vampire embodies the threat of political and economic instability[168] offers the image of vampire and human blood loss as reflecting a financially anaemic State of a war-torn nation. Through the tree's vampiric nature, Irene's garden becomes a quasi-graveyard, littered with dead birds and animals (including her dog) in a reflection of how the proliferation of poppies ironically turned the killing fields of Flanders into a quasi-garden. Irene's graveyard-garden hails the fears of intensified market gardening impinging on nature versus the necessity of countering rationing. The notable absence of men in this tale (until the end) and Mrs Watcombe's discovery that the Sumach 'had been enclosed during a recent extension to the garden of the old Grange…',[169] offers a role reversal of the orchid and greenhouse wherein the male plant is within the female space contributing to anxieties about expanding women's roles and feminising the nation. While the suffragist movement and the Women's Social and Political Union had gained significant advancements for women with the Electoral Reform Bill (1918), through work in munitions and other key industries during the Great War women had vastly improved welfare in factories.[170] For returning husbands (and sons) this expansion of gender expectations for women was purported to be temporary and 'once the conflict was over they were sent unceremoniously "back to home and duty" … [as] traditional gender dichotomies were re-established, and ethos of "domesticity" pervaded popular culture'.[171]

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[165] Emma Hanna, *The Great War on the Small Screen: Representing the First World War in Contemporary Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.70.
[166] Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2001), p.12.
[167] Daubeny, 'The Sumach', p.302.
[168] Stephen Shapiro, 'Transvaal, Transylvania, Dracula's World-system and Gothic Periodicity', *Gothic Studies* 10.1 (2008), 29-47.
[169] Daubeny, 'The Sumach', p.302.
[170] L. K. Yates, *The Woman's Part: A Record of Munitions Work* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918).
[171] Adrian Bingham, '"An Era of Domesticity"? Histories of Women and Gender in Interwar Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 2004.1: 225–233, p.225.

Yet, while Irene's acts of domesticity when she 'womanlike, put to use her enforced idleness, by instituting a rearrangement of the box-room' underlines this pervasive perception of inter-war desire to return to 'normal',[172] '[t]hese years saw the articulation of a self-consciously "modern" femininity that drew upon real changes in the political, social, economic and sexual position of women'.[173] Although Diana Wallace has highlighted that 'several studies have drawn attention to the conservative ideology of domesticity which characterised the inter-war period',[174] the interaction of male tree and female human challenge a gender politics that was not necessarily universal or widespread. The heroine's nightly battle with the male tree is indicative of how difficult inter-war readjustment was. Disintegration of the 'female' domestic ideology and the gains of the feminist movement through wartime Britain may seem to have slowed in momentum as the nation rallied to regain a sense of normality, but war work had expanded female expectations beyond the home and had already instigated significant health, safety and welfare changes that improved women's lives.

An ecoGothic perspective reveals the nostalgic desire for the return to pre-war social structures of the nineteenth century in conflict with modern ideas of the new century in relation to gender in this tale. Seen through a gothic trans-corporeality that explores the 'material interchanges between bodies', the male vampire tree troubles the transitory boundaries of the material and social, cultural and environmental, the human and non-human,[175] as conservative gender dichotomies are challenged. Grown from 'a stake plunged through the heart' of a suspected vampire to confine it,[176] the tree has grown from and has absorbed the decomposed corporeal matter of the bloodthirsty monster, embodying the patriarchal vampire as a conservative heteronormative gendered figure. The repeated violent vampiric attack first on the previous owner, Cousin Geraldine, and subsequently on the story's protagonist, Irene – as independent modern women, each living alone in the cottage – mirrors inter-war desires to re-establish traditional gender

[172] Daubeny, 'The Sumach', p.298.
[173] Bingham, p.233.
[174] Diana Wallace, 'Revising the Marriage Plot in Women's Fiction of the 1930s', in *Women Writers of the 1930s: gender, politics and history,* ed. by Joannou Maroula (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.63.
[175] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.16.
[176] Daubeny, 'The Sumach', p.302.

roles. As if to counteract feminist and social advances made during the war effort, the patriarchal vampire reimposes itself through a violent domination over these female gardeners. A sense of injustice at the non-recognition of women's contribution to the war effort is portrayed through the trans-corporeal contrast of Irene's unconscious, pale, anaemic body with the 'bloated, unnaturally vigorous' growth of the vampire tree.[177] Indeed, the social and welfare advances across manufacturing and engineering industries made for the employment of women during the war now improved the working conditions for the returning male labour despite women being forced to relinquish their employment. Ultimately, when husband Hilary burns the conservative vampire tree, modern attitudes towards expanding gender roles, companionship in marriage, and wider social and sexual freedoms for the modern woman are re-asserted, even as Hilary embraces his less violent modern masculinity.

Elizabeth Parker argues, 'ecophobic and gynophobic anxieties' are often confused within tales of 'the monstrously animate and sentient forest', with ecofeminism exploring the 'established cultural connection between women and Nature'.[178] Coding nature as feminine maintains its cultural dichotomy of benevolent Mother Nature and its antithetic eco-*femme fatale* (as in Hillard's Gothic Nature). Daubeny's vampire tree is overtly masculine in its violently sexual attack, but as previous greenhouse *fleurs fatales* have illustrated, masculine violence is a key feature of the fatal woman figure, seen as a transgressive (and increasingly during the early twentieth century, lesbian) woman. Hilary's burning of the tree to restore order to his relationship with his wife, Irene, equally offers the cross-species interaction as a homosexual one. Like the post-colonial predatory anthropophagic trees with animalistic descriptions of 'tentacle' and 'serpent-like' branches and tendrils, monstrous trees carry 'sexual undertones' that emphasise the 'abuse of women',[179] asserting transgressive associations of nature with women. The hybridity of plant-animal, plant-human, masculine-feminine attributes forge these ambiguously gendered eco-monsters as tropes that vilify transgressive sexual/gender identities. A gothic trans-corporeality suggests that as the plants in these narratives consume human blood, they consume human qualities, intelligence, and identity. While the transgressive female

[177] Daubeny, 'The Sumach', p.302.
[178] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, pp.114-5.
[179] Blake Price, 'Vegetable Monsters', p.317.

hothouse plants of the *fin de siècle* challenged emerging feminism through an eco-*femme fatale* figure, the vampiric vine and tree of the early modernist period draws on a gendered nature to highlight conflicting attitudes to modern definitions of femininity and masculinity. With political, social and economic instability manifesting over the next two decades, another global conflict sees the vampiric plant monster re-cultivated for its time.

2.3. Hybrid Hell (1939-1949)

One of the recurring features of man-eating plant monsters is the animalistic references to Medusa's head of serpents. As outlined previously, the grotesque human-animal hybrid of Medusa is closely associated with the *femme fatale* figure. With individual trees traditionally gendered male preying on female victims, adding images of Medusa only serves to undermine binary gender assignations. Ambiguous gender boundaries in the early twentieth century are expressed through a deliberate cultivation of Medusa-like anthropophagus plant monsters. With branches and tendrils resembling the serpents of the Medusa head, these animalistic plant hybrids engage with gender definitions similar to those of the First World War explored by Nesbit through her vampiric pavilion vine. Indeed, 'narratives of man-eating plants were evolving … and … authors were combining animal and plant characteristics in order to form frightening new evolutionary hybrids'.[180] By the late 1930s, the anthropophagous Gorgon-image plant as cultivated man-made monstrosity becomes an established hybrid trope that draws on monstrous female nature to challenge modern masculinity.

The Medusa plant owes its origins to the plant monster narratives of the nineteenth century gothic adventure and the tentacular teratology of the weird – fiction genres that 'attempt to find ways … to cope… with changes and shocks to the social world' prevalent at the turn of the century.[181] As plant collectors searched (and pillaged) colonial environments, gothic tales of the dangers of these wild locations often reflected the contemporary derogatory attitudes towards the indigenous cultures and practices, linked to domestic anxieties towards changing gender identity constructs. Transposed onto some

[180] Blake Price, 'Vegetable Monsters', p.318.
[181] Alder, *Weird Fiction and Science at the* Fin de Siècle, p.16.

of the very real dangers of these colonial environments, anxieties surrounding the emerging female emancipation manifested in these tales in the form of the Medusa eco-*femme fatale* figure. The ambiguous gendering of anthropophagic trees is heightened by multiple references to serpent-like branches, with narrators observing 'transparent palpi reared' like 'serpents flayed, yet dancing on their tails' and when a woman is forced into the vicinity of the tree, 'slender, delicate palpi, with the fury of starved serpents, …strangled down … like great green serpents, … with the cruel swiftness and savage tenacity of anacondas fastening upon their prey'.[182] The branches of this tree are clearly more flexible, more tendril, than traditionally associated with a tree, and are referred to here as 'palpi' – insect feelers – adding connotations of evolutionary regression associated with weird fiction. They are not just palpi, but compared to dangerous snakes, providing an animalistic perception of this strange tree. The dichotomous symbol of the serpent – representing good/evil, poison/medicine, death/rebirth – is a recurring descriptor in many of the *fin-de-siècle* tales of monstrous plant killers, which many postcolonial readings suggest indicates the ambiguity towards indigenous populations.[183] As *femme fatale* figures, the ambivalence posed by the 'serpent-like branches' emphasises contemporary concerns about growing female independence. Phallocentric fears of degeneration caused by feminism and gynophobic responses to female emancipation are depicted through images of the Gorgon.[184]

Images of the Gorgon 'tree' become increasingly masculinized in later narratives like Phil Robinson's 'The Man-eating Tree' (1881), where a tree 'more terrible than the Upas' seems to have 'some great serpent among its branches', later revealed to be the tree

[182] Anonymous, 'The Man-eating Tree' (1875), in *Botanica Delira: More Stories of Strange, Undiscovered, and Murderous Vegetation*, ed. by Chad Arment (Landisville, Pennsylvania: Coachwhip Publications, 2010), pp.46-54 (pp.52-3).

[183] Man-eating plants are situated alongside the serpent (and other animals) within postcolonial gothic readings as often derogatory Western imperialist metaphors. Both animal metaphors and non-pastoral environments stand for, or are associated with, indigenous, non-white peoples subjected to genocide or slavery in established postcolonial ecocriticism. See, amongst others: Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) and Clare Echterling, 'Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Classic Children's Literature, and the Imperial-Environmental Imagination in *The Chronicles of Narnia*', *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 49.1 (2016), 93-117.

[184] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p.118-119.

itself, described as 'a vast coil of snakes in restless motion'.[185] Snakes in trees draw on Judeo-Christian symbolism of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, where the snake in the tree encouraged Eve to pick the apple leading to man's expulsion from Eden This act became a universal symbol for human hubris and greed, vilifying women as the culpable party in man's downfall within the Western male imagination.[186] Alongside the female-inflected gorgon association, Robinson's vampire tree attacks a *young male* victim, portraying it as a fatal woman figure to reflect fears of degeneracy similar to the greenhouse plant monsters of the period. Such animal-plant hybrids invoke the Medusa *femme fatale* figure that draws on the serpent-head as a liminal site for phallocentric fears about women's roles, paving the way for monstrous vegetable hybrids of the twentieth-century Weird.

As perhaps a mode rather than a genre, weird fiction is, according to Emily Alder, about troubling borders, 'collaps[ing] them' and recreating 'the "natural" order of things' differently,[187] and as such it inhabits the liminal space between the gothic and science fiction genres. With its uncertain and shifting boundaries, the Weird resonated with an inter-war society, China Miéville argues, as a fiction that 'allows swillage of that awe and horror from "beyond" back into the everyday'.[188] 'The fantastic', he suggests, 'has always been indispensable to think and unthink society, but traditional monsters were now [during this inter-war period] profoundly inadequate'.[189] Socio-political instability of the 1920s and 1930s were reflected within a fiction that envisioned realities across or without boundaries, with weird narratives developing tentacled hybrids in response to capitalist modernity. Acclaimed as the most influential Weird fiction writer of the time, H. P. Lovecraft's now-famous 'monstrous tentacle creation Cthulhu' typified this literary mode's obsession with the tentacle.[190] Exploring its 'entirely negative' late nineteenth century metaphorical associations, Paul Stangl argues images of the octopus (and tentacles) in Victor Hugo's *Toilers*

[185] Phil Robinson, (1881), 'The Man-eating Tree', in *Flora Curiosa: Cryptobotany, Mysterious Fungi, Sentient Trees, and Deadly Plants in Classic Science Fiction and Fantasy,* ed. by Chad Arment (Greenville, Ohio: Coachwhip Publications, 2013), pp.46-54 (pp.49-51).
[186] Further reflection on this imagery will be looked at alongside apple trees in Chapter 5.
[187] Alder, *Weird Fiction and Science at the* Fin de Siècle, p.10.
[188] Miéville, 'Weird Fiction', p.511.
[189] Miéville, 'Weird Fiction', p.513.
[190] Carl Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, 'Introduction: Lovecraft Now', *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 28.3 (2015), 444-9 (p.444).

of the Sea (1866) with its 'tentacles reaching out' and 'hideousness … hiding in a beautiful area', influenced subsequent imaginings in engaging with contemporary socio-cultural anxieties.[191] Certainly, Hugo's description of the 'monstrous creatures'[192] lurking in the ocean depths that 'have no relation to the human race'[193] that envisages the octopus as 'the sea vampire',[194] 'the devil-fish, that Medusa with its eight serpents',[195] suggest an influence on the eco-*femme fatale* descriptions found in narratives such as H. G. Wells' strange orchid, explored above. Moreover, Hugo asserts '[t]he monster is endowed with the qualities of the sensitive plant'[196] not only aligning creature (male) with plant (female) but with insectivorous plants in particular.[197] Doing so situates the cephalopod hierarchically below vegetation and contributes to category and gender confusion similarly echoed in the plant monster hybrids of the 1930s. Together with the Hydra (Greek mythology's multi-headed *female* sea serpent), the Medusa and its weird tentacled progeny underline the interchangeability between tentacle, serpent and tendril in plant monster fiction as an encompassing image of the eco-*femme fatale*.

In 'The Devil Flower' (1939) by American science-fiction writer, Harl Vincent, tentacles replace the serpents of this Medusa-image plant monster.[198] Published in the pulp Science Fiction magazine *Fantastic Adventures* in May 1939, this narrative features a vampiric and tentacled floral hybrid engineered by 'expert botanist', Rufus Ballinger. Vincent was a mechanical engineer by training and often included scientific devices and processes within his writing to create a sense of wonder,[199] and this tale was coincidentally published around the opening of the World Fair in New York – an event that was intended to pique public curiosity in 'The World of Tomorrow'.[200] In Vincent's tale, however, exciting

[191] Paul Stangl, 'Geographic and Discursive Wanderings of San Francisco's "Evil" Octopuses', *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 18.3 (2016), 343-71 (pp.346, 351).
[192] Victor Hugo, *Toilers of the Sea* (1866), trans. By W. Moy Thomas (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1911), Project Gutenberg, p.131.
[193] Hugo, *Toilers of the Sea*, p.132.
[194] Hugo, *Toilers of the Sea*, p.291.
[195] Hugo, *Toilers of the Sea*, p.294.
[196] Hugo, *Toilers of the Sea*, p.292.
[197] 'Sensitive plants' refers to those which react to touch like the insectivorous plants explored by Darwin, who equally referred to the glandular hairs of such plants as 'tentacles' (*Insectivorous Plants*, 1875).
[198] Harl Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', (1939), in *Arboris Mysterius: Stories of the Uncanny and Undescribed from the Botanical Kingdom*, ed. by Chad Arment (Greenville: Coachwhip Publications, 2014), pp.255-68.
[199] Greg Fowlkes, ed., Editorial Review, *Harl Vincent Resurrected: The Astounding Stories of Harl Vincent*, (Resurrected Press, 2011), *amazon.com*, [accessed 25 February 2021].
[200] Alan Taylor, 'The 1939 New York World's Fair', *The Atlantic*, November 1, 2013.

scientific endeavour is portrayed as malevolent botany, with the monstrous plant's survival requiring the reluctant conspirator, Dr. Gregory, to drain blood from his patients to satiate the tentacled plant which eventually outgrows the botanist's control. Vampiric and tentacled *femme fatale* imagery are combined in this tale as fears of the New Woman and expanding female gender roles merge with pre-World War II anxieties.

The narrative follows Dr. Frank Robeson who visits the rural Gregory Pines Sanitorium after two of his referral patients die suspiciously of 'pernicious anaemia' while under Dr. Martin Gregory's care. Pernicious anaemia (deficiency in Vitamin B12) was the focus of medical research in the 1920s with researchers George Minot, William Murphy and George Whipple receiving the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 1934 for proving the positive effects of liver consumption on anaemia sufferers.[201] The idea of eating internal organs in order to boost the human body's red blood cells in itself seems to be a particularly gothic trans-corporeal solution to an ailment more generally associated with pregnancy and/or menstruation and thus predominantly seen as a female condition.[202] Yet Robeson's patients are male and diagnosed as suffering extreme anaemia in a tale where women are conspicuously absent. The gendering at play here may seem ironic, but Robeson's patients were also supposedly recovering from major surgery. Depicting male anaemia highlights contemporary American anxieties of an emasculated nation that drove the social rehabilitation of the inter-War years in relation to realigning traditional gender roles. Yet, it also underlines the significant physical (and mental) health effects of those returning from the First World War as a drained (and draining) resource. With the floral hybrid revealed as the cause through distinctive eco-*femme fatale* aspects, this plant monster narrative reveals parallel concerns regarding major social change experienced during the inter-war period at the cusp of World War II as those expressed in Nesbit's text at the start of the First World War. American gender constructs and roles – particularly masculinity – had been in crisis with major unemployment during the Great Depression of the 1930s,[203]

[201] The Global Resource for Animal Use in Science, 'Medical discovery timeline: pernicious anaemia', *animalresearch.info,* 2021 [accessed 18 January 2021].
[202] Carey W. Smallwood, "The Anaemia of Pregnancy". *The British Medical Journal* 2.3950 (1936), 573–577.
[203] Unemployment rose to 25% in 1933, with men predominantly affected. Indeed, '[t]he number of married women working rose disproportionately simply because they often could find work when their husbands could not'. Robert F. Himmelberg, *The Great Depression and the New Deal* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), p.70.

and although the economy was in recovery, events in Europe would equally cause concern across the Atlantic, influencing attitudes towards acceptable female (and male) behaviour.

This pre-WWII plant monster narrative encompasses a modernist Gothic that Kelly Hurley argues draws on the 'abhuman' through 'admixed and metamorphic entities' or 'species hybrids' that are the 'products of human dissoluteness and degeneration'.[204] Through a material ecoGothic reading that redefines the plant/animal as plant/human, the Medusa-plant as an admixed plant creation further collapses the boundaries of human/non-human, when it seeks human blood for sustenance through its tentacled appendages. This vampiric tentacled vegetable becomes not only indicative of weird teratology but of a modernist gothic abhuman that challenges gender definitions. Like its man-eating forebears of the nineteenth century gothic adventure stories, botanist Ballinger's tentacled 'experimentation with plant life' draws parallels to the female monsters of Greek mythology, offering it as an eco-*femme fatale* metaphor for the inter-war slippery gender landscape.[205] The hero, Robeson, discovers it is Ballinger's 'vegetable incongruity' - not the stated anaemia – that caused his patients' deaths from extreme blood loss when the tentacled plant monstrosity is sustained through illicitly obtained blood donations.[206] The Medusa eco-*femme fatale* emits a 'sickly-sweet odor' that induces a 'sense-deadening influence' before demonstrating its vampiric tendencies in desiring human blood.[207] This Medusa plant embodies a number of temporally significant anxieties about the impending cost of political upheaval in Europe and early bio-weapon development, alongside anxieties about the flexibility of gender roles at a time of social instability. The plant's branches are described less like flora and more cephalopod in appearance: 'having a mass of rubbery, vine-like branches that seemed always to be in motion', its appendages are 'milky-white in hue and nearly transparent' but 'shaded off into a deep pink hue' at the main stem,[208] offering an echoing influence of Hugo's monstrous octopus in *Toilers of the Sea* (1866). This uncanny cross-species hybrid invokes a tentacled Medusa-like plant that calls traditional binary gender constructs into question.

[204] Hurley, 'The Modernist Abominations of William Hope Hodgson', p.130
[205] Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', p.265.
[206] Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', p.263.
[207] Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', p.263.
[208] Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', pp.262.

Ballinger's 'unnatural plant' appears to breathe like 'liquid boiling in a test tube',[209] signifying the scientific creation of this plant monster as 'flora that was half fauna' by the nefarious botanist.[210] Unlike the curious gardeners of previous tales, the botanist character begins to shift closer to the mad scientist figure of emerging Gothic Science Fiction explored in more detail in the next chapter. A figure so engrossed in the desire to be the first to scientifically achieve the seemingly impossible, Ballinger is a botanical Dr. Frankenstein or Dr. Moreau – meddling with nature and creation that inevitably wreaks havoc. Equally, the greenhouse is clearly marked as a scientific space, since the 'low rambling structure' where they cultivate their bloodthirsty Medusa-plant with nefarious intent, is separate from the main building and specifically for experimentation in cross-species hybrid plants. With its 'many hotbeds' containing the unusual plants, the greenhouse is, according to Gregory, 'his experimental laboratory' where he and Ballinger conduct their 'botanical research'.[211] Invoking Mark Fisher's definition of the eerie as a concept within weird narratives as an absent presence,[212] the lack of female (human) protagonists in this tale is telling. This androcentric focus allows Vincent to situate the plant monster as the eco-*femme fatale* figure, preying on the vulnerable male characters (patients and botanists alike) within a male defined space. Like its mythological doubles, Medusa and Hydra, this tentacled plant monster underlines the contemporary concerns about modern concepts of masculinity in the face of growing female emancipation.

As a *man*-made hybrid the Medusa-plant is subtly gendered *femme fatale* in combining the features of plant monsters examined thus far: the strange orchid's aerial roots were compared to tentacles, the pitcher plant's flower described as a maw and giant, and the vine exhibited rapid and deliberate movement. This floral hybrid metaphor is developed to encompass the culmination of conservative anxieties about the increasing effect the emancipation of female (and other groups) had on definitions of masculinity. Described as 'the octopus-like thing' that 'engulf[s]' its victims within 'wildly thrashing tentacle[s]',[213] the animal-vegetable hybrid plant is re-configured as a Medusa figure using

[209] Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', pp. 262-3.
[210] Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', p.265.
[211] Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', pp.259, 262, 263.
[212] Mark Fisher, *The Weird And The Eerie* (London: Repeater Books, 2016), p.12.
[213] Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', p.267.

cephalopodic imagery of weird narratives, further emphasised when Robeson himself comes under attack from the plant. As the 'slimy pink tentacles' strain towards him 'over the window-sill from outside' just as Nesbit's vine did, the full extent of the plant's monstrosity as an eco-*femme fatale* figure is revealed:

> One of the plants had gone berserk! The thing was alive and it was gigantic! Flowers, blood red in hue, with faces like crimson gargoyles, budded and bloomed in a second of time, looked at him with sinister gloating . . . [they] advanced with the speed of a pack of stalking wolves.
>
> Breath-takingly, a pungent odor assailed his nostrils (ellipsis in original).[214]

Anthropomorphising the plant suggests the monster is sentient and in control of its own actions; despite seemingly wild, there is a sense of evil calculating in its attack that disrupts dichotomous boundaries. In outlining trans-corporeality through the consumption of food (plants and animals), Stacy Alaimo pinpoints that 'we are transformed by the food we consume', a notion by which environmental and social issues can be explored as crossing the nature/culture divide.[215] By imbibing human blood, Ballinger's Medusa plant illustrates a gothic trans-corporeality that suggests it has been transformed by the human that it eats, creating a truly 'unnatural' human/plant hybrid *femme fatale*, with its flower-faces 'like crimson gargoyles' observing the human-food with 'sinister gloating',[216] suggesting intent, an attribute often perceived as uniquely human. Such ecophobic narratives of Nature as 'actively hostile', Kelly Hurley asserts, suggest 'monstrous nonhuman species [lurk] within the natural landscape' and 'prey on human flesh', proposing that humans are no longer the superior being, but become food.[217] When predatory Nature is cultivated by the human protagonist as in these narratives, not only is the plant's monstrosity underlined but also the odious nature of the botanist. In a Frankensteinian demise 'at the hands [or in this case, tentacles] of his unnatural creation', Ballinger meets a fate which is the inevitable downfall of all over-ambitious mad scientists.[218] In a momentary lapse while tending his 'wriggly plants', Ballinger is attacked as '[i]ts tendrils whipped about like the arms of an octopus', until he is 'almost completely wrapped up in its tentacles' and the 'blood-dripping flowers'

[214] Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', pp.265-6, ellipsis in original.
[215] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.13.
[216] This is a recurring motif in later plant monster narratives.
[217] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, p.61.
[218] King and Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema*, p.47.

leave 'his body a waxy husk'.[219] Species and gender boundaries disintegrate in an act of a gothic trans-corporeality, as the evil botanist is vampirically absorbed into the Medusa-plant offering a reflection of contemporary concerns about gender power shifts. As women increasingly became more visibly active in social reform and in many cases had become the main breadwinner during a period of mass unemployment, conservative definitions of masculinity and femininity were in contention. Like Ballinger's body, masculinity in the male imagination was being leeched by women during a time when opportunities in the workplace and public sphere were becoming increasingly open to their female counterparts.

According to Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, the Gothic uses transgression in the form of the monster to engage with debates surrounding the significance of social change on the construction of gender identity, and in association, national, sexual, and racial identities.[220] While this tentacled plant monster is never directly gendered, its monstrous female hybridity underlines the era's social upheaval. Jerrold E. Hogle further suggests that Anglo-American Gothic historically engages with gender by challenging domestic ideologies through the Othering of the female body.[221] This fearful, uncontrollable vampiric plant hybrid offers a distinctive othering of the modern woman in conservative ideology. More specifically still, Julia Kristeva, and subsequently Barbara Creed, have illustrated how fears and anxieties are projected onto the grotesque female figure.[222] As a hybrid form, the monstrous plant underlines the grotesque, stemming from art forms that depict human/animal (such as mythical centaurs; male torso with the body and legs of a horse) or human/plant (consider the foliate head; a male head enmeshed with leaves and branches). Although grotesques such as these are viewed as ambiguous and uncanny, it is the female grotesque figures of women/animal admixing, such as the harpy,[223] Medusa, and Sphinx, that inspire terror in the male imagination. Ballinger's Medusa-like plant, with its tentacle

[219] Vincent, 'The Devil Flower', pp.267-8.
[220] Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, 'Female Gothic', in *Teaching the Gothic*, ed. by Anna Powell and Andrew Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp.107-20.
[221] Jerrold E. Hogle, 'Theorizing the Gothic', in *Teaching the Gothic*, ed. by Anna Powell and Andrew Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp.29-47.
[222] Julia Kristeva, 'Approaching Abjection', *The Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) reproduced in *The Monster Theory Reader,* pp.95-107; Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. by S. Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 1999) pp.251-66, reproduced in *The Monster Theory Reader,* pp.211-25.
[223] Harpy: a bird with the head of a woman.

growth in place of serpents, embodies the female grotesque onto which contemporary concerns about unstable gender identity and roles are projected. '[D]eviant behaviour' and 'transgressing gender roles', Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund explain, depict female monsters as 'taking on masculine physical traits, such as beards, becom[ing] violent and fierce: these women hunt, take revenge, or simply kill men'.[224] Apart from the beard reference, Edwards and Graulund in essence describe the fatal woman, arguing that the grotesque is 'a liminal phenomenon [that] disturbs' binary concepts.[225] Vincent's weird hybridised plant is imbued with the grotesque and monstrous female attributes of an eco-*femme fatale* as a trope that reflects contemporary America's uncertainty towards changing gender constructs and the destabilising perceptions about the growing visibility of women in the workplace and leadership roles in public office (albeit within domestic and social reform fields deemed acceptable for them).

Developing the weird tentacled plant monster further, American author, Leroy Yerxa, published 'The Garden of Hell' in *Fantastic Adventures* in May 1943.[226] Yerxa was a prolific writer between 1942 and his untimely death in 1946, for both *Amazing* and *Fantastic Adventures*, often using pseudonyms to avoid the frequent recurrence of his name in these pulp sci-fi magazines.[227] Like some of its gothic predecessors, the plant monsters of this tale are found in a foreign setting (Mexico), but are cultivated within the borders of a garden and reflect an American context. Written a year after an intergovernmental agreement in which Mexican labour is sent to help with the US labour shortage, Yerxa's weird tentacled hybrid plant and its nefarious gardener underline American contention with the rising opportunities for those of ethnic and non-white backgrounds as well as shifting gender norms that war-time offered.[228] The result of botanical meddling, the narrative's mobile anthropophagus plant fiend paves the way for science fiction plant monsters of the post-war era.

[224] Edwards and Graulund, *Grotesque*, p.47.
[225] Edwards and Graulund, *Grotesque*, p.6.
[226] Leroy Yerxa, 'The Garden of Hell', in *Arboris Mysterius: Stories of the Uncanny and Undescribed from the Botanical Kingdom*, ed. by Chad Arment (Greenville: Coachwhip Publications, 2014), pp.269-97.
[227] 'Notes About Leroy Arno Yerxa', *theyerxas.ca*, [n.d.] [accessed 20 January 2021].
[228] Jacqueliine Foertsch, *American Culture in the 1940s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

On the hunt for the brutal murderer of their ex-wife and lover Gwenn, Americans Herbert Ross and Jeff Flynn set out to find a local flower seller (Trujall) who Flynn suspects of the strange murder. After engaging in some Gothic heroism and surviving the over-powering and debilitating scent of the valley of roses, they eventually discover Trujall and his laboratory garden (Trujall has no call for a greenhouse given its Central American location). When Flynn sets out across a small vegetable plot 'with bulblike plants' just protruding the earth, he fails to notice '[t]he tentacles had suddenly come alive' until tendrils pin him to the ground and penetrate his flesh, seeking blood.[229] He escapes, but not before realising that the 'plants are [the] killers' he seeks.[230] Hidden within a massive rose farm, Trujall's garden of insidious tentacled hybrids take advantage of the flowers cultivated for perfume manufacture in enacting an eco-*femme fatale*. The overwhelming perfume of the roses stupefies the farm-workers, who move slowly as if entranced, making them easy prey for the plant. While the farm itself highlights male objectification of both women and nature through commodification of the environment, Trujall's botanical creations subvert man's control over nature as the human labourers become food. The extent of the gardener's nefarious cultivations is revealed in the giant specimen that attacks them. The bulbous octopus-like plant was 'almost as tall as a man' and:

> walked on nine short feeler-like legs … its thick, scaly body vibrating smoothly as it moved. A half-dozen long, root-like feelers protruded from the body … reached out … the tips reaching three feet … [its] head was a net of muscular fiber with a sharp, cup-like opening at its top. … From the edge of this cup a blossom grew … a type of orchid, huge and spotted, … Out of its center came two feelers that evidently gave it a sense of touch and smell that allowed it to pursue its victims.[231]

A potential inspiration for John Wyndham's triffids in 1951,[232] this mobile, sentient, aggressive vegetable hybrid is revealed to be a mutant vampiric orchid. Together with the Medusa imagery of multiple 'feelers', reminiscent of the 'palpi' of earlier incarnations, this plant monstrosity draws on eco-*femme fatale* imagery to challenge contemporary war-time gender definitions.

[229] Yerxa, 'The Garden of Hell', p.290.
[230] Yerxa, 'The Garden of Hell', p.291.
[231] Yerxa, 'The Garden of Hell', p.295.
[232] See Chapter 3 for more on triffids.

Tentacular and predatory, this monster is animated with 'life', the mad botanist reveals, 'by shooting certain injections into them',[233] offering a contemporary perception of vegetation as inanimate resource rather than as a live being. Considering nature as a resource that can be experimented on challenges the horror of modern hubris evidenced by another global conflict. Despite the scientific animation, however, the plants 'did not react to natural emotions without the blood of humans in their body',[234] suggesting the plant's power and aggression stems from the ingestion of the material human body (blood) in a clear act of gothic trans-corporeality that instils human desire in the plant. Moreover, Trujall, a grotesque dwarf, justifies his despicable plant creation as a vegetal counterpart that embodies Trujall's masculine failings. His plants are tall, strong, and powerful, generating a botanical double that displays the masculinity Trujall perceives he lacks. Trujall masculinises his abomination, calling them '*king-plants*', bemoaning that in overcoming the Brobdingnagian specimen, the Americans had 'killed him',[235] an overtly masculine gendering despite the eco-*femme fatale* imagery, embodying fears of degeneration from reverse colonisation that modernist Gothic writers aligned with the New Woman.[236] Since '[m]any Mexican women and men ha[d already] given their blood to [Trujall's] king-plants' and Trujall explicitly admits selecting Gwenn for his plant as he 'had to have a white woman',[237] the plant offers an unsettling gothic trans-corporeality that transgresses species and racial boundaries while confusing gender definitions. In a period where women were 'manning' the fort and men left on home soil were emasculated in the face of a demanding war narrative pervasive with hyper-masculinity, human/plant doubling and bloodlust are significant of the moment's socio-political anxieties. Trujall's vegetal double attacks both Mexican and American, male and female; a manifestation of the gardener's non-heterosexual desires, while the hyper-masculinity combined with eco-*femme fatale* imagery not only mirrors war-time gender role instability but points towards America's emerging desegregation policies. This shift towards a more overtly masculinised eco-*femme fatale* plant monster marks a growing anxiety in contemporary attitudes towards

[233] Yerxa, 'The Garden of Hell', p.297.
[234] Yerxa, 'The Garden of Hell', p.297.
[235] Yerxa, 'The Garden of Hell', pp.296-7.
[236] Hurley, 'The Modernist Abominations of William Hope Hodgson', pp. 129-49.
[237] Yerxa, 'The Garden of Hell', p.297.

gender identity constructs and roles. An anxiety that would persist in the following decades.

2.4. The Final Planting

Exploring the cultivated plant monsters of the greenhouse in this chapter, the orchid set the groundwork for how Gothic and Weird writers portrayed contemporary concerns about emerging female emancipation within the figure of the fatal woman. Bloodthirsty exotics are described in dichotomous terms of feminine beauty and vilified woman, as the independent New Woman triggered anxieties within a patriarchal mindset. Displacing Victorian metaphors of the predatory female onto greenhouse flowers, these challenge fears of the independent woman within the Victorian male imagination. Through a material ecoGothic framework, the flowers as fatal women are revealed to be more than a basic transfer of metaphor, but rather their behaviour of consumption highlights a gothic trans-corporeality that establishes these distinctive exotic plant monsters as ecophobic, cultivated Nature that transgresses human/nonhuman boundaries. They are liminal eco-monsters that are at once culture and nature, controlled growth that becomes rampant and dangerous as the human becomes food. This ecophobic metaphor echoes fears of imperial endeavour, growing urbanisation and the shifting gender landscape in creating an eco-*femme fatale* that engages with contemporary *fin-de-siècle* eco-social concerns.

With the major upheaval of the First World War and what was perceived as a feminising of the nation (in both Britain and the U.S.), the figure of the eco-*femme fatale* is set in opposition to established patriarchal arboreal and dichotomous ideology. Reflecting public desire to return to a pre-WWI stability and fears that nineteenth century social constructs had been disassembled with female emancipation, writers invoked the masculine image of the tree. Concerns that the Great War had embedded female independence and undermined conservative cis-gender roles are plotted across the ambiguous gendering of inter-war plant monster narratives. Features of the eco-*femme fatale* are increasingly masculinised, emphasising attitudes to the physical absence and then return of the nation's male population. Disintegration of established constructs of masculinity are confronted through the plant monster attacks in the guise of the degenerate female figure of Medusa. The supple and flexible tendrils, withies, switches and

aerial roots of these eco-*femmes fatales* are perceived as corrupt palpi or tentacles, replacing the Medusa head of snakes with insectile/cephalopodic imagery prevalent in weird narratives, an influential genre popular during this period. These vampiric female-inflected plant monsters engage with contemporary social instability during a time of upheaval across two global conflicts. The inter-war period itself was an uncertain time, with slow economic recovery and a tenuous political resolution to World War I still uneasy within the public imagination. The impact of both global wars on gender identity and roles in Britain and America within the popular (male) imagination are projected onto anthropophagus plant monsters. These cultivated monstrous flora with a taste for humans paved the way for writers to engage with contemporary attitudes to gender identity and roles as well as the environment over the next few decades. As the next chapter shows, the Cold War sparked concerns about nuclear devastation while conservative ideologies brought conflicting attitudes to gender.

Chapter 3: Plant Growth

3. Killer plants of the mid-twentieth century: the conflicted 1950s

"All plants move, but they don't usually pull themselves out of the ground and chase you!"

Tom Goodwin[1]

As T.S. Miller argues, 'various genres of speculative fiction have all but covered the globe with perilous foliage',[2] and this chapter explores the plant monster trope of the mid-twentieth century in the growing genre of Gothic Science Fiction, tracing the move from short story into novels and films. It explores the material interconnections of predatory plant and gardener against the background of 'postwar containment' and Cold War ideologies of suburban development, juvenile delinquency, and racial conflict,[3] that re-imagines the breakdown of dichotomous cis-gender roles and the oscillating post-war definitions of femininity and masculinity so prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. Bar the odd exception, predatory plants of this period have progressed from exotic bloodsuckers to specifically manipulated anthropophagus varieties that demonstrate a homicidal intent, and will be considered through a gothic trans-corporeality that reconsiders Stacy Alaimo's material transformation through the process of eating,[4] with the *human* as food. By considering the material flesh of the gendered body through material eco-feminist theories, these anthropophagus plants dispel any clear-cut boundaries between nature and culture, human and plant, masculine and feminine as they challenge the dichotomies of Western thought. In focusing on the consumption of human flesh and the uncertain relationship between plant and gardener this chapter reaffirms how the material interconnectedness of human and nonhuman protagonists in these narratives not only engages with the period's contradictory gender dynamics, but explores how a gendered nature is used to underline environmental exploitation in an age of scientific, technological, and nuclear advances.

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[1] *The Day of the Triffids*, dir. by Steve Sekely (Rank Organisation, 1962).
[2] Miller, 'Lives of the Monster Plants', p.460.
[3] Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, pp.5, 8.
[4] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.12.

Arguing that the permeability of skin and flesh enables the agency of matter to dispel the divide between nature and culture as a coemerging body, Nancy Tuana's 'viscous porosity' seeks to move beyond the androcentric nature/culture dualism that perpetuates women/nature/Other as exploitable.[5] As this chapter illustrates, the anthropophagus botanical creations of the mid-twentieth century gardener reject the attempts at their exploitation, transgressing species and gender boundaries in their hyperbolised carnivory that posits a gendered commingling. Plant and human become entangled through a material interconnectedness that interrogates contemporary conflicting concepts of gender within the context of conservative American suburban ideology and liberating 1960s counter-culture. Equally, gender-nature associations of the coemerging body provided by this material entanglement suggests a vegetal cannibalism that challenges the human superior position. An ecofeminist intersectionality, according to A. E. Kings, intends to 'assess the complex relationship between humans (specifically women) and the natural world' towards a better understanding of the intrinsic idea that 'humanity itself is inseparable from nature as a whole'.[6] Using this and the concepts of trans-corporeality and viscous porosity to illustrate how the predatory plant confronts a masculinity in crisis through their cannibalism as fears of effeminacy advocated a reassertion of cis-gender roles, this chapter argues the anthropophagus plant equally challenges post-war industrial agriculture, and the impact of chemical and nuclear advances on the environment through a gendered nature that engages with redefinitions of femininity and masculinity for a modern post-war age.

Scientific progress, environmental destruction, and the conflicting notions of gender identities that epitomized the 1950s and 1960s are embroiled in the entanglement of plant and gardener. Gothic responses to modernity, Roger Luckhurst has argued, are echoed in science fiction of the 1950-60s 'in which the human subject is pierced or wounded by invasive technologies that subvert, enslave or ultimately destroy'.[7] Replace 'technologies' with 'plants' or 'Nature' and plant monster narratives of this period illustrate concerns about man's manipulation of nature for monetary gain or suspicious ends,

[5] Tuana, 'Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina', pp.188-213.
[6] A.E. Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', *Ethics and the Environment,* 22.1 (2017), 63–87 (p.71).
[7] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p.5.

echoing public mistrust of government and academics, particularly scientists, in the wake of militarised scientific progress of the Second World War. The perceived damaging effects of nuclear testing and atomic energy on the natural and human world further fuelled the gothic imagination of the science fiction author. As Patrick D. Murphy explains, science fiction often parallels human-nature relations by pitting humans against other sentient species, or by offering commentary on the 'consequence of human manipulation of the environment gone awry'.[8] This study is amongst the first to consider monstrous plants as sentient species examining narratives of cultivated plant hybrids that walk, and/or talk, and most importantly show intent, although as Tom Goodwin in Steve Sekely's *The Day of the Triffids* (1962) adaptation asserts above, the carnivorous triffid plants simply exhibit exaggerated features of existing vegetal life. These and similar fictional plant monsters engage both the paradigm of manipulative science and explicit sentience in exaggerated reflections of gendered nature that confuse category boundaries and emphasise the conflicting ideologies of a Cold War culture. Although 'cold war ideology is central to understanding 1950s [American] culture',[9] this chapter offers an alternative perspective for understanding predatory plants beyond mere Cold War metaphors. While one or two of the texts have been considered in terms of Cold War narratives (Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*, 1951) or as commentary on capital-consumerism (*The Little Shop of Horrors*, Corman dir., 1962), other texts (Mildred Johnson's 'Cactus', 1950) have received little to no prior investigation. To date, none have been explored through a material ecofeminist Gothic.

The analysis begins by charting the evolution of the plant monster narrative from weird tales of the pulp magazines to other genres and media, and the development of the gardener from curious horticultural villain to the mad botanist of science fiction emerging in the later tales of the previous chapter. Although science fiction begins within the short story format, its popularity, particularly within the U.S. context of mass consumerism, sees science fiction and the plant monster narrative evolve during this period into anthologies, novels, and on screen with the widespread accessibility of TV and movie theatres. This

[8] Patrick D. Murphy, 'The Non-Alibi of Alien Scapes: SF and Ecocriticism', in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, ed. by Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), pp.263-278 (pp.264, 266).
[9] Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, p.2.

section contextualises the plant monster and gardener against the socio-historical background of gender conformity in conflict with a liberalising counter-culture, providing a rationale for a material ecoGothic perspective to be applied to plant monster narratives across a variety of genres.

Subsequent sections chart the evolution of plant monsters as they engage with changing gender perceptions across different media. Beginning with a short story by a female writer, Mildred Johnson's 'Cactus' (1950),[10] the first of these sections will explore how gendering the plant monster and gardener confronts conflicting ideologies in the U.S. at the start of this decade. Johnson's tale signals a change in decade but continues to draw on some of the established Gothic/Weird tropes in a challenge to post-war conservatism. Against a backdrop of suburban conformity and conflicting gender ideology, this section explores the liminal space of the porch as a site of transgression marking the dissolution of gender and other social boundaries through an ambivalent gendering of both plant and human protagonists. Johnson's unusual tale of murder engages a gothic ecofeminist perspective of contemporary masculine and feminine constructs.

With equality a key concern on both sides of the Atlantic, the next section focuses on the gendered relationship between eco-monster and gardener in the short story of British writer, Arthur C. Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid' (1956),[11] and the film from American director, Roger Corman, *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960).[12] Clarke's narrative intertextually parodies the plant monster and gardener motifs of earlier short stories to highlight the period's contradictory attitudes towards gender and sexual identity construction. Similarly, Corman's dark comedy speaks to the contemporary cultural disillusionment of the American (suburban, capitalist, consumerist) dream, seen through the plant's consumption of humans. Applying the concept of gothic trans-corporeality to the actions of these anthropophagus plant monsters demonstrates a 'becoming other' as human and non-human protagonists become materially entangled. The gardener becomes plant 'other' in these narratives, through their material intra-actions (to use Barad's term), confusing

[10] Mildred Johnson, 'Cactus', (1950), in *Arboris Mysterius: Stories of the Uncanny and Undescribed from the Botanical Kingdom*, ed. by Chad Arment (Greenville: Coachwhip Publications, 2014), pp.298-308.
[11] Arthur C. Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', first published 1956 in *Satellite Science Fiction* (Renown Publishing Co. Inc. PDF version), pp.1-7.
[12] *The Little Shop of Horrors*, dir. by Roger Corman (Santa Clara Productions, 1960).

gender constructs as the shift from (hu)man to plant underlines contemporary ambiguity towards sexuality, gender, and environmental consumerism.

The final section argues that anthropophagus plant monsters can be read through a gothic eco-feminist lens within the science fiction genre to encompass new perspectives on gendered nature beyond the changing socio-political anxieties of the Cold War era. Already established as a novel epitomising its Cold War context from a British perspective, the carnivorous creations in John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) warrant a closer look through a material eco-feminist gothic that perceives the triffids as key protagonists in challenging contemporary gender instability as well as critiquing post-war industrial agriculture and modern consumerism. In a move away from binary gender identity constructs, intersectionality, according to eco-feminist Greta Gaard, 'analyses the connections among racism, sexism, classism, colonialism, speciesism, and the environment' toward a material understanding of human identity,[13] and as hybrid creations, the cannibal triffids with their penchant for human flesh provide an ideal gendered ecogothic trope for reconsidering what it means to be human. Exploring the triffids in association with Roger Corman's plant monster in *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960), this section highlights an interconnectedness that Kings argues focuses on the effects of 'the discrimination, oppression, and identity of women and the natural environment'.[14] Both Wyndham's and Corman's man-eating plant monsters not only dispel binary boundaries of human and nonhuman nature through gothic trans-corporeal consumption, but these cultivated anthropophagic plants attest a sentience that troubles the assumption of human superiority and challenges perceptions of nature as resource by reversing the plant-human dynamic.

3.1. Gothic Science Fiction: from Gothic Villain to Mad Botanist

Entering the realm of science fiction then, twentieth-century plant monsters as 'other' are no longer unwittingly propagated bizarre oddities with an unusual taste for human blood/flesh that have been procured from some remote or unknown primordial

[13] Greta Gaard, 'Ecofeminism Revisited: Rejecting Essentialism and Re-Placing Species in a Material Feminist Environmentalism', *Feminist Formations*, 23.2 (2011), 26–53.
[14] Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', p.64.

source (although versions of strange origins do reappear in later narratives). From the 1940s onwards, plant monsters are the products of deliberate cultivation and scientific manipulation that enhances their blood-thirsty propensity. Whereas monstrous forms in Victorian Gothic narratives are perceived as *fictitious* science, Roger Luckhurst argues, British and American science fiction writing of the 1950s responded to anxieties about real-world scientific advances within their cultural and historical context.[15] As a genre, (Gothic) science fiction was closely linked to unease surrounding American modernity and subsequently responded to the nation's Cold War anxieties,[16] taking on 'a greater sense of conflict, particularly large-scale conflict', Sian MacArthur suggests, 'than it had ever done before'.[17] From a very personal murder in Mildred Johnson's 'Cactus' (1950) and the apocalyptic plant colonisation in John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) to the redemptive suicide in Roger Corman's *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960), there is certainly conflict in the plant monster narratives in this chapter. As man-made monstrosities with roots in scientific fact, anthropophagus predatory plants provide 'uncanny images of the "real world" in which they are written',[18] with their intersectionality engaging with contemporary conflicting ideologies of femininity and masculinity and questioning the era's environmental ethics.

With science and technology making significant advances throughout the Second World War and the nuclear arms threat of the Cold War, it is easy to see the Gothic tendencies of science fiction of the 1950s as reflecting real-world anxieties. Emerging 'as a hybrid form in the nineteenth century', science fiction has continued to interweave 'strands of Gothic, Realist, fantasy and utopian writing' through its focus on 'the encounter with the other'.[19] For Fred Botting, this is a speculative 'other', embodied in the gothic monster as something contradictory or alien that sees the fears of the past (or present) projected onto the future.[20] Sian MacArthur also claims 'the period between the late 1940s and the late 1960s produced a huge variety in science fiction writing, much of it with distinct Gothic trace', and charts the shift from Gothic towards science fiction in the 1940s, that morphs

[15] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*.
[16] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, pp.123-124.
[17] MacArthur, *Gothic Science fiction*, p.15.
[18] Heiland, *Gothic and Gender*, p.164.
[19] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, pp. 11, 15.
[20] Botting, *Gothic Romanced*.

into Gothic Science Fiction from the 1950s onwards.[21] Otherness and monstrosity conjoin Gothic and Science Fiction, Sara Wasson and Emily Alder argue, to form 'a hybrid category' reflecting a 'wide range of ideologies' that provide commentary on their socio-historical contexts.[22] Following on from the Gernsback era of pulp-fiction magazines such as *Weird Tales* (1923-1954, 1988-) and *Amazing Stories* (1926-2005), both of which also included science fiction stories, the plethora of publications largely devoted to science fiction evidences the popularity of the genre. Writers from Britain and America contributed to this phenomenon, in publications such as the *Wonder Stories* series (1929-1955), *Galaxy Science Fiction* (1950-1980), *Science-Fiction Plus* (1953) and *Satellite Science Fiction* (1956-1959),[23] and although authors and readers of these magazines were from both sides of the Atlantic, the genre's popularity was closely linked to American cultural anxieties making science fiction less palatable as a genre in Western Europe. According to Martin Halliwell, while 'the spread of American culture across the Atlantic' helped halt the iron curtain from moving across Europe, 'anti-American sentiments … were rife'.[24] Although some well-known British authors (Arthur C. Clarke, John Wyndham, H.G. Wells and Brian W. Aldiss among others), produced short story contributions to American science fiction magazines, in post-war Britain, 'the more indigenous form of fantasy' prevailed.[25] This is apparent in the British pulp magazines containing tales of weird worlds and fantastic futures that competed alongside the American publications. *New Worlds* (1936-1971) and its companion magazine, *Science Fantasy* (1950-1967) reflect the particular fusion of 'fantasy, Gothic and SF elements' in British writing of the post-war-1950s that 'refracted meditations on their historical moment'.[26] Even Wyndham declared his novels to be a form of '"logical fantasy"', renamed '"cosy catastrophe[s]" by fellow British SF writer Brian Aldiss'.[27] Plant monster narratives, particularly those of *cultivated* vegetable monstrosity, find a home within the cross-over genre of Gothic Science Fiction.

[21] MacArthur, *Gothic Science Fiction*, p.15.
[22] Sara Wasson and Emily Alder, *Gothic Science Fiction 1980-2010* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp.5 and 16.
[23] MacArthur, *Gothic Science Fiction*, p.13; Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p.122.
[24] Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, p.29.
[25] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, pp.123-124.
[26] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p. 124.
[27] Barry Langford, 'Introduction', in John Wyndham (1951), *The Day of the Triffids* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1999), pp.i-xvii (p.viii).

Against a backdrop of scientific advances visible through the nuclear arms race, space exploration, medical advances and technological competition between the most powerful nations, mad scientist fiction reflects the 'sentiment of fear that dominated the mid-twentieth century'.[28] Cold War anxieties and the threat of nuclear annihilation together with the anti-communist paranoia of the fifties in McCarthyite America where few 'dared to speak freely', underpinned a nostalgically-remembered decade of 'economic security, affluence, social cohesion and the benign technical transformation of everyday life'.[29] Despite affordable technology (the motorcar and household appliances) and other beneficial scientific improvements, their development on the back of military-funded projects provoked 'widespread suspicion' of intellectuals as well as wariness of corporate and industrial intentions.[30] Together with tension over increased activism of the civil rights and women's movements meant 'the 1950s were met not only with excitement but also with a great deal of anxiety'.[31] Within this melting pot of conflict, the gardener is depicted as mad botanist – a nefarious scientific figure who is deemed as monstrous as the anthropophagus plants he creates.

Nineteenth-century scientists such as Victor Frankenstein and Henry Jekyll were depicted as arrogant and ambitious, wanting 'to be the first in the field', which causes them to operate 'outside of the normal expectations of society', becoming 'more and more absorbed with [their] scientific research and experiments'.[32] Although this 'temperamental and destructive personality' was equally visible in the male botanist/gardeners of Chapter 2, the mad scientist that emerged in the 1950s was 'one of real social nightmare.'[33] In a reflection of real-life science, the gardeners of this period truly believe they can manipulate and control nature to enhance their fame, and more importantly, their fortune. These underlying characteristics continue to be portrayed, as later chapters assert, throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The megalomaniac gardener as mad scientist, in cultivating carnivorous varieties of plant species for personal gain with inevitable

[28] MacArthur, *Gothic Science Fiction*, p.41.
[29] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p.109.
[30] Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, p.18.
[31] Susan A. George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films: Invaders from the Suburbs* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.1.
[32] MacArthur, *Gothic Science Fiction*, pp.27-28.
[33] MacArthur, *Gothic Science Fiction*, pp.27, 31.

consequences that threaten humanity, draws on interpretations of the gothic villain. According to Anne Stiles, the trope of the mad scientist is rooted in late-Victorian discussions of genius and insanity, and is a vehicle for discussing ideas 'such as the nature of the soul, the possibility of free will, and the ramifications of biological determinism.'[34] Because they are generally cast as men, feminist critics have long attributed the trope to phallocentric arrogance and hubris to them, although like all monsters, the mad scientist figure is culturally relevant for its own contemporary context. This was a time of anti-establishment, with public demonstrations that challenged military-funded and corporate-controlled technological and scientific progress, but they also called for protection of freedoms established in previous decades, that political power now sought to curb. So too, the constant threat of nuclear war between the two emerging superpowers reflected a 'very real belief and understanding that actually *man* is very much a creature to be feared and absolutely capable of destruction on a massive scale' (my emphasis).[35] While MacArthur uses the term 'man' to mean 'human', it is a subconscious acknowledgement that within Western dichotomous thinking the male gendered term is pivotal to understanding the patriarchal-infused power tussles of the mid-twentieth century. Gardening scientists need to be considered, then, against the backdrop of post-War, Cold War, and contradictory attitudes to gender.

Although 'it is difficult to evade the shadow of the Cold War', reading it 'into all cultural products of the 1950s … can be a reductive exercise', suggests Halliwell, hence a gender-nature intersectionality may better reflect 'the transition from inward-looking conservatism of the 1950s to the political activism of the mid-1960s'.[36] While the 1950s focused on embedding conformity and consumerism through modernised household ideals, counterculture and liberalisation of the 1960s instilled institutional panic and attempts to constrain hard-won freedoms,[37] creating a period of cultural contradictions. The conformity of suburban developments in the U.S. during the late 1940s and 1950s attempted to re-introduce conservative gender attitudes of wife and mother as home-

[34] Anne Stiles, 'Literature in "Mind": H. G. Wells and the Evolution of the Mad Scientist', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 70.2 (2009), 317–339 (p.320).
[35] MacArthur, *Gothic Science Fiction*, p.31.
[36] Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, p.3.
[37] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, pp.109 and 141.

maker and husband as the bread-winner. Britain, too, had experienced a similar move, although according to Catriona Beaumont, 'the impact of paid work on married women', their 'role as wives and mothers, and … as democratic citizens' were popular 'topics for discussion during the 1950s'.[38] Both sides of the Atlantic experienced gender instability as desires to reassert traditional cis-gender roles competed with post-war ideas of shared gender responsibilities, economic independence and sexual freedoms that required a re-definition of gender identity constructs.[39] Unease in the public imagination about the effects of scientific progress on the natural world and changing gender identity and roles are found in the gothic rhetoric of the cultivated plant monsters' behaviour, providing a cultural metaphor for the period's intense sense of conflict.

3.2. House Plant Monsters: Killer Cacti and the Gender Identity Struggle

By the 1950s Science Fiction/Weird tales had entered American mass culture, with many pulp magazines publishing stories critiquing the contradictory socio-political landscape and the suburbanite conformity convening around American welfare capitalism.[40] These suburban anxieties are seated in Betty Friedan's argument that the 'feminine mystique' concept of the fifties imposed domesticity on American women by suggesting that while 'femininity …is no way inferior to the nature of man', women needed to stop emulating or envying men and be 'accepting of their own nature, which can find fulfilment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love.'[41] This feminine mystique model, Friedan argues, simply produced frustrated, unhappy and unfulfilled suburban housewives by demonizing the modern career woman, which often resulted in a sense of conflicting identity and relationships.[42] While women may have been shunned from actual scientific professions, the arena of science *fiction*, despite its predominantly male reader- and author-ship, was particularly open to female writers,

[38] Caitríona Beaumont, 'What Do Women Want? Housewives' Associations, Activism and Changing Representations of Women in the 1950s', *Women's History Review*, 26:1 (2017), 147-162 (p.149).
[39] Helen McCarthy, 'Women, Marriage and Paid Work in Post-war Britain', *Women's History Review*, 26:1 (2017), 46-61.
[40] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*.
[41] Betty Friedan, (1963), *The Feminine Mystique* (reprinted London: Penguin, 1992), p.38.
[42] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.

although 'women remained a distinct minority' in the field.[43] One of the few feminist plant monster stories within this study, Mildred Johnson's 'Cactus' (1950),[44] underlines concerns about oscillating gender roles, patriarchal ideas of domesticity and femininity, and conflicting attitudes to and about the modern career woman. Since cultural anxieties and genres are not strictly aligned to specific decades, this short story still encompasses some of the key Gothic/Weird features explored in the previous chapter: acquiring the plant monster from an exotic location and inadvertently propagating an uncanny vegetal being. Nevertheless, it clearly reflects post-war attitudes to gender with the conventions of Gothic taking precedence over those of science fiction. Although not anthropophagus, Johnson's demonic plant monster displays aggression that is male-gendered, and like Daubeny's vampire tree in 'The Sumach' (1919) acts as a subversive character that destabilises patriarchally-accepted gender assignation through the human-nonhuman interactions.

The gendered similarity of cactus and tree as male is no coincidence when considering Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory.[45] Both these plants have root systems which Deleuze and Guattari equate with Western patriarchal hierarchies and ideologies, although with an uncanny gothic resonance, the real-world cactus, according to Dan Torre, is 'very "open" to hybridization',[46] making it a suitable plant for engaging with gender and sexual identities through gender-nature intersectionality. The ambiguous gendering of human and non-human characters in Johnson's tale reflects the era's struggle to reassert patriarchal values of femininity whilst redefining masculinity within a revised domestic setting. For Susan A. George, conflicting gender ideologies are linked to American suburban conformity and what she refers to as an extension of the nation's containment strategy, arguing that the pressure for women to conform to traditional domestic roles also coincided with 'new standards and values that were redefining masculinity' creating a growing tension 'between the values of individualism and the values of cooperation and

[43] Between 1926 and 1960, according to Eric Leif Davin, *Partners in Wonder: Women and the Birth of Science Fiction, 1926-1965* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), '*203 different women authors – identifiable as women* [i.e. not using a male pseudonym] – *published almost 1,000 stories in the science fiction magazines*' (italics in original), and moreover, 'women continue to be a comparable minority in the field currently', pp.5 and 64.

[44] Mildred Johnson, 'Cactus' (1950), in *Arboris Mysterius: Stories of the Uncanny and Undescribed from the Botanical Kingdom*, ed. by Chad Arment (Greenville, Ohio: Coachwhip Publications, 2014), pp.298-308.

[45] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

[46] Dan Torre, *Cactus* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), p.19.

conformity'.[47] In 1950s Britain too, Helen McCarthy notes, there was 'a gradual but unmistakeable shift away from rigidly segregated and unequal conjugal roles and towards a more egalitarian model in which spouses pulled together as partners'.[48] Unlike the U.S., as Melanie Bell has argued, 'there was a sharp contrast between the official descriptions of women's lives as wives and mothers within the companionate marriage and nuclear family, and the reality of increasing numbers of married women in the workforce'.[49] As an American author, Johnson's tale underlines a 'tyranny of sameness in suburban environments' together with 'behavioural conformity' that conflicted with notions of free society and individualism.[50] The suburban setting invokes an era of contradictions in American culture, yet contextualises anxieties experienced on both sides of the Atlantic.

The eco-monsters explored in this chapter take root in the more domestic settings of the backyard, porch or window-ledge, seen as liminal domestic spaces in popular culture, underlining what Bernice M. Murphy terms 'Suburban Gothic'.[51] Like Victorian Gothic, Murphy argues 'there is a dark and terrifying underside to the suburban experience in the United States' that 'exploit[s] a closely interrelated set of contradictory attitudes'.[52] Setting the suburban dream versus the suburban nightmare, the gendered monster 'reflects the fear that the rapid change in lifestyles and modes of living which took place in the 1950s and early 1960s caused'.[53] Johnson's monstrous cactus story engages with the contradictory attitudes to gender that the suburbs reflected and although not instilled with cravings for human flesh, introduces the developing trend in the plant monster as a sentient, agentic being – one with murderous propensity. As material ecofeminist Serenella Iovino has argued, '[t]here is a strong, deep, and complex interrelation between the agency of natural forces and the agency of cultural practices',[54] and the determined actions of the

[47] George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films*, p.12.
[48] McCarthy, 'Women, Marriage and Paid Work in Post-war Britain', p.47.
[49] Melanie Bell, '"A prize collection of familiar feminine types" – The female group film in 1950s British cinema', in *British Women's Cinema*, ed. by Melanie Bell and Melanie Williams (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), pp.94-110 (p.96).
[50] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p.109.
[51] Bernice M. Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[52] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture*, pp.3, 11.
[53] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture*, pp.2-4.
[54] Iovino, 'Bodies of Naples', p.106.

plant monsters in this and other texts exaggerate nature's agency to create uncanny protagonists that challenge contemporary cultural concepts of gender performance.

The story introduces cactus aficionado and club member, Edith Porter, who receives a 'tenderly' wrapped package from her old friend, Abby Burden, that contains 'a small prickly object'.[55] The 'brown and shriveled' (sic), 'lifeless' cactus cutting, which Abby and her husband, Robert, took from a desert crater in Mexico when on holiday, immediately secures its grip on life once potted and watered.[56] The gothic connotations of the revenant imbue the cactus with contemporary perspectives on re-asserting patriarchally-inflected gender roles. Edith, a childless widow we infer, lives alone with her cactus collection as a surrogate family. Several bizarre events surrounding the cactus cause Edith to fear and loathe it to the point of disposing of it. However, in a twist of fate, it is the cactus who finally disposes of Edith.

Johnson's choice of plant monster is itself an ideal symbol of the 1950s, for as Dan Torre elaborates, '[c]acti are full of contradictions'; they are 'both familiar and alien, … beautiful and menacing' and are either loved or hated.[57] Leafless, covered in spines, oddly shaped forms, these are not the plants of Romantic association with femininity, yet, many surprisingly produce some of the most fascinating and spectacular floral displays,[58] adding another gothic convention and aspect of Freud's uncanny. Echoing Betty Friedan, Jennifer L. Barker and Kirstin Ellsworth suggest, 'the dilemma most American women faced in the 1950s, [was] the need to project an ideal image of themselves, [while] suffering inside for its lack of coherence to reality',[59] and the cactus embodies this gender duality. Abby Burden's letter equally mirrors the contradictory perspectives of the decade as it is 'typewritten with hand interlineations and annotations crawling about the pages and into the margins'.[60] Here Friedan's notion of women's internal conflict with their expected role is alluded to through the conformity of the typescript in contrast with the handwritten afterthoughts. Johnson precipitates the gothic nature of the exotic cactus through Abby's

[55] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.298.
[56] Johnson, 'Cactus', p. 300.
[57] Torre, *Cactus*, p.1.
[58] Torre, *Cactus*, pp.89-90.
[59] Jennifer L. Barker and Kirsten Ellsworth, 'Introduction: Women Inventing the 1950s', *Women's Studies*, 40.8 (2011), 969-973.
[60] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.298.

fragmented narrative, while Edith's own struggle to conform to the ideals of the feminine mystique of the fifties is reflected in her having to 'turn it [the letter] upside down and endways and trail sentences for sheets before capturing the sense' of how Abby has acquired the specimen.[61]

There are some elements to this story that resonate with its predecessors, particularly Wells' 'Flowering of the Strange Orchid'. For example, the cactus is a specimen discovered in a remote area of a foreign land (Mexico) and has been brought back to a civilised (American) household to be propagated by a gardener with unwitting knowledge of the havoc it will wreak. In the same way Winter-Wedderburn tended his orchid with hopes of 'something extraordinary',[62] Edith intends 'the infant was going to be a prodigy' with a planned 'star appearance at the horticultural show', as 'friends admired it and, at club meetings, inquired about its health as they would about a child's'.[63] Here the gardener is portrayed as a devoted and proud mother, an image of conservative feminine ideology promoted by Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg's (1942) influential studies that suggested 'working mothers were responsible for juvenile delinquency, school difficulties or emotional disturbance in their children'.[64] In contrast to these ideas and underlining conflicting attitudes towards such justifications of biological determinism, despite her attentions, Edith's 'infant' becomes responsible for her death.

Most likely the club meetings that Edith Porter refers to is a branch of The Cactus and Succulent Society of America (CSSA), since these societies 'hold cactus and succulent shows and competitions … of spectacular plant specimens … to educate the public'.[65] Founded in 1929, CSSA and its British branch (founded in 1932) both indicate a revitalised interest after World War II with current memberships in the thousands.[66] Perhaps because they are easy to maintain and display, 'people have in fact been collecting them for centuries'.[67] Cacti are also easily cultivated, 'with approximately 1,500 unique species' and

[61] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.298.
[62] Wells, 'Flowering of the Strange Orchid', p.68.
[63] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.300; Professor Jonkin also treated his pitcher plant as if it were a child.
[64] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, p.171.
[65] Torre, *Cactus*, p.194.
[66] The Cactus and Succulent Society of America, *cssainc.org* or *cactusandsucculentsociety.org* [n.d.] [accessed 8 April 2018]; The British Cactus and Succulent Society, *society.bcss.org.uk* [n.d.] [accessed 8 April 2018].
[67] Torre, *Cactus*, p.176.

like the orchid, 'countless hybrids, mutations and variations',[68] making it an ideal plant to engage with non-conforming gender identity construction of the 1950s. Ironically, while public perception of cacti collecting is considered principally a male pastime,[69] the main driving force behind the British Society (affiliated to the Royal Horticultural Society) was the female botanical illustrator, Vera Higgins, who was first editor of *The Cactus Journal* and subsequently President of the National Cactus and Succulent Society from 1949-62,[70] suggests otherwise. Within the context of fifties American suburban conformity Johnson's monstrous cactus and gardener challenge definitions of masculinity and femininity that mark the conflict between contemporary ideology and reality.

Previous tales resonate in Abby's description of the original plants echoing elements of the eco-*femme fatale* with its monstrous beauty and alluring scent:

> the crater 'was filled with cactus growths, marvellous, unearthly, beautiful- eight, nine, ten feet tall- gray-green giants stretching their twisted arms to the sky … blooming with dark red flowers … that gave off the strange, sweet smell'.[71]

However, in a gender reversal, it is Abby who is enamoured by the 'heavy perfume' of the 'weird plants', and like Winter-Wedderburn is nearly overcome: 'my head swam'.[72] Just as his housekeeper found the orchid revolting, Abby's husband Robert is not at all fond of the cactus, likening its physical appearance and smell to a goat.[73] This is particularly poignant in reading the cultural conflict of the 1950s through the gender of the monstrous cactus. Cristóbal Macías Villalobos and Delia Macías Fuentes have outlined that 'the figure of the goat' has come to symbolise 'lust and lechery', becoming a cliché for lasciviousness, adding that the he-goat's association with sexuality is due to 'the strong odor of he-goats, mostly when mating'.[74] Hence, the 'muskiest odor' experienced by Abby hints at the masculine

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[68] Torre, *Cactus*, pp.176-8.
[69] According to an article in *The Telegraph*, '"Women don't buy cacti," said the owner of our local garden centre, with great certainty. "Boys, any age from seven up. That's where the market is. We sell any amount of cacti, but never to women."', Richard Jones, 'Cacti are making a comeback and are not just for hipsters', *The Telegraph*, 9 November 2017, Style Section. [accessed 16 February 2018].
[70] Also, a hybrid species of succulent has been named after her in honour of her editorship of CSSGB and RHS journals and her presidency of the NCSS. The two societies merged in 1982. The British Cactus and Succulent Society, History, *society.bcss.org.uk* [n.d.] [accessed 8 April 2018].
[71] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.299.
[72] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.299.
[73] Johnson, 'Cactus', pp.299 and 301.
[74] Cristóbal Macías Villalobos and Delia Macías Fuentes, 'Symbolism of the Goat and Its Presence in Picasso's Work', *Arts*, 6.2 (2017), 3-23 (pp.2-3, 6).

sexuality of the unusual cactus.[75] William D. Moore also associates the goat with American Fraternal Societies as a symbol of masculinity, arguing that 'the semiotic meaning of the [lodge] goat can be linked to transformations in American masculinity' that saw 'boisterousness, ribaldry' and 'the ability to compete roughly' the focus of fraternal male identity in response to fears of effeminacy and emasculation in the face of 'shifting gender identities and 'the new ''feminist'' construction'.[76] The cactus/goat association is evident in Edith's re-assessment of her prize plant in maturity:

> It *was* a grotesque thing, she admitted, a frame on which mental aberrations could easily be hung. Cruciform in shape, its upraised "arms" were terminated in spiked nodules, like taloned fingers; the forward-sweeping horns were truly formidable; and the withered flowers at the "head" were arranged to suggest an evil face, a demonic, leering, loathsome face, (emphasis in original).[77]

As a symbol for sexual masculinity the caprine-like cactus firmly assigns a male gender to Johnson's plant monster,[78] that as a sentient agential protagonist is used to challenge re-definitions of gender roles and behaviours.

While the female characters are mostly enticed by the cactus' perfume, Edith, like the men in this tale, is repelled by the muskiness of the unusual blooms, suggesting Edith's feminine conformity is in question. The growing tension between Edith's individualism and gender conformity are reflected in her changing relationship with the cactus as it matures. Edith privately thinks that the cactus flowers are 'unattractive, almost repellent … like sores … their odor was pungent',[79] her dislike for the plant growing more akin to Robert Burden's as both imagine they have seen 'the cactus floating along in its own emanations',[80] attributing an uncanny, supernatural agency to the plant. On learning of Robert's perceived neurosis about the cactus, Edith re-evaluates her own specimen in the porch:

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[75] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.299.
[76] William D. Moore, 'Riding the Goat: Secrecy, Masculinity, and Fraternal High Jinks in the United States, 1845–1930', *Winterthur portfolio*, 41.2-3 (2007), 161-188 (pp.181, 188).
[77] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.302.
[78] According to the *Encyclopaedia of Occultism and Parapsychology* 'the devil was frequently represented as a goat', however, Villalobos and Fuentes also claim that 'the caprine-like devil as a development of the classical deities related to fertility in the plant and animal worlds,' In addition, 'the image of a he-goat' could be found frequently 'at the center of the [witches'] coven' in Western art reflecting patriarchal attitudes to women through a suggestive gendering of plant and human protagonists and foregrounding the evil nature of this cactus. Villalobos and Fuentes, 'Symbolism of the Goat and Its Presence in Picasso's Work', pp.6.
[79] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.301.
[80] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.301.

> In sudden revulsion she decided she must destroy it but then, remembering her promise to exhibit it at the flower show and the admiration and interest of her friends, canceled the impulse.[81]

Edith's response to the maturing cactus suggests her deviancy from the 1950's 'norm' by aligning her aversion with Robert Burden, in contrast to Abby Burden, who represents the ideology of the suburban housewife. The post-war period in the U.S. brought with it a generalised encouragement for women to leave the workforce and embrace their patriarchal roles of wife and mother, which many women found stifling. Aligning herself with Betty Friedan, Bernice Murphy suggests suburbia was 'the prison in which millions of middle-class women found themselves trapped as a result of a conspiracy to reinforce conservative domestic ideology'.[82] Alongside Mrs Ferguson (Edith's neighbour), Abby embodies the suburban feminine ideal of a nostalgic era of prosperity, particularly as both their husbands are clearly present in the tale also. Both suburban ladies are taken in by the cactus and inadvertently nurture both murderous specimens, leading to the separate deaths of Robert and Edith – neither of whom conform to the traditional gender ideals. Edith epitomizes the independent, self-sufficient, feminist subtly aligned throughout the narrative with the other male characters in attitude, response, and actions. Her decision and reasoning behind not ridding herself of the cactus, having committed to exhibiting it in the next horticultural show, typifies the traditionally male 'gothic villain' who places fame and fortune before all else. Moreover, Edith transfers her own gender identity anxieties onto the cactus, anthropomorphising it as 'grotesque' – a term frequently associated with the non-conforming female figure in the male imagination. All the men in this story find the cactus revolting, derogatively claiming it looks and smells like a goat, suggesting a repulsion of its masculinity within a heterosexual context and yet, unlike the other female characters who find this odour attractively musky, Edith finds the cactus sinister and repulsive.

The overt masculinity of the cactus alongside Edith's response to it subversively questions Edith's lack of femininity/conformity as a woman living alone. This is particularly evident in the sexual overtones of Edith's nightmare, similar to 'The Sumach' in Chapter 2, when Edith dreams of the cactus attacking her, its 'malevolent face close to hers', as it

[81] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.302.
[82] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*, p.9.

pinions her in a 'sickening embrace', before she awakens and imagines it stalking her amidst 'swamp miasma',[83] questioning both her sexuality and gender. Heavily suggestive of the supernatural, the demonic cactus reflects 'an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability'.[84] Like the ambiguous gendering of both human and plant protagonists, it is unclear whether this sexualised encounter is imagined or real, enhancing the gothic effect of this story even as it underlines conflicting attitudes towards gender in an era of conformity. The suggested male sexual domination within this dream sequence clearly projects socio-cultural fears of conservative patriarchal tradition onto the cactus by characters that stretch the boundaries of gender roles and sexual orientation. The interaction of human and cactus further discombobulates the issue of gender throughout this narrative. Both Abby and Edith feminise Robert Burden's dislike of the cactus; Abby claims, '[h]e was positively silly' when he says he has seen it move, while Edith has 'always thought him neurotic' and refers to his concerns about the cactus as 'Robert Burden's vaporings'.[85] Such language has been patriarchally reserved for derogatively describing women. Conversely, Edith describes herself in traditionally masculine tone: she is 'middle-aged, matter-of-fact, a professed scoffer at all superstition'.[86] This reattributing of masculine and feminine associations to Robert and Edith seems significant since it is the modern-gendered Robert and Edith who feel threatened and are eventually killed by the cacti engaging with contemporary contradictions about gender roles and performance. In his analysis for 'Stories from the Borderland', Scott Nicolay suggests that the weird nuances surrounding the cacti's (un)earthly origins and the odour 'irresistible to human women' and 'repugnant to their men' is Johnson's 'deliberate effort to share a female perspective and a feminine critique', however, these nuances are more than 'a natural byproduct of her gender lens'.[87] What Nicolay omits in his brief review is the tale's subtle engagement with gender concerns of its time, as underlined by the characters. That Johnson 'transposed [the weird plant] from a man-eating vegetable in some exotic jungle location to a simple cactus

[83] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.302.
[84] Barbara Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', *Screen*, 27.1 (1986), 44–71 (p.49).
[85] Johnson, 'Cactus', pp.299, 302, 303.
[86] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.303.
[87] Scott Nicolay, 'Stories from the Borderland #11: "The Cactus" by Mildred Johnson', *scottnicolay.com,* June 2016 [accessed 7 January 2018].

in a domestic setting' to contextualise a feminist discussion is certainly true,[88] but it is the cacti's discerning choice of victims that highlights the contemporary contradictions between traditional and modern views on gender roles and performance. It is Mr Krakaur, Edith's handyman, who brings the cacti's representation of conservative views on gender into focus. Krakaur, like Robert, also finds the cactus repugnant, but Krakaur is a patriarchal male character: he 'fancied himself something of a misogynist',[89] and is never in danger or under threat from the cactus, even when he, like Robert, is tasked with disposing of it. Like Abby, Krakaur represents the patriarchally-constructed gender of the pre-War period that conservative 1950 ideology wished to re-establish. Conversely, Robert and Edith display more liberal perspectives on gender roles – ones which the cacti target and kill.

This 1950 killer plant also marks a significant shift in trend for the plant monster in terms of sentience and mobility. English philosopher Jeremy Bentham argued in 1781 that consciousness (reason, decision-making and moral judgement) was closely linked to intentionality in relation to pleasure and pain,[90] and together with Charles Darwin's theories of inter-species communication and expression in animals,[91] has been used in animal studies to establish sentience in non-human animals as the ability to feel as individuals.[92] Although recent research by plant neurobiologists, Stefano Mancuso and Alessandra Viola, have shed more light on ideas of sentient plant-life,[93] in 1950, such ideas existed purely in the minds of speculative fiction writers who employed sentience in nature anthropomorphically as a monstrous threat to humanity and/or social constructs. Johnson's cacti exude sentience in deliberately targeting their murder victims. Abby Burden firmly believes the cactus 'killed him [Robert] deliberately' and certainly a recount of the incident empowers the cactus with conscious deliberation and intent.[94] Robert, who:

> wanted to get rid of it quickly and couldn't wait for the trash collection … set it afire and stood there watching it burn. … then all of a sudden it broke in the

[88] Scott Nicolay, 'Stories from the Borderland #11'.
[89] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.306.
[90] Jeremy Bentham (1781), *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Kitchener, CA: Batoche Books, 2000).
[91] Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872).
[92] Donald M. Broom, *Sentience and Animal Welfare* (Wallingford: CABI, 2014).
[93] Mancuso and Viola, *Brilliant Green*.
[94] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.303.

> middle and the top half flew at him, all ablaze, and landed on him- and it clung to him.[95]

These sentient actions recur later when Edith too, is subsequently found 'lying there with those spikes in her throat' suggesting the cactus, revived by Mrs Ferguson, has purposefully attacked her.[96] Johnson anthropomorphises the plant early in the plot when Edith adopts her cacti collection as a surrogate family, further humanising it in her dream and empowering it with mobility. The lingering goat-like odour of the cactus-flowers triggers Edith to imagine 'the cactus itself had passed her open door', while Robert Burden also believes 'he had caught a glimpse of the cactus floating along in its own emanations like a jellyfish in an ocean current'.[97] In killing those humans who stretch the boundaries of patriarchally-constructed gender norms, the cactus not only 'dramatize[s] nature as an active, purposeful force' to threaten mankind, but equally 'disrupt[s] the boundaries between [humans and nonhumans] … culture and nature'.[98] Such vengeful agency allows the cactus to be equated in monster terms with human serial killers, further dissolving the distinction between human and non-human nature.

The domestic setting provides a further uncanny aspect as the home is supposed to be a place of safety, where a person can be themselves without fear of retribution, yet Edith feels threatened by the cactus enough to leave her home for several months before believing it safe to return. Even with the ghostly appearance of Edith's late husband, Ted, as a protective warning against the cactus attacks, this domestic space reflects what Lynette Carpenter and Wendy Kolmar see as a place of 'patriarchal oppression … a place where privacy ensures not protection but the invisibility of domestic crime'.[99] Unlike the male-dominated space of the greenhouse as laboratory, Edith's cactus collection is kept in the porch – an add-on area attached to the house bridging the gap between house and garden; a border zone of culture and nature. Being neither inside nor outside, porches and conservatories are ambiguous female domestic spaces, particularly within an American

[95] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.304.
[96] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.308.
[97] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.301.
[98] Stacy Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures: Monstrous Natures in Recent Films' in *Beyond Nature Writing – Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, ed. by Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), pp.279-296 (p.293).
[99] Lynette Carpenter and Wendy Kolmar, (1998), 'Introduction', *Ghost Stories by British and American Women: A Selected, Annotated Bibliography* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp.xi-xli (p.xxvii).

suburban context where the porch often refers to the elevated covered decking along the outside walls. 'By the 1920s', Thomas Durant Visser outlines, 'symbolic connections between the porch and concepts of home and individuality were being recognized … as liminal places that straddled the realms of privacy and community', becoming enclosed glazed spaces by the mid-twentieth century.[100] In her essay exploring the American porch as a gendered spatial metaphor, Sue Bidwell Beckham argues the porch was 'betwixt and between absolute private and absolute public', a 'liminal space' where social, racial, class and gender boundaries could be broken down and women could be themselves.[101] Like Edith's porch, 'back porches, with their suggestion of privacy and even secrecy', challenge fictional characters to confront their own ambiguities.[102] As a semi-open, in-between area, it similarly draws parallels with Bernice M. Murphy's Suburban Gothic, described as 'an in-between space by definition: located beyond the heart of a town or city, yet still existing within its urban orbit', which 'became symbolic of what they perceived to be the most oppressive aspects of 1950s life – sameness, blandness and materialism'.[103] The suburban garden too, Emma R. Power surmises, is 'a human/cultural construction that is shaped by contrasting notions of social distinction and social conformity',[104] while 'the suburban lawn became the symbol of American affluence, comfort, and security', according to Jill E. Anderson.[105] Often depicted as uniform, white-picket fenced, pristine-lawned spaces, gardens are where cultivated order, Heholt concludes, is asserted and maintained within imagined domestic boundaries.[106] Situating the killer cactus within the liminal space of the porch, Johnson's plant monster challenges the cultural reimagining of gender behaviours

[100] Thomas Durant Visser, *Porches of North America* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2012), pp.56-7.
[101] Sue Bidwell Beckham, 'The American Front Porch: Women's Liminal Space' (1988) reprinted in Carol Delaney with Deborah Kaspin, *Investigating Culture: An Experiential Introduction to Anthropology* (John Wiley and Sons, Incorporated, 2011), pp.68-78 (p.72).
[102] Beckham, 'The American Front Porch: Women's Liminal Space', p.74.
[103] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*, pp.5, 7.
[104] Emma R. Power, 'Human–Nature Relations in Suburban Gardens', *Australian Geographer*, 36.1 (2005), 39-53 (p.41).
[105] Jill E. Anderson, 'The Revenge of the Lawn: The Awful Agency of Uncontained Plant Life in Ward Moore's *Greener Than You Think* and Thomas Disch's *The Genocides*' in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, ed. By Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.129-144 (p.129).
[106] Heholt, '"That which roars further out"', pp.82-98.

along social rather than biological stereotyping that was emerging during the period.[107] Although '[g]ender identity was being widely questioned' at this time, Martin Halliwell notes, '[i]f masculinity was contained in the early 1950s, then American women suffered even more from gender standardization'.[108] Nevertheless, the blurring of gender roles in this fifties tale is underlined by the liminal space of the porch, with the grotesque nature of the cactus confronting non-conforming masculine and feminine performance.

Gender dynamics, Stacy Alaimo argues, are often apparent in establishing a monstrous nature through the othering of the female body,[109] yet the cactus in Johnson's tale is overtly male, contradicting the Gothic tradition of aligning monsters, plants, and nature with women. As Sarah Gleeson-White points out, hybrid (grotesque) figures that are neither distinctly male nor wholly feminine defy proper gender assignment and identification, conjuring up unease in a conservative society through a grotesque form that challenges configurations of identity.[110] Masculine descriptions of the eco-*femme fatale* are reconfigured in the deterministic violence of Johnson's cactus, with its seductive attractions reserved for the conformist female human characters, while its victims are those humans of either gender who do not conform to the patriarchal ideal. Although '[w]omen, it seems, must serve as the border zone between nature and culture, keeping nature safely at bay in order that men can be fully human',[111] Johnson's grotesque male-gendered cactus destabilises patriarchal norms of suburban conformity in highlighting conflicting notions of femininity and masculinity of the 1950s.

In the end, Edith must conform to patriarchal notions of femininity. After the strange death of Robert Burden, Edith decides to throw her cactus in the trash. Shortly afterwards, noticing a thickening mist and 'foul stink' of goat, Edith runs in fear to her neighbour's house.[112] There, Edith's internal gender identity battle is evident when she

[107] Writing in 1958, Daniel G. Brown, a clinical psychologist who wrote several books in the late 1950s and early 1960s on sex-role development and preferences, noted that 'there has been considerable change in the direction of both masculine and feminine roles becoming broader, less rigidly defined, less sex-typed, and more overlapping with each other'. Daniel G. Brown, 'Sex-Role Development in a Changing Culture', *Psychological Bulletin*, 55.4 (1958), 232-42, p.239.
[108] Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, pp.41, 43.
[109] Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p.281.
[110] Gleeson-White, 'Revisiting the Southern Grotesque'.
[111] Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p.283.
[112] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.305.

acknowledges that '[i]t was difficult to confess her fear of staying alone, but she had to do it',[113] submitting further to female expectations when she tells Krakaur, '[y]ou know how we women get nervous at times', standing 'fearfully in the kitchen' while he puts out the trash.[114] Nor does she contradict Mrs Ferguson when she suggests Edith has gone 'into a nervous breakdown'.[115] Returning from her holiday more like her old (masculinised) self, she ignores Ted's ghostly warning and is fatally wounded by the new demon cactus revived by Mrs Ferguson. Although in ecohorror films, 'patriarchal order is magically re-established once [the] unruly female nature is slain',[116] Johnson's tale skilfully reflects the gender concerns of the fifties in a reworking that empowers the masculinised plant within a domestic setting to slay the unruly female human. As a tale that heralds the new decade of the post-war era, 'Cactus' embraces a Gothic/Weird legacy. Deep-rooted gender associations of plants in the Western popular imagination subvert the American ideology of suburban conformity with its hyper-controlled green spaces and expected behaviours of femininity and masculinity through the liminal space of the porch. Johnson's feminist perspective uses the physical and imagined interactions of human and plant to signify the growing ambiguity about sexuality that changing gender roles underlined.

3.3. Masculinity in Crisis: Domesticated Gardeners and 'Becoming Plant'

This section focuses on masculinity in crisis and explores how 'new standards and values that were redefining masculinity in the atomic age' underlined contemporary fears of effeminacy,[117] seen through gendered carnivorous plant monsters in both a British short story, Arthur C. Clarke's 'The Reluctant Orchid' (1956), and Roger Corman's American film, *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960). Conflicting ideas about rigidly defined gender identity and the steadily broadening male/female roles became more apparent in fiction by the mid-1950s, with concerns 'that masculine identity was in crisis' necessitating 'a reassertion of traditional feminine modesty' in the face of ostentatious female sexuality in Hollywood.[118]

[113] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.305.
[114] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.306.
[115] Johnson, 'Cactus', p.307.
[116] Alaimo, 'Discomforting Creatures', p.282.
[117] George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films,* p.12.
[118] Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, pp.41-42.

The horror and science fiction genres 'were often permitted a certain amount of license within the confines of Hollywood's new conservatism', their B-movie status allowing them 'to slip by the censors unnoticed', meaning they became rare platforms 'where cultural, political, and social issues were examined, promoted, or challenged',[119] such as in Corman's film. In the following tales, the gardeners' attempts to conform to gender classification result in a becoming-plant (monster) that challenges rigid definitions as species, gender and corporeal boundaries are transgressed. Displaying the multi-dimensional character of the mad scientist (male) figure 'troubled by personal issues that motivate him to pursue his scientific interests' until he becomes 'incapable of seeing the dangers and risks that his research poses',[120] these gothic gardeners and their vegetal counterparts implode the natural/cultural dichotomy through gender identity, reflecting the work of material ecofeminists who, according to Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, 'explore the interactions of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the "environment," without privileging any one of these elements' by examining 'the question of agency, particularly the agency of bodies and natures'.[121] Agential intra-actions are key to concepts of becoming, Karen Barad argues, where 'differential boundaries between "humans" and "nonhumans", "culture" and "nature", the "social" and the "scientific" are constituted' through a dynamic process, 'stabilized and destabilized' and reconfigured through material corporeality.[122] In these plant monster narratives, the agency with which the plants 'intra-act' with their human gardeners disturbs the differential boundaries in uncanny ways. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the assemblage, Susan Hekman champions Barad in her call for a 'feminist social ontology' which insists that material corporeality and social constructions inform each other in the conception of alternative identities that society's norms define as deviant or immoral.[123] Focusing on concepts of becoming and assemblage through agential intra-action these narratives use the plant monster to present transgressive gendering within the 'conflicting ideologies and values [that] directly affected

[119] George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films,* pp.2-3.
[120] MacArthur, *Gothic Science fiction*, p.25.
[121] Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, 'Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory', in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.1-19 (p.7).
[122] Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', p.135.
[123] Susan Hekman, 'Constructing the Ballast: An Ontology for Feminism' in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.85-119.

the construction of masculinity in the 1950s'[124]. While Bernice Murphy suggests these issues are closely linked to a Suburban Gothic tradition that 'differs in intensity' in America, it is equally significant 'in the popular culture of other Western countries (particularly Britain, Australia and Canada),[125] suggesting the plant monster engages with the contradictory gender debate on both sides of the Atlantic.

Indeed, Luckhurst has claimed that 'Clarke is the British writer who comes closest to the American model of SF',[126] allowing for any cultural differentiation. Much post-war British science fiction, Luckhurst claims, saw a revival of Wellsian disaster fiction,[127] and Miles Link has outlined how John Wyndham's writing (explored later) was clearly influenced by Wells' apocalyptic scenarios.[128] In fact, Clarke's narrative draws directly on Wells' weird tale of the previous chapter, an intertextuality that suggests a comparison can be useful in exploring the perceived influence of feminism on masculine identity. Clarke's short story cleverly satirises redefinitions of masculine identity through his effeminate gardener whose nefarious attempts to reassert traditional masculine domination result in his own 'becoming other/plant'. For Deleuze and Guattari, '[B]ecoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing', but involves a multiplicity of other agencies both human and non-human – a material realisation of the self as other.[129] Clarke's protagonist, Hercules Keating, (another) reputed cactophile and orchid collector, receives a 'shapeless root' from the Amazon that develops into an unusual orchid 'fringed by a series of eight dangling tendrils'.[130] Reminding him of Wells' 'Flowering of the Strange Orchid', Hercules locates the tale in his local library and re-reading it, he realises that he possesses a carnivorous orchid like that of Wells' protagonist. The orchid, he believes, is the perfect murder weapon for disposing of his overbearing aunt. Inevitably, things do not go according to plan and instead of attacking and consuming Aunt Henrietta as Hercules intends, the

[124] George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films,* p.14.
[125] Murphy, *The Suburban Gothic*, p.5.
[126] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p.133.
[127] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p.130.
[128] Miles Link, '"A Very Primitive Matter": John Wyndham on Catastrophe and Survival', *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies 14* (2015), 63-80.
[129] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.239.
[130] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.116.

orchid bonds with her like a domestic pet, disturbingly causing Aunt Henrietta to visit more, rather than less, often.

Despite Halliwell's claims that 'the climate of censorship made it difficult for writers to offer direct social commentary',[131] Clarke's hothouse gardener pointedly challenges the ideological notions of masculinity:

> Hercules is not the sort of name you can carry off lightly at the best of times, and when you are four foot nine and look as if you'd have to take a physical culture course before you can even become a 97-pound weakling, it is a positive embarrassment.[132]

The ironic emasculation of Hercules highlights 1950s tensions surrounding changing gender roles in attempts to redefine a modern masculinity. As Helen McCarthy outlines, 'the advent of a more family-orientated masculinity' witnessed men becoming 'gentler, domesticated, even "feminised" by this home-centredness'.[133] Modern views of masculinity conflicted with the desire to reassert pre-war traditional gender roles and the association of domesticity with femininity, which saw the modern career woman persistently presented as deviant or monstrous. Aunt Henrietta, who 'earned a living, and quite a good one, breeding dogs of various shapes and sizes', is described in stark contrast to her nephew with heavy masculine overtones: '[s]he was a massive six footer, usually wore a rather loud line in Harris tweeds, drove a Jaguar with reckless skill, and chain-smoked cigars'.[134] Henrietta despises 'men as the weaker sex', and her 'booming voice and her bone-crushing handshake' do not endear her to Hercules, who has his 'own well-developed inferiority complex'.[135] Through gender role reversal in the human characters, Clarke stereotypes the fifties non-conformists with what Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik call the 'comic turn which consists entirely of spoof renderings of Gothic tropes and devices';[136] an approach used equally effectively, as discussed later, in both *The Little Shop of Horrors* directed by Roger Corman (1960), and its later adaptation (in Chapter 4) by Frank Oz

[131] Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, p.53.
[132] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.115.
[133] McCarthy, 'Women, Marriage and Paid Work in Post-war Britain', p.47.
[134] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.115.
[135] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.115.
[136] Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Gothic and the Comic Turn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.14.

(1986).[137] Henrietta is caricatured as the monstrous independent female through her perceived masculinity. Hercules dispels any sense of femininity in Henrietta when he acknowledges that '[t]here had been a time when he was terrified that she would kiss him, but he had long since realized that such effeminate vulgarity was foreign to her nature'.[138] Contrasting Friedan's mystique model of femininity aligned with the domestic, motherly roles, Henrietta clearly underlines the ambiguity between biological-assigned (natural) sex and socially-constructed (cultural) gender identity – a concept that was soon to emerge in feminist theory. The unmarried Aunt Henrietta displays both physical and behavioural male attributes having 'an avuncular-yes, avuncular is definitely the proper word-interest' in her nephew (even the narrator re-affirms the use of this male-gendered term).[139] Hercules and Henrietta unsettle gender expectations by exhibiting behaviour that contradicts their biologically-determined conduct and roles, highlighting an ambiguity to modern gender role ideology that the inter-action of plant and gardener solidifies. Hercules fantasises of Henrietta 'struggling helplessly in the grip of the [plant] monster, unable to escape from its carnivorous clutches',[140] reflecting his desire to re-establish conservative cis-gender hierarchy of the 1950s and Friedan's feminine mystique model.

It is in the figure of the gardener and his relationship with both human and non-human figures where Barad's intra-action produces an uncanny and contradictory figure. Hercules is described in effeminate terms and feminised further through the patriarchal association of women with nature as we have seen in the gothic gardeners so far. Like previous gardening protagonists, Hercules is the mad botanist/villain: the knowledgeable loner who seeks to establish his patriarchal position of power through his extraordinary botany. 'Whenever he chose, he could become the most famous orchid-grower in the world,' he understands, with his 'natural qualms' about the unusual orchid plant 'outweighed by his feeling of triumph'.[141] His 'wide reputation among the fraternity of cactophiles' has helped him build his 'rather remarkable' collection of orchids and cacti.[142]

[137] Corman, dir., *The Little Shop of Horrors*; *Little Shop of Horrors*, dir. by Frank Oz (The Geffen Company/Warner Bros., 1986).
[138] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.118-9.
[139] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.115.
[140] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.119.
[141] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.118.
[142] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.115.

Depicted as an orchid expert and established collector among his male peers with unfettered ambition, Hercules assumes the dominant male position within his greenhouse environment. However, 'all his real friends grew in pots in a humid conservatory at the bottom of his garden',[143] simultaneously positioning Hercules alongside the plants he cultivates, heightening his perceived effeminacy and opening the masculine space to the female figure.

Believing his vegetable monster can rid him of his human monster, Hercules embarks on 'a course of training' to manipulate the plant for his 'diabolical plan'.[144] Unlike Winter-Wedderburn's orchid, which was described in distinctly female terms, Clarke's vegetable monster is ambiguously gendered. Described initially as 'clutching [its first taste of meat] to its figurative bosom', this orchid is subsequently associated with masculinity through animal semantics, being referred to as a 'pet', 'creature', 'vegetable octopus' or 'beast', with 'deadly tentacles',[145] revisiting the ambiguous gendering and cephalopod imagery of Wells' orchid and other predecessors. In the previous chapter, overt female sexuality and ambition were portrayed through the *femme fatale* figure, and although still used in science fiction of the 1950s, such characters are often reformed or destroyed by the re-imposition of patriarchal gender ideals. Susan A. George has pointed out that 'changing gender roles in post-war America' provoked a 'containment strategy' through the re-established traditional nuclear suburban family that attempted to redefine femininity and masculinity creating 'a real conflict between an assumed norm' and new gender identity constructs based on companionship and cooperation.[146] To discourage career women from competing with men in the public/professional sphere, they were mocked as unfeminine and often accused of being lesbian, in an effort to revitalise domestic femininity.[147] Depicted as masculine, Henrietta appears monstrous in her apparent domination of Hercules, and despite his pride in cultivating the unusual specimen, Hercules' trepidation towards the carnivorous orchid and fear of its aggressiveness, mirrors his feelings towards the masculinised Aunt Henrietta in a particularly telling gothic doubling.

[143] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.115.
[144] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.119.
[145] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', pp.117-20.
[146] George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films,* pp.12-13.
[147] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1963), pdf version.

However, he is subsequently deemed the monster through his effeminacy and manipulation of the orchid when Henrietta accuses him of bullying the plant. Parodying the sex/gender conflict of the 1950s, the masculine Henrietta not only remains the dominant figure in the familial relationship, but she now also takes charge of the conservatory and the plant/animal hybrid, leaving Hercules 'a broken man',[148] echoing post-war America concerns about masculinity in the face of women's liberation. Women had been 'forced out of their high paying war-time jobs', yet they did not systematically return to the home as intended, but took 'lower paying "pink" collar jobs'.[149] While 'the "feminization" of the 1950s male did not apply to all men equally',[150] Clarke exaggerates the gender role reversal through the orchid whose odour pervades not just the conservatory but begins 'to creep into the house' where Hercules is now apparently confined – in feminine-like hysteria of patriarchal tradition.[151] Already positioned alongside his plants in the opening description, Hercules represents the domesticated masculinity emerging in opposition to calls for a return to pre-war gender roles. He '[sinks] into a kind of vegetable sloth' and 'every day becomes more and more like an orchid himself. A harmless variety, of course'.[152] For eco-philosopher, Michael Marder, this reflects a Western philosophical becoming-plant that perceives 'the stupor of vegetable existence' within the acknowledged 'imbroglio of the plant, the animal, and the human in us' to be 'the basest, most deplorable impassiveness' of the human.[153] In the end, the gardener 'becomes … an orchid', confirming his re-defined gender performance in a semiotic Deleuzian becoming that metaphorises both orchid and Hercules as the passive suburban housewife of Friedan's 'feminine mystique'. Karen Houle, however, proffers that '*becoming-plant* would involve our extension and ideas entering into composition with *something else'* [emphasis in original]; not just a shared experience but an in-between state.[154] Hercules is perceived as neither man nor orchid, both male and feminine, hence in becoming-plant he exists in the liminal space between nature and culture, like the orchid-creature he has cultivated. Although Hercules does not physically develop leaves and blossoms, his becoming-plant is revealed philosophically through his

[148] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.122.
[149] George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films,* p.22.
[150] George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films,* p.22.
[151] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.122.
[152] Clarke, 'The Reluctant Orchid', p.122.
[153] Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant*, p.52.
[154] Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', p.97.

passive behaviour, which is associated with both conservative femininity and plant-life. The resulting paradigm shift re-arranges the hierarchy structure from man, animal, woman and nature at the bottom, to Henrietta at the pinnacle protecting the orchid 'beast' and Hercules at the bottom of the pecking order as human vegetable. Moreover, it signals the emerging heterogeneity of gender roles in the 1950s, paving the way for changing definitions of masculinity and femininity the cultural and political rebellion amongst the younger generations of the 1960s sparked.[155]

Hercules is not the only gardener to *become-plant* within the context of 1950s gender ideologies. A few years later, director Roger Corman's comedy-horror, *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960), follows would-be horticulturalist, Seymour Krelboyne (Jonathan Hayes), who eventually becomes one of the blossoms of his anthropophagus hybrid flower in a manifestly physical becoming-plant.[156] Using concepts of gothic trans-corporeality and porosity this section explores the corporeal blurring between plant and human in *Little Shop* that challenges patriarchally-constructed dichotomies, troubling definitions of masculinity through transgressions of female-plant associations revealed through a material interaction. Set against a backdrop of an American, 1950s inner-city, financially-failing florists, the clumsy, maladjusted Seymour works as 'the clean-up boy' alongside love interest Audrey Fulquard (Jackie Joseph) and shop-owner Gravis Mushnick (Mel Welles) in Skid Row. Unlike Clarke, whose characters reflect the conflicting views on gender expectations, Corman uses characters as hyperbolic suburbanite gender constructs of conformist ideology. While Mushnick portrays the dominant male father-figure, and Audrey epitomises the suburban feminine, Seymour battles with gender definitions that were 'in a constant state of flux'.[157] Oppressed by his hypochondriac mother, dismissed as useless by his boss, unnoticed by his love interest and overlooked by the rest of society, the awkward Seymour dreams of being a famous botanist so he would be noticed and win the admiration of those around him. Working in a flower shop, Seymour reflects the period's gender role redefinitions, as botany and floristry had distinctive gender associations dating from the seventeenth century. As Sam George has demonstrated, the

[155] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*; Murphy, 'The Non-Alibi of Alien Scapes: SF and Ecocriticism', pp.263-278; Halliwell, *American Culture in the 1950s*, p.3.
[156] Corman, *The Little Shop of Horrors*.
[157] George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films*, p.22.

scientific investigation of botany was considered a male interest 'infinitely superior to fickle floristry', which alongside flower painting, was deemed more fanciful 'as a genteel accomplishment for women'.[158] Seymour, who 'loves flowers almost as much as Audrey does',[159] but also wants to pursue the masculine interest of botany, is situated within a feminised setting of a flower shop, that like the porch, is a liminal space within which the conflicted suburban male is ambiguously defined. Moreover, cut flowers, being neither living nor dead are 'denaturalized, put in the service of culture as a symbol of love, grief, or gratitude',[160] suggesting an ambivalence towards both nature and gender. Boundary transgression and gender uncertainty are persistently parodied in the Seymour/plant doubling and a subsequent becoming that manifest in a corporeal commingling. Growing a strange new plant that might save his job and gain him recognition, Seymour names it 'Audrey Junior' (after his female colleague), confounding gender-plant associations by anthropomorphising the seedling as a surrogate lovechild with the patronym 'Junior', a term generally reserved for male offspring. Just as Seymour's gender performance signifies the uncertainty of definitions and roles (with masculinity under scrutiny in popular culture) during a decade of conformity, his plant counterpart equally defies normative gender assignation.

Alongside anxieties about the expanding suburban consumerism and commodification of nature during an era that sparked the modern environmentalist movement, the gendered relationships and dynamics between humans are underlined by Seymour's plant creation throughout the film. The normative stereotypical gender roles of Corman's characters are parodied in the opening scenes. Representing the 1950s influx of immigrants to post-War America, the heavily-accented shop-owner Mushnick attempts to maintain his patriarchal authority, belittling Audrey's intelligence when he refers to the plant named after her as 'Dumb-bell Junior' to insinuate that the suburban female only needed to focus on ensuring order and tranquillity in the home. Audrey is portrayed as the classic *Good Housekeeping* female that Betty Friedan identifies as the 'self-perpetuating' image of 1950s 'truly feminine women' in American culture that promoted marriage above

[158] Sam George, *Botany, Sexuality and Women's Writing 1760-1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp.164-5.
[159] *The Little Shop of Horrors.*
[160] Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant*, p.201.

education.[161] Corman parodies this ideal female identity further through Audrey's language misuse and in her hopes for Seymour's new-found fame with Junior to provide them with enough financial security to marry and live the suburban dream. Although sharing Audrey's aspirations, Seymour embodies the 1950s tensions between the residual ideologies of masculinity as 'rugged individualist' and the 'new forms of masculinity based upon notions of companionship and cooperation within the family and workplace',[162] through his Gothic doubling. Seymour's masculine desires are manifested by the plant, even as Audrey Junior's desires for human flesh are enabled by the hapless gardener in a symbiotic relationship that results in his corporeal becoming-plant.

'Plant horror narratives', Keetley claims, 'derive much of their dread, then, from representing not only the proximity but the immanence of the "plant will," a constitutive part of the self utterly beyond the realm (and reign) of the rational, volitional self'.[163] Corman's comedy-horror hinges on this ecophobic dread through the uncanny doubling of Seymour and plant, introduced when Mushnick is encouraged by out-of-towner Burson Fouch (Dick Miller) to use Junior as a curiosity to draw in customers. The plant initially offers a reflection of Seymour's inadequacies, subsequently embodies the archetypal masculinity the gardener desires, and eventually dispels the dichotomous boundaries of human/nonhuman, culture/nature, masculine/feminine in a superimposed doubling by eating Seymour. When Seymour shows his plant to those in the shop, the flower-munching Fouch ironically observes its lack of food value: 'It looks delicious, but don't you think it's kinda stale?' overtly commodifying nature, while Audrey perceives its uncanny non-normativity in commenting, 'It's certainly different'.[164] The unhealthy-looking plant reflects Seymour's perception of his own low self-worth: 'Don't waste your pity on me, Audrey, I'm not worth it',[165] foreshadowing the symbiotic doubling in which the 'plant-will' becomes the dominant power, as Audrey declares Seymour to be 'a fine figurative of a man' (sic).[166] This is typical of the characters' misuse of terminology that not only underlines Audrey's

[161] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, pp.16, 18.
[162] James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s*, p.3 quoted in George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films*, p.13.
[163] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.19.
[164] *The Little Shop of Horrors*, [11:48-12:05].
[165] *The Little Shop of Horrors*, [13:54].
[166] *The Little Shop of Horrors*, [13:18-13:23]

lack of education, but is cleverly used to draw attention to the plant's intelligence later in the film. Seymour is indeed 'figurative', of the gender crisis that 'the new model of masculinity' caused against the ideologies of Cold War conformity.[167] Seymour has much invested in his unusual plant; his very livelihood at the florist and any residual acceptance as a functioning member of society rest on the plant's survival. Although Gary Farnell argues that it is the power to express desire through the ability to communicate that underlines the horror in killer plant narratives,[168] it is Seymour who Initially communicates vocally with the plant, attempting to understand what it needs from him. The plant makes it quite clear what it wants/needs in its reaction to the drops of Seymour's blood, cementing the gothic doubling through a materially physical connection when the gardener provides the plant with regular supplies of his blood. As the plant imbibes essence of Seymour in a trans-corporeal commingling, his vegetal double is increasingly anthropomorphised when he comments, 'there's just no accounting for *people's* tastes' [my emphasis].[169] As with its predecessors, the plant's monstrosity stems from its bloodthirsty aspect and increasing need for larger meals in the shape of human flesh that sees Seymour albeit reluctantly feeding the plant human body parts when his own blood-letting is no longer enough (see Figure 1). The plant's carnivorous desire becomes even more sinister when the plant vocalises its hunger: "Feed me!" being Junior's well-known utterance. While Junior's ability to talk initially surprises Seymour, he never reveals this unusual facet to anyone, even attempting to disguise it when the plant speaks in Audrey's presence. Although Farnell argues, it is the fear of '*monstrous* vegetal rule' [emphasis in original] that produces the real horror,[170] as the gigantic carnivorous plant matures, becomes self-aware, and dominates Seymour in an Oedipal progression, the plant's unnatural ability to voice its desire unsettles. Providing the vegetal monstrosity with a voice may seem simply a comic anthropomorphising, but a gothic trans-corporeality asserts the vegetal doubling through the absorption of Seymour's blood, allowing the plant to

[167] George, *Gendering Science Fiction Films*, p.16.
[168] Gary Farnell, 'What Do Plants Want?' in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, ed. by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.179-196.
[169] *The Little Shop of Horrors*, [16:17].
[170] Farnell, 'What Do Plants Want?', p.183.

transgress species boundaries and acquire the human ability to talk (reason, impose its will) and gender performance.

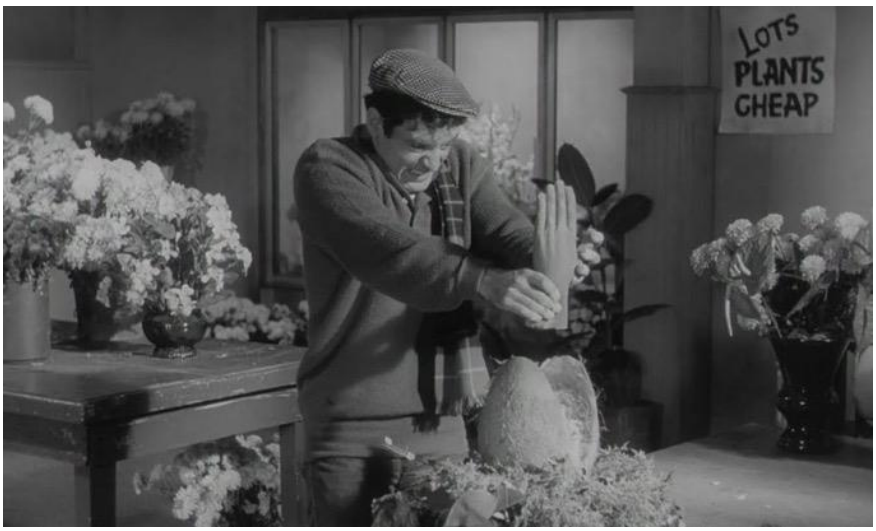

Figure 1:Seymour feeds Audrey Junior body parts.
from The Little Shop of Horrors, dir. by Roger Corman (American International Pictures, 1960).

Seymour and his symbiotic relationship to Junior: 'I've helped you and you've helped me',[171] embody contemporary masculine contradictions within a gender doubling. Seymour's popularity and acceptance within his social circle improves exponentially with the growth of Junior but not without a Faustian cost. Seymour's morality is compromised when he is required to murder (accidentally or deliberately) and feed first body parts (as in Figiure 1) and then whole corpses to the plant as 'food'. Like the botanists before him, Seymour is driven by his desire to be recognised as a 'big botanist' for inventing Junior, whose ability to talk, strangely, is revealed only to an epicene Seymour and equally non-normative Mushnick (whose masculinity is questioned when he uses the plant's carnivorous nature to save himself from an armed robber). When Seymour refuses to provide any more humans for the plant to eat, Junior hypnotises him to search for another victim asserting a masculine plant will. The human Seymour epitomizes the domesticated male, as husbands were encouraged to take a more active role in the care of family and home;[172] he takes care of his mother and as he points out to the plant:

[171] *The Little Shop of Horrors*, [1:02:25].
[172] '[I]ndications of the trend toward increasing similarity of sex roles include: … husbands doing the dishes, cleaning the house and carrying out other domestic tasks historically considered exclusively "feminine"; …', Brown, 'Sex-Role Development in a Changing Culture', p.239.

> Who fed you from a tiny little seed? Who fed you all those high-class fertilizers and stayed up all night with you when you were sick? Nobody else would have done that for you. Do you think anybody else would have brought you human beings to eat? You're darn right they wouldn't.[173]

The violence inherent in the anthropophagic Junior, however, symbolises the more traditional aspect of masculinity that eludes Seymour. Farnell asserts that '[t]here is an analogy here with the so-called "monstrous feminine"',[174] wherein Junior is ambiguously gendered through the masculinisation of female-nature associations that are key features of eco-*femmes fatales*. There are two aspects, however, to the plant's 'monstrosiness', as Audrey calls it: although named after the female character, its flesh-eating desire is markedly masculine and its commanding vocalisation for food in dominating Seymour is noticeably macho, offering a human-plant relationship of contradictory gendering that marks the re-definitions of masculinity in the 1950s.

The 'plant will' and ultimate becoming-plant that signifies the restitution of a modern masculinity is offered at the end of the film where Seymour himself becomes the plant's final meal. The narcissistic plant exposes Seymour as a murderer to the police when it blooms the faces of its 'food'. Having already been rejected by Audrey as weird when he tries to cover up the plant's ability to talk, the plant's revelation also causes the ambivalently named 'Society of Silent Flower Observers of Southern California' (are the observers or the flowers silent?) to withdraw their horticultural accolade on Seymour, Junior has effectively 'ruined [his] whole life'.[175] In what Seymour deems to be his determined (masculine) attempt to destroy the plant, he voluntarily steps into its maw, knife in hand. In the closing frames, a final blossom opens in front of the core characters to reveal Seymour's face, his parting words issued by the plant those of Seymour's constant whining apology, 'I didn't mean it'.[176] In a gothic becoming-plant that not only physicalises the material human-nature entanglements but confirms the gothic doubling, Seymour's corporeal transformation into the plant's flower suggests that neither he nor the plant are able or willing to conform to suburban gender expectations. Although Junior is 'unspecifiable' both in terms of genus and gender, 'the flower' Michael Marder observes,

[173] *The Little Shop of Horrors*, [1:02:10-2].
[174] Farnell, 'What Do Plants Want?', p.183.
[175] *The Little Shop of Horrors*, [1:13:36].
[176] *The Little Shop of Horrors.*

'evokes phallogocentrism as well as its obverse', hence Junior can also be read as female since 'repressed femininity has always been at the bosom of phallogocentrism' in Western thought.[177] In becoming-plant, Seymour further underlines the contemporary conflicting gender ideologies through a liminality expressed throughout the film. Seymour's plant does not simply challenge the divide between nature and nurture that provides the horror, but in fact, raises concern that the 'rational' (the scientific, the human) is destroying the 'natural'. As a cultivated Butterworth-Venus Flytrap hybrid, Junior emphasises the very real ambiguity of plants that are at once natural and artificial, given the 'countless generations of humanly controlled hybridization, grafting, and cultivation', placing them 'at the epicenter of the unavoidable cross-contamination of nature and culture',[178] amplified by Seymour's becoming-plant.

3.4. Beware Plant Power: Fears of Feminising the Male Gardener

In her article 'New Directions for Ecofeminism', Greta Gaard calls for ecofeminism to 'explore the ways that a feminist relational identity is developed in conjunction with connections not just to humans but also to *place, plants*, and species alike' (my emphasis),[179] precisely the focus throughout the current study. Although Kings also points out that '[e]cofeminist analysis which focuses only on gender as a significant mode of oppression severely limits our understanding of the other multiple intersecting factors',[180] to read nature without a gender association consigns the monstrous plant as other to the compost heap. Rather, the move towards reading gender as a way of understanding traditional attitudes of oppression in general through material interconnections with our environment provides an alternative perspective on the significance of plant monsters. This section will show that the plant monsters of this era portray ambiguous and porous notions of 'other' identities through gender anthropomorphism that challenge the patriarchal ideals of conformity of the 1950s and embrace the liberalisation of individualism of the 1960s. Focusing on the iconic plant monsters themselves from this period: Junior from *The Little Shop of Horrors*, and the triffids from John Wyndham's eponymous novel, *The Day of*

[177] Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant*, pp.206-7.
[178] Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant*, p.202.
[179] Greta Gaard, 'New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment,* 0.0 (2010), 1–23 (p.11).
[180] Kings, 'Intersectionality and the Changing Face of Ecofeminism', p.78.

the Triffids (1951), and how their desire for eating human flesh helps 'cultivate a tangible sense of connection to the material world',[181] this section equally underlines perceptions about the feminisation of male roles. As carnivorous plants that develop a taste for human flesh, these vegetal monsters seem wholly suitable for examining 'the mix of political and social practice' that 'are scripted', according to Alaimo and Hekman, 'onto material bodies'.[182] As Claire Colebrook asserts, 'the difference between men and women [in a modern context] becomes bodily and material',[183] with gender power relations embodied and challenged within both humans and plants of these narratives. Moreover, examining the consumption and assimilation of the humans these plant monsters eat puts the spotlight on growing technological consumerism, scientific effects on the environment and feminist demands for equality during the mid-twentieth century. Through the interface between human and natural agentic forces, the plant monster punctures the pervasive Western assumptions that (hu)man is superior and separate from nature and the environment.

Illustrating a material ecofeminist interconnectedness, Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality considers how elements of nature such as toxins enter and become part of the human body through ingestion of food produce.[184] Inverting the concept for a gothic trans-corporeality that considers how culture enters nature as a toxin, these carnivorous plant monsters bring the human (and nonhuman) body into focus through the consumption and absorption of human flesh as food. With every human consumed, Corman increases Junior's anthropomorphosis as s/he becomes more vocal in a trans-corporeal commingling of human and nonhuman body. For Adam Knee, Corman's parody demonstrates 'the image of consumption as part of a tongue-in-cheek critique of capitalism' through '[t]he plant's exploitive, insatiable, and ultimately deadly appetite [that] resonates with similar (if not as obvious) appetites of the human characters, in a skid row setting that is emblematic of the dark side of the American economic system'.[185] Yet, Corman's sense of irony that we are

[181] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p.16.
[182] Alaimo and Hekman, 'Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory', p.8.
[183] Claire Colebrook, 'On Not Becoming Man: The Materialist Politics of Unactualized Potential', in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp.52-84 (p.60).
[184] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*.
[185] Knee, 'Vegetable Discourses in the 1950s US Science Fiction Film', p.154.

all ultimately destined to be plant food, is underlined here with the many references to vegetarianism, offering justification for Junior's desire for human flesh. At the restaurant, Mushnik and Audrey eat mock chicken (tofu) salad. According to William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi, the use of soy-bean curd as a substitute for meat and dairy was quite popular post-war and throughout the 1950s with Mildred Lager publishing several recipe books dedicated to tofu between 1942 and 1963 alongside USDA leaflets about the benefits of soya products, until the early 1960s 'when America's consumption of meat and dairy products skyrocketed, [and] tofu virtually fell out of public sight … until 1975'.[186] While in Britain post-war rationing and food shortages saw the British public encouraged 'to turn to vegetables',[187] it was in the 1960s that animal rights and vegetarian concepts became closely aligned in making the general public aware of intensive factory farming practices.[188] Nevertheless, vegetarianism appealed to 1960s counterculture influenced by Eastern spiritualism and culture.[189] And just in case this subtle irony is lost on the audience, Corman openly parodies the vegetarian counter-culture: Junior eats human flesh in an uncanny doubling of Burson Fouch, who eats 'kosher' carnations in the shop and whose 'wife's making gardenias for dinner'.[190] The character of Fouch underlines the Western ideology of nature as resource in his exchange with Audrey and Mushnik about the quality of his carnations, indicating that 'those big places are full of pretty flowers, expensive flowers, but when you raise them for looks and smell, you are bound to lose some of their food value'.[191] While Knee identifies a mirroring of consumption in both plant and characters,[192] he omits that all Fouch's remarks in relation to flowers quantify them in terms of their consumer value, either as a source of food or as a way of generating money. Despite this reading of capitalist consumption, a gothic trans-corporeality also reveals the narrative's challenge of contemporary role reversal. As discussed in the previous chapter, Carol J.

[186] William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi, A Chapter from the Unpublished Manuscript, *History of Soybeans and Soyfoods, 1100 B.C. to the 1980s*, (Lafayette, California: Soyfoods Center, 2004), *soyinfocenter.com* [accessed 09 September 2018].
[187] Rod Preece, *Sins of the Flesh: A History of Ethical Vegetarian Thought* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), p.297.
[188] Preece, *Sins of the Flesh*.
[189] Donna Maurer, *Vegetarianism: Movement or Moment?* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), p.13.
[190] *The Little Shop of Horrors*, [12:44].
[191] *The Little Shop of Horrors,* [5:54-8].
[192] Knee, 'Vegetable Discourses in the 1950s US Science Fiction Film', pp.145-162.

Adams argues that vegetarianism was closely associated with feminism and effeteness while masculinity was linked to meat-eating. Corman's vegetable- and flower-eating humans are contrasted with Junior's transgressive carnivory comically highlighting the decade's morphing gender responsibilities within the home that apparently contributed to a masculinity in crisis.

In feeding Junior his blood, Seymour provides both human and nonhuman with a deep connection that revitalises notions of our primordial origins. According to Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils, the ecoGothic stems from the fear that our 'long, evolutionary [vegetal] inheritance … that inevitably embroils us with the nonhuman' may resurface, driving our horror of (hu)man-eating plants.[193] Establishing a blood kinship with his plant, Seymour links human and plant into an uncanny partnership that forces us 'to contemplate and confront the vegetal in the human',[194] and is a 'reminder of the ecological reality of our material selves: that our bodies … will inevitably decompose and become food'.[195] This kinship provokes a revulsion to Junior's eating habits as cannibalistic. Although Kristen Guest argues that 'cannibalism prompts a visceral reaction among people precisely *because* it activates our horror of consuming others like ourselves' [emphasis in original],[196] a gothic trans-corporeality offers an alternative perspective to cannibalism's usual corporeal similarity. While human and plant do not physically resemble each other, their 'kinship' becomes key to reading the plant monster's diet as cannibalistic. Junior's ability to talk – and not just mimic but express a specific desire - identifies Seymour's creation as a sentient being, rendering Corman's human characters and plant monster as uncanny doubles of the same origin. Junior displays most of what Keridiana W. Chez points out are 'typical measures of human superiority, [locomotion,] intellect, language, [and] emotional capacity'.[197] Increasingly anthropomorphised through its ability to express

[193] Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils, 'Introduction: Approaches to the Ecogothic', in *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, ed. by Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp.1-20 (p.14).
[194] Miller, 'Lives of the Monster Plants'.
[195] Keetley and Wynn Sivils, 'Introduction: Approaches to the Ecogothic', p.9.
[196] Kristen Guest, 'Introduction: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Identity' in *Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Kristen Guest (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp.1-10 (p.3).
[197] Keridiana W.Chez, 'The Mandrake's Lethal Cry: Homuncular Plants in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets,* in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, ed. by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.73-90 (p.76).

desire for food, Junior's language capability increases with the ingestion of each human meal. Junior's monstrous size and character expands as the plant absorbs the darker aspects (associated with a philosophical 'plant will') of human nature from those consumed: an alcoholic, a sadistic dentist, an armed robber, a prostitute, eventually ending with the meal where it all started, the hubristic Seymour who signifies the plant's decline.

Minaz Jooma outlines that 'metaphors of eating—and notably those of cannibalism—are used to represent relations of power', arguing this represents 'men exhibit[ing] a predatory violence toward other men', in contrast to Peggy Reeves Sanday, who 'marks the reproductive female body as the key ontological symbol in cannibalistic cultures typically dominated by competitive male individualism'.[198] Reading cannibalistic tendencies in *The Little Shop of Horrors,* contrasting the plant-eating humans with the human-eating plant engages with the gender power struggles within a society of increasing consumerism, emphasised by Junior's ambiguous gender assignation. At the beginning of the film, traditional patriarchal associations of feminine nature are reflected in Seymour's naming the plant after his female colleague and love interest, but having ingested Seymour's blood the plant's vocalisation is clearly male in timbre, which coupled with its desire for flesh, destabilises social constructs through transgressive gendering as plant and human begin to occupy liminal classifications. Seymour calls the mature plant 'Dracula', referencing the plant's taste for blood and power, and the human Audrey innocently observes the giant plant's 'monstrosiness' on seeing its size, while the plant refers to the dentist as 'food', and the dismembered alcoholic is 'a snack' for Junior, clearly commodifying humans in a reversal of fortunes. The reversed power hierarchy of plant as cannibalistic aggressor and the human as comestible equally inverts the stereotypical gender attributes of the protagonists as they challenge the decade's definitions of cis-gender roles sparked by women seeking roles in the public and professional sphere and prompting re-assessment of professions as pink-collar jobs. This is epitomized by the flower committee girls talking of the public 'eating up' Audrey Junior in a celebration of femininity by showing it (her?) alongside the festival queen on the flower float – much to Mushnik's

[198] Minaz Jooma, 'Robinson Crusoe Inc(orporates): Domestic Economy, Incest, and the Trope of Cannibalism', in *Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity*, ed. by Kristen Guest (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), pp.57-78 (pp.58-59).

horror in contemplating it more likely Junior would eat the festival queen in a display of misogyny! As Jooma also argues, relationships between 'parent and child possess different levels of power' that are expressed through the 'politics of food,'[199] evidenced in Junior's cannibalistic diet, initiated by drinking Seymour's blood at its seedling stage. The emanating power struggle between gardener and progeny is similar to that of 'Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant' in the previous chapter.

Dating from 1960, but set in the 1950s, Corman's film is retrospective and clearly engages with the conflicting socio-political ideologies of the previous decade. The cannibalistic, talking plant monster not only parodies 1950s oscillating gender power tussles and roles as masculine and feminine constructs are redefined, but is an evolutionary metaphor that builds on the iconic 1950s plant monster in John Wyndham's earlier Cold War narrative, *The Day of the Triffids* (1951).[200] Previous readings of this novel have analysed associations with the Cold War context and fear of Communism by considering the plants as Soviet experimentation or concluding that the processing of triffid oil signifies the rise of capitalist modernity.[201] Accrediting Wyndham and this novel with reviving the disaster novel in British science fiction, Roger Luckhurst has dismissed the 'walking and talking plants' as 'merely the occasion for what propels the plot', in order to satirise the Communist threat and ideas that American power could save Britain from global disasters.[202] While this may be so, it gravely underestimates the plant monster, which is exactly what the novel's society also does. Through a material ecoGothic reading the triffids offer an environmental and social commentary on the adaptability of both humans and nature, the commodification of nature and the changing attitudes to gender in post-war British society. A closer look at the plants themselves, although not gendered specifically in this text, alongside attempts to re-establish patriarchal traditions by the narrator's surviving society, offers a critique of the phallocentric hubris and changing gender role dynamics. The change of power hierarchies in relation to both human/nature and by association men/women challenges conservative ideology as gender roles become more

[199] Jooma, 'Robinson Crusoe Inc(orporates)', p.60.
[200] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*.
[201] Langford, 'Introduction', pp.vi-xvii.
[202] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p.132.

interchangeable and conflicted, that (alongside emerging homosexual communities)[203] allows the triffids as protagonists to engage with broadening identity constructions through an absence of specific gendering.

After an ocular-targeted triffid sting leaves him blind-folded during an unusual and intense global meteor display, Wyndham's narrator protagonist, Bill Masen, wakes in a silent hospital to discover that the cosmic event has left most of civilisation blind. Masen recounts how the survivors must adjust to an irrevocably changed world, while also contending with the triffids – predatory, ambulatory carnivorous plants. These transgressive plant monsters challenge contemporary gender identities reflected in the human characters of Masen's narrative as the protagonists reconfigure civilisation in a world (already) dominated by vegetation. A triffid specialist and chief horticulturalist for the Arctic and European Oil Company that commodifies and commercialises triffid oil extract, he wends his way with companion, Josella Playton, from city to countryside, evading both human and plant attack, until finally settling into the community on the easily defensible Isle of Wight.

The triffids are fundamentally un-natural, being 'the outcome of a series of ingenious biological meddlings', in an attempt to intensify food yields.[204] A hybrid concoction of part sunflower, turnip, nettle, *orchid* (note its reappearance), amongst other possible plant species, the triffids are made of constituent parts that science has cultivated in an attempt to produce a top quality vegetable oil cheaply.[205] The triffid's hybridity and gender ambiguity through the specified variety of plants that make up the triffid trouble species categories and embody the disintegrating boundaries of gender identity construction and roles of the 1950s. The turnip was 'a symbol of the male organ of

[203] According to Daniel Rivers, 'Queer Family Stories', in *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, ed. by Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.57-72 (pp.65-66), amid a 'strongly heterosexual culture' where homosexuality 'risked incarceration and loss of employment', this underground community established networks of 'lesbian or gay bars in the 1950s or 1960s', and even though those of this community were 'acutely aware of their own marginality and the dangers they lived with during this [pre-Stonewall] period', many navigated their sexuality through a heteronormative familial standpoint. Hence, prior to gay and lesbian rights movements of the late-1960s and 1970s and relevant anti-discrimination laws of the late 1990s-early 2000s, gender expectations and sexual orientation became a hotbed of confusion.

[204] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, p.18.

[205] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, pp.24-5.

copulation' in several fairy tales,[206] and nettles symbolise male cruelty,[207] while the sunflower, despite the phallic imagery of its stem and the orchid are frequently female-gendered. Such symbolised gendering of the monstrous vegetal hybridisation allows a gender-nature intersectionality to explore contemporary conflicting gender ideologies and disrupted heteronormative frames. The global distribution of these modified seeds due to a plane 'accident' and their adaptability to both temperate and tropical climes and various soil types aligns a triffid invasion with capitalist modernity's increasing feminisation of traditionally male careers. As Melanie Bell has argued, although 'narrative contradictions and ambiguities' reflected the contemporary 'debates concerning the reconstruction of the "traditional" nuclear family, with sexual politics settled along traditional gender lines', there continued to be 'some social unease vis-à-vis gender roles and femininity during this period, [as] women's social embeddedness in patriarchal society was clearly *not* assured at this time' (italics in original). [208] Although never described in gender-specific terms, the triffids challenge modern masculinity through their gender ambiguity within the uncertain gender landscape of the novel's post-apocalyptic societies as these re-form according to various ideologies. Contemporary uncertainty around the progressiveness of the fifties career woman is underlined by linking this figure to the plant monster, particularly in how little attention is paid to the triffids until a mature plant pulls itself out of the ground and walks. In a similar parallel, these ambulatory plants are 'casually dismissed' as novelties until they are discovered to be carnivorous and 'capable of discharging enough poison to kill a man' provoking a 'slightly hysterical assault upon the plants' with 'nervous smashing and chopping of triffids everywhere' until someone thinks of pruning their sting.[209] Identifying the plant monster with progressive female gender roles, the triffids are brought under control in a parallel of conservative ideologies attempting to curb the growing sphere of contemporary women.

As cultivated vegetable hybrids, the triffids implode the dichotomies of natural/artificial, plant/animal, as well as gender codes that blur the boundaries of nature

[206] Franz Riklin, 'Wishfulfillment and Symbolism in Fairy Tales', *The Psychoanalytic Review (1913-1957)*, 2 (1915), 203-218, (p.210).
[207] S. Theresa Dietz, *Floriography Today: The Symbolic Meanings and The Possible Powers of Trees, Plants and Flowers* (Fayshoneshire Limited, 2012).
[208] Bell, '"A prize collection of familiar feminine types"', p.108.
[209] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, p.32.

and culture, although it is ultimately their deliberate stalking, killing and consuming of human flesh that invokes an ecophobic response where nature is turned 'into a fearsome object in need of our control'.[210] Once man's superiority over nature is re-asserted (the triffids have 'no natural enemies – other than man'),[211] scientific experiments ensue resulting in large-scale farming 'to extract valuable oils and juices' as the commodification of the triffids becomes 'the realm of big business overnight'.[212] In describing his work with the triffids for the largest oil extraction business, Masen confounds the species categories with terminology generally used for livestock, such as 'corraling', 'pens', 'herd' adding further to the triffids' ambiguity. Underestimating the dangers posed by the farmed, un-docked triffids after the catastrophic blinding levels the playing field merely underlines 'delusions about human exceptionalism' as Estok puts it.[213] The plants' adaptability to climates and soils, ability to move at a steady walking pace and lurk among the greenery waiting to ambush their prey, is topped by their 'uncanny accuracy' in aiming their stings at the most vulnerable human body-part: the eyes.[214] Graham Matthews suggests these 'seemingly planned actions are more akin to instinctual responses' rather than plant intelligence based on anthropomorphic interpretations that 'ascribe human motivations to the plants' as projections of human values.[215] While there is an element of anthropomorphist language in Masen's narration, this liminal plant monster provides a perspective beyond the ecophobic inversion of human primacy to challenge the boundaries of plant and human and by extension, gender constructs.

It is the triffids' 'habit of lurking near their fallen victims' and their feeding 'upon [human] flesh as well as upon insects',[216] that not only establishes them as horrific plant monsters but allows them to be reconsidered as liminal beings that challenge human superiority. The hapless victims, both men and women ('children and those who wear

[210] Estok, 'Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia', p.135.
[211] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, p.33.
[212] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, p.34.
[213] Estok, 'Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia', p.137.
[214] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, p.33.
[215] Graham. J. Matthews, 'What We Think About When We Think About Triffids: The Monstrous Vegetal in Post-war British Science Fiction', in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, ed. by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.111-127 (pp. 116-7).
[216] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, p.34.

helmets frequently escape unscathed'[217]), are reduced to meat for the plant as the notion of cannibalism resurfaces through a gothic trans-corporeality and 'viscous porosity of flesh' that destabilises both nature and gender power hierarchies by considering a mix of material, social, political, cultural, and ethical platforms of understanding.[218] By absorbing human flesh, these carnivorous plant monsters underline the materiality of the human body as a site for re-assessing the eco-social effects of capitalist modernity. While other cannibal plants progressed from blood to body parts then to whole humans, Wyndham's triffids adhere (somewhat) to scientific plausibility, allowing natural corporeal decay to assist with absorption, as they ingest the transformed human flesh rather than eating whole, fresh, body parts. These monstrous carrion consumers are limited by their 'stinging tendril [which] did not have the muscular power to tear firm flesh, but it had strength enough to pull shreds from a decomposing body and lift them to the cup on its stem'.[219] In consuming decomposing human flesh, the triffids undermine the culture (human)/nature (plant) hierarchy by collapsing the concept of human flesh to food. Since the plants can absorb any required nutrients the traditional way by taking root in the soil, the consumption of human flesh by the triffids suggests a deliberate assimilation of the cultural being – becoming human - through ingesting the material flesh. Like the gardeners discussed earlier, Masen equally signifies this collapse of nature/culture boundaries in becoming plant, since he withstands several triffid attacks thanks to his absorption of triffid oil, juice, and most importantly, poison through a trans-corporeal porosity of previous encounters.

The plants subsume cultural attitudes towards commodification of nature when humans become food in a reversal of fortunes that disadvantages human superiority. The presence of the vast numbers of triffids is in large part due to the industrial-scale farming of triffids. Swiftly assimilating these cultural values, the triffids move from hunting humans for food to harvesting them as they besiege and systematically overrun the various human compounds. For Matthew Hall the horror here arises not from the gory aspect of cannibalism but from the 'corruption in the established order of things' that sees an

[217] Matthews, 'What We Think About When We Think About Triffids', p. 117.
[218] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, pp.14-15.
[219] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, p.34..

exchange of identity where the 'subjective qualities of dominator, killer, consumer [exhibited by the triffids] … are very clearly borrowed from humans'.[220] More precisely, a gothic trans-corporeality suggests, the anthropophagic triffids have acquired these human qualities through consumption, much as humans absorb nutrients from plants, thereby becoming a truly liminal site for the disruption of nature/culture boundaries.

The triffids are, of course, a cultural construct encoded with category crisis for navigating contemporary anxieties of change. As eco-feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray has noted, 'because our culture is a masculine one and the stress is put on production, through which man can compete with nature', Western attitudes to assert control over nature (and associated identities) have rendered societies 'frightened of any change'.[221] Since nature 'is also always changing and becoming',[222] or as Masen explains, 'life has to be dynamic … [c]hange is bound to come',[223] plant monsters offer a method for negotiating real-world change. The conflicting perspectives of gender (and other) identity construction, wherein post-war liberalist redefinitions of femininity and masculinity compete with conformist ideology, are played out in the novel's plant-versus-human apocalypse with an uncertain conclusion of success for either. As Masen and Playton navigate the reconfigurations of various communities with differing moral values, in reducing human value to mere food, the triffids require the characters (and the reader) to rethink their position in their new world view. In creating a plant monster that can compete with, and ultimately challenge, human perceptions of species dominance, '[t]he triffids have made the plant kingdom heard. The repressed have risen up and smashed the walls of exclusion'.[224] Reconsidered within their 1950s context, the uprising of the repressed triffids as key protagonists, despite their non-specified gender, draw on prevailing nature/female associations to interrogate contemporary female identity and roles even as they challenge conservative masculinity. Despite its speculative narrative, Wyndham's novel challenges contemporary 1950s society to address attempts at reinstating old habits and customs ('[t]he men must work – the

[220] Matthew Hall, 'The Sense of the Monster Plant', in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film,* ed. by Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp.243-269 (p.251).
[221] Luce Irigaray and Michael Marder, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives*, pp.38 and 24.
[222] Irigaray and Marder, *Through Vegetal Being*, p.39.
[223] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, p.93.
[224] Hall, 'The Sense of the Monster Plant', pp.250-1.

women must have babies'[225]), and embrace changes sparked by capitalist modernity. The surviving humans of Masen's post-catastrophe world fail to explore new world views, with communities rebuilding societies along outdated codes: patriarchal tyranny, polygamist regeneration, conservative cis-gender roles, welfare communities; all reconfigurations that restore pre-event human (male) primacy. Even the female humans revert to 'the tradition of appealing helplessness', outlines one character, despite the fact that women demonstrated their competencies 'when a war came and brought with it a social obligation'.[226] In contrast, the nomadic triffids, with their ability to move (in human spheres) and communicate (in plant terms), subvert the conformist gender assertions in their category confusion.

Unlike the human vocalisation seen in *The Little Shop of Horrors*, 'in a sort of hierarchy of horrors, comes the discovery that [the triffids] can talk'.[227] For Gary Farnell, the 1950s 'phenomenon of plants that not only talk *to* but also *about* humans' [emphasis in original] is a key component in plant horror.[228] The 'rattlings' of their 'little sticks against their stems' suggests that the triffids have 'an altogether different type of intelligence',[229] that points towards a sense of their coordinated, organised predation of (the principally sightless) humans. Their monstrous attributes: their mobility, communication, and ability to learn, pinpoint the triffids as 'a contested space' that not only 'question[s] the boundary between the plant and the human',[230] but challenges both fictitious and real societies to acknowledge a changing gender landscape. At the dawn of a decade that witnessed public protests against continued rationing, racial discrimination, anti-war (Korea) peace rallies, nationalist demonstrations and equal pay marches (as forerunners to numerous organised workers' strikes by the mid-1950s),[231] the triffids acknowledge a rapidly changing gender power dynamic that was becoming increasingly more visible in political and public circles. Seen through their manner of communicating in a network of voices as a collective rather than individual, the triffids are envisaged as an opportunist army of predatory monsters

[225] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, p.100.
[226] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, p.149.
[227] Farnell, 'What Do Plants Want?', p.180.
[228] Farnell, 'What Do Plants Want?', p.180.
[229] Wyndham, *The Day of the Triffids*, pp.35 and 37.
[230] Matthews, 'What We Think About When We Think About Triffids', p.112.
[231] Brian Moynahan, *Looking Back at Britain: Road to Recovery 1950s* (London: Reader's Digest Association Ltd., 2007).

aligned with growing demands for sexual, racial, and social equality. As Andrew Tudor notes, gender is 'an important structuring device' within 1950s science fiction/gothic/horror with pre-seventies female monsters embodying a threat to stability.[232] In their ability to 'express desire … and it is the desire of this "Other" which, to the human mind, appears especially terroristic',[233] the triffids embed themselves as monstrous female plants. The triffids not only threaten the boundaries of nature and culture through their assimilated human characteristics, but also prompt the reader to question gender definitions through an ambiguity that suggests they are female 'Other'. Their organised and militant actions are not only held in stark relief to the complacent human society that seeks to re-establish an old-world order, but as female 'Other' – specifically the new feminist that poses a threat to contemporary patriarchal stability – the horror of the triffids' organised invasion reflects conservative anxieties about the rise of female equality.

By the 1960s, public concern about female equality, racial discrimination and capitalist institutional disregard for the environment became embedded within the decade's revolutionary counter-culture. In a significant deviation from the original, Steve Sekely's adaptation of *The Day of the* Triffids (1962)[*234*] critiques fifties feminist achievements of equality in the public sphere by using the triffid attacks to undermine the human female characters. The film's origins of and the triffids themselves, covered in more detail in Chapter 4, are also updated to reflect their cultural moment. Sekely's hero, Bill Masen (Howard Keel), knows very little about the triffids, being a naval captain that has simply undergone eye surgery in a London hospital. On awaking to the chaos of the blinding and navigating the effects, Masen assumes guardianship of the young orphan, Susan (Janina Faye), rescued from a train crash (reminiscent of numerous similar disasters in fifties Britain) as they embark on a cross-Europe journey to a naval base in Cadiz. In parallel, disgruntled husband and wife, Tom and Karen Goodwin (Kieron Moore and Janette Scott) are marine biologists working in the basement of an island lighthouse, thereby escaping the blinding. In both the French community Masen comes across and the Goodwins'

[232] Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists,* p.126.
[233] Farnell, 'What Do Plants Want?', p.182.
[234] *The Day of the Triffids*, dir. by Steve Sekely (Rank Organisation, 1962).

situation, the female characters are initially portrayed as strong leaders and decision-makers. When confronted by the triffids, Masen and Tom Goodwin re-assert their traditional masculinity in heroically rescuing these now cowering, screaming women as the phallocentric ideals of femininity are re-established. With gender equality and anti-discrimination on the rise socially and politically, the ambiguously gendered triffids offer a vehicle for male writers and directors to express perceived phallocentric anxieties about the dissolution of gender assigned roles and the loss of patriarchal dominance. The film simultaneously advocates the modern woman who begins to gain more control – over body, finances, and careers, while equally placing these ideas in doubt through the film's triffid attacks.

3.5. Graduating to the Garden

The ambiguous gendering of the plants in the mid-twentieth century illustrates concerns about capitalist modernity's redefinitions of femininity and masculinity during an era of significant change. During a decade of intense communist paranoia, political repression, and fear of being accused of subversion, sensitive eco-social commentary was projected onto plant monsters within a growing science fiction genre that tapped into the popular imagination. Suburban conformity of the U.S. instigated growing concerns about modern gender redefinitions and roles that the era's plant monsters embody through their consumption of the human characters. Both space and plants are liminal sites for navigating these contemporary gender debates that a gothic trans-corporeality interrogates through the blurred boundaries of plant/animal, nature/culture, human/non-human as specified cis-gender roles are dissolved, merged, and broadened. Ecophobic representations of cannibalistic plants offer alternative perspectives for the period's re-inventing of gender roles and acknowledging non-normative (and sexual) identities through incidents of becoming-plant/human. Becoming-other through a gothic trans-corporeality reveals how the cannibalistic plant engages with contemporary gender power-shifts as sexual and racial equality movements also emerged. Consumerism, environmentalism, and feminism invaded the counterculture of the 1960s during the height of the space race. As the next chapter highlights, growing environmental concerns and a visibly active Women's Lib movement of the 1970s and 1980s witness a trend in galactic plant monsters with a

penchant for human flesh. Within science fiction cinema, ‘little green (wo)men’ invade the popular imagination.

Chapter 4: Breaking Bud

4. Alien and humanoid killer plants of Gothic/Horror science fiction: recognising 'the Other' in the late twentieth century (1960s-1990s)

"Didn't you know? I'm a herbicidal maniac!",
John Steed (The Avengers)[1]

The televised moon landing of Apollo 11 in 1969 and the team's return with a collection of lunar rock provides a notable marker for the focus of this chapter: alien plant monsters. Whereas the plant monsters of previous chapters were unusual specimens of botanic experiment that challenged conceptions of femininity and masculinity, the insidious vegetation of this chapter are intelligent galactic life-forms with a total disregard for the corporeal human form. These alien plant monsters emphasise the materiality of the human body, reduced to mere food source as human hubris dismisses these invaders as innocuous plant-life, until it is too late. Plant agency and trans-corporeal becoming-other are key features of the plant monsters in this chapter as they draw on elements of the eco-*femme fatale* and hyper-masculinity to challenge assertions about equality and second-wave feminism that are played out through the alien plant-human interconnections. At the same time, gender associations allow these alien plant monsters to engage with contemporary concerns about the effects of nuclear testing, industrial agriculture, and over-use of pesticides, as hinted at in the John Steed quip above. Species and category boundaries are transgressed and abandoned as plant and human commingle in a plant-becoming that underlines contemporary calls for (sexual, gender, class, racial) equality as plant monster narratives begin to shift towards more progressive thinking.

Moreover, these plant monsters have morphed from scientific hybrids in literary narratives to galactic alien vegetation on screen. In her introduction to *Science Fiction Cinema*, Christine Cornea argues that although Brooks Landon and William Gibson claim

[1] Philip Levene, 'Man-Eater of Surrey Green', Stanley Hayers, dir., *The Avengers* S4 E11 (ABC Weekend Television, 1965).

science fiction films 'impact upon popular culture', their premise 'underestimates the level of influence that science fiction novels have had upon the film genre'.[2] Certainly, the plant monsters in many of the films and TV series explored in this chapter have been influenced by their literary counterparts. Like many of these alien plants that blend human and vegetation, screen and novel also have a symbiotic relationship. As Steffen Hantke notes, 'outstanding cinematic adaptations' have served 'as potent reminders of how crucial the interaction with cinema would turn out to be for the fiction market' as well.[3] Exploring how plant monster narratives are portrayed on television and the big screen during the latter half of the twentieth century seems appropriate for understanding how they have equally influenced later iterations (both screen and print) detailed in Chapter 5.

The increase in drugs, divorce and delinquency, John Kenneth Muir has asserted, alongside environmental concerns, health issues and growing civil rights inequalities contributed major anxieties that were expressed through the horror genre.[4] Yet plant monster narratives are often omitted from the 'natural nasties' category that generally includes the giant animal or real-life man-eater to express these growing concerns. As public fears became outward-facing, speculative science fiction narratives imagined an extra-terrestrial 'other' as an intelligent life-form that could pose a wider threat to humanity (although the texts explored here tend towards a particularly American bias). These alien plant monsters are un-'natural nasties' that provide unsettling narratives to challenge contemporary perceptions of sexual (and other) equality, feminist and environmental movements. They provide a key insight into how plant monsters through the decades have changed to engage with contemporary gender politics and as this chapter illustrates, the plant monster shifts from a gendered transgressive hybrid to androgynous alien species in a deliberate move by fiction writers, not only in response to the Hollywood space age audience, but as a trope that engages with the contemporary gender politics of equality through a more progressive mindset.

[2] Christine Cornea, *Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.5.
[3] Steffen Hantke, 'The Rise of Popular Horror, 1971-2000' in *Horror: A Literary History*, ed. by Xavier Aldana Reyes (London: The British Library, 2016), pp.159-187 (p.164).
[4] John Kenneth Muir, *Horror Films of the 1970s* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2002).

After the race to the moon, a key objective of space exploration was to chart Halley's Comet - first captured on camera in 1910 - as it returned to the Earth's orbit in 1986. These televised events also captured the public's imagination during an era that witnessed the growth of the television and cinematic industry. As a result, Space Age culture throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Megan Shaw Prelinger suggests, seeped into fashion, style and music promoted by the way the aerospace industries glamorised science, technology and engineering through visual advertising that mirrored science fiction cinema.[5] Interest in astronomical occurrences increased, courtesy of advances in Earth-orbiting satellites (first launched by the Soviet Sputnik programme) that allowed for the detection and televised images of meteor showers. While scientists stepped up the hunt for meteorites and other space debris reaching Earth for a deeper understanding of space (in the 1970s, a Japanese team in Antarctica picked up 10 to 20 meteorites of varying types),[6] such items have provided a science fiction rationale for alien invasion narratives since the 1950s. Is it any wonder that the insidious alien plant monster arrives by space junk or is mistaken for a meteorite?

Celestial events provide a significant mode of transportation for these alien plant invaders, stemming from a long-standing tradition of things coming from space being harbingers of doom. In medieval times, '[c]omets were often foreseen as a sign of great disaster or change',[7] and were adopted as a synonymous metaphor by early twentieth-century science fiction and weird tale writers, H.P. Lovecraft and H.G. Wells.[8] Despite the space-race context, the arrival of an alien Other in the tales of this chapter is not by space craft but as hitch-hiker of innocuous space debris, providing a significant representation on screen of the contemporary anxieties of invasion, conspiracy and paranoia within the Cold War stalemate. This becomes a popular way for most alien plants to arrive: in Steve Sekely's *The Day of the Triffids* (1962), the extraordinary meteor shower not only blinds the majority of Earth's population but accompanies the arrival of the triffids; in 'The Man-Eater of Surrey

[5] Megan Shaw Prelinger, *Another Science Fiction: Advertising The Space Race 1957-1962* (New York: Blast Books, 2010).
[6] 'Hunting for meteorites.', *Web News Wire*, 11 Mar. 2015, *Infotrac Newsstand* [accessed: 9 April 2019].
[7] Elizabeth Howell, 'Halley's Comet: Facts About the Most Famous Comet', *Space.com: Science and Astronomy*, 20 September 2017 [accessed: 1 March 2019].
[8] See H.P. Lovecraft, 'Color out of Space' (1927) and H.G. Wells, *In the Days of the Comet* (1906), where the arrival of celestial bodies effect change.

Green' (*The Avengers*, 1965), when an extra-terrestrial pappus collides with a spacecraft it is mistaken for a meteor shower; the weed-like alien of Stephen King's 'Weeds'/'The Lonesome Death of Jordy Verrill' (1976) is contained in what he believes to be a meteor[ite], while the people of the aptly-named Comet Valley in Peter Mangooian's *Seedpeople* (1992) initially mistake the seed pods for meteor[ite]s. Even Philip Kaufmann's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978) opens through the credits with the alien seedpods arriving on Earth as space dust. It is, as ever, human (in the guise of botanist/gardener) interference with these space items and disregard for nature (including the universe) that triggers the alien plant antagonism.

Before analysing specific examples in this chapter, the first section will outline how plant monster narratives traverse genre and media, focusing on adaptations of monstrous vegetation from Gothic science fiction literature to Science Fiction horror on screen. This section will also establish reasons for a notable gap in plant monster narratives in the 1990s. Despite the various remakes of Don Siegel's iconic vegetal alien invasion film, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), its analogous B-movie, *Seedpeople* (1992), and *Body Snatchers* (1993) focus on the seedpod rather than plant. Nevertheless, in helping frame the trend in plant monster narratives, they are discussed here in general terms of their negotiation with contemporary attitudes to gender and nature.

Section two explores screen adaptations of (hu)man-eating plant monsters portrayed as 'other-worldly' space visitors. It starts by considering such narrative changes in Steve Sekely's *The Day of the Triffids* (1962), a cinematic adaptation of Wyndham's novel.[9] Echoing this murderous vegetation plot, 'The Man-Eater of Surrey Green', an episode of the British TV series, *The Avengers* (1965), also features an alien man-eating plant, one that manipulates high-level botanists into assisting it with its plan for world domination. Similarly, in a musical reworking of Corman's film, Frank Oz's *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986) repositions the plant monster's origin to intergalactic visitor. This section will explore the era's significance of depicting the plant monster as space alien in engaging

[9] Interestingly, later adaptations (1981 BBC mini-series and 2009 film) of Wyndham's novel revert to the original idea of genetic engineering, signalling pertinent contemporary representations of environmental concerns.

with contemporary gender equality. These vegetal alien (hu)man-eaters employ gothic trans-corporeal commingling in the act of consumption to portray the dissolution of fixed gender roles, while Dana Oswald's hypermasculinity, a trope of exaggerated stereotypical male behaviours, re-affirms the plant monster as an eco-*femme fatale* that parodies the modern feminist.

Section three will explore the way in which the alien plant-humanoid monster embodies contemporary perceptions on gender equality as aligned with concerns about the environment. Stephen King's short story 'Weeds' (1976) and its screen adaptation 'The Lonesome Death of Jordy Verrill' (1982) considers how the alien plant subsumes the human to form a new type of monster that can be re-evaluated through ideas of trans-corporeal hybridity and becoming-other to highlight gender equality issues during an era of 'Women's Lib' while challenging the effects of large-scale farming. Together with 'The Seeds of Doom' episodes (Douglas Camfield, dir.) of the BBC TV series *Doctor Who* (1976), and Wes Craven's film *Swamp Thing* (1982), this section will equally explore how alien plant-humanoids encompass the broader global concern of environmental degradation seen through an ecofeminist gothic approach. Drawing on Nancy Tuana's concept of 'viscous porosity' that interrogates the 'permeable and shifting' boundaries of dichotomous ideologies,[10] the alien corporeal invasions that generate plant-human hybrids underline fears in the male imagination about the impact of equality of the sexes through a feminist subtext and progressive thinking.

Section four builds further on ecocritical notions of plants as agential beings. The darkly comedic 'Love Hungry', from the US TV series, *Tales from the Darkside* (1988: S4, E11), and the more sinister 'The Sound Machine' (John Gorrie, dir.), an episode from the UK TV series *Tales of the Unexpected* (1981: S4, E7),[11] reflect the rise in awareness of the need to respect Other identities: environmental, social, racial, sexual and gender alike. In these episodes, the plants are not galactic alien but alien in the sense of a monstrous alterity. This section explores ecofeminist ideas of equality through the protagonists' ability to identify with sentient nature as other beings. Hyperbolising the plant monster through

[10] Tuana, 'Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katarina', p.189.
[11] The TV series was created by Roald Dahl and this episode is based on his short story of the same name (1949), available as an eBook from Penguin Books (2012).

a sinister comic gothic, these televised narratives draw on plant studies and Karen Barad's concept of 'agential realism', whereby the materiality of both the human and nonhuman bodies transcend determinate boundaries in a 'mutual intra-action' that produces a 'discursively differentiated becoming'.[12] It requires humans to recognise that they are part of the world they share with other non-humans. In doing so, it sets the groundwork for ideas of an environmental posthuman that the following chapter explores in more detail as it considers the resurgence of sentient plant monster fiction in the millennium decades.

4.1. The Gothic-Horror Turn and Alien Invasion Narratives

The shift from Gothic to horror as a genre and its relationship to science fiction, where the plant monsters are distinctly other-worldly in origin, is important. Equally pertinent here is the move from plant monster literary narrative to its screen characterisation. Just as the literary narratives found themselves within a cross-over category of Weird/Gothic/Science Fiction (outlined in earlier chapters), the cinematic plant monster finds itself within multiple film genre categories. This flexibility and diversity of the Hollywood science fiction film genre is due to the wide variety of sources it draws upon: from Greek melodrama, gothic fiction, westerns, horror, thriller and adventure to comics, video games and science itself.[13] According to Cornea, it can be 'difficult to distinguish between science fiction and the horror genre' with 'the blurring of boundaries between these genres' in film allowing 'for comment upon the kind of world views that each has to offer'.[14] The future, in other words, is not always bright, with '[m]any science fiction films present[ing] us with potentially terrifying elements of dystopia' that articulate 'real fears about developments in areas such as nuclear weapons/power or genetic modification'.[15] The blurring of boundaries becomes the theme here, not just in terms of the slippery genre of science fiction film and its leanings towards horror, but as this chapter argues, in how (on screen) plant monsters dispel distinctions between human and alien vegetable in a bid to comment on contemporary gender equality.

[12] Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', pp. 137-8.
[13] King and Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema*, p.3.
[14] Cornea, *Science Fiction Cinema*, p.7.
[15] King and Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema*, pp.17-18.

Horror is effectively Gothic, according to Xavier Aldana Reyes, who describes the Gothic as 'horror fiction, in a different shape, under a different name and answering to different needs of its readers'.[16] Although horror fiction has subsequently evolved 'as a discernible and distinct genre in its own right' since the 1980s,[17] along with gothic and horror, Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles argue, 'ecohorror is both a genre and a mode'.[18] While many critics use the relatively new concepts of ecoGothic and ecohorror interchangeably, as outlined in Chapter One, ecohorror, as Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles explain, 'assumes that environmental disruption is haunting humanity's relationship to the non-human world' with the intention of highlighting ecocritical matters caused by human interaction.[19] Climate change scenarios, disruption of ancient burial sites, industrialised destruction of the landscape, any variety of human disturbance that elicits inexplicable hauntings or violent consequences typify ecohorror. Focusing on the human/non-human relationship as a key parameter for ecocritical thinking, 'ecohorror has been in use since at least the mid-1990s to describe works of literature and film in which human characters are attacked by natural forces' in response to human interference.[20] While some plant monster fiction could be defined within this scope, as alien vegetation, the texts explored here enlist the assistance of the human gardeners, voluntarily or unwittingly, rather than the more traditional 'revenge of nature' narratives. While these vegetal space visitors also engage with ecological concerns, the interaction of human-alien plant reveals how the dark and 'dystopian ecological visions' contribute to and 'reinvigorate debate about the class, gender and national identities that inhere within representations' of nature.[21] Although alien in origin and hence classed as science fiction, these cinematic plant monsters call for an ecoGothic approach to explore the intersection of gender and nature.

While Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils suggest ecogothic as 'the intersection of environmental writing and the gothic' that 'presupposes some kind of ecocritical lens', disclosing a 'deep unease, fear, and even contempt' *of* the natural world,

[16] Xavier Aldana Reyes, 'Introduction' in *Horror: A Literary History*, ed. by Xavier Aldana Reyes (London: The British Library, 2016), pp.7-19 (pp.14).
[17] Aldana Reyes, 'Introduction', p.16.
[18] Tidwell and Soles, 'Introduction: Ecohorror in the Anthropocene', p.3.
[19] Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles, 'Ecohorror Special Cluster: "Living in Fear, Living in Dread, Pretty Soon We'll All Be Dead"', *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 21.3 (2014), 509–512 (p.510).
[20] Rust and Soles, 'Ecohorror Special Cluster', p.510.
[21] Smith and Hughes, 'Introduction: defining the ecoGothic', p.4.

they importantly argue this is represented by 'a blend of human and nonhuman' through 'the contours of the body'.[22] Fears and anxieties are projected onto nature and the wilderness through gothic representations of the body as monstrous. Unusual beings such as Wildmen, Golems, werewolves, giants, and hybrids are some of the typical gothic conventions that embody phallocentric fears and socio-political anxieties enrobed in nature. Alien plant monsters that take over or subvert the human form offer a becoming-other that could be added to these gothic representations. As Dawn Keetley argues, 'plants … have figured as monstrous within horror fiction and film', yet an ecoGothic discourse 'about "nature" as terrifying' is warranted for specific enquiry.[23] Conventions of both ecohorror and gothic monstrosity are key to exploring alien plant monsters as tropes that engage with contemporary gender equality and behaviours, alongside wider environmental concerns generated by the Cold War nuclear arms race. The monstrous crosses the boundaries of weird, gothic, horror, and science fiction, that in these texts is focused on the commingling of human and nonhuman bodies, revealing the uneasiness that the breakdown of category boundaries generates.

Built on earlier narratives with plant monsters of alien origin, films featuring other-worldly sentient nature become prolific in the 1970s and 1980s. As Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska argue, science fiction cinema can be viewed 'both as an *expression* of social concerns […] and as part of a cultural process in which such concerns might also be *negotiated* to some extent'.[24] With the ability 'to raise challenging issues about the nature of the world' and 'to ask politically-informed questions about our own society',[25] the horror of these alien plant monsters not only throws the spotlight on ecological crises, but equally engages with contemporary gender concerns. Perceptions surrounding gender roles became more liberal in the latter half of the twentieth century, with the introduction of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s enabling women more sexual freedoms, and Anti-Discrimination Acts[26] that allowed women to compete for the same employment rights as men. However, career women were often perceived as emulating their male counterparts

[22] Keetley and Wynn Sivils, 'Introduction: Approaches to the Ecogothic', pp.1, 4.
[23] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', pp.5 and 25 n.2.
[24] King and Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema*, p.2, italics in original.
[25] King and Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema*, pp.29 and 22.
[26] Equal Pay Act (1963) and Civil Rights Act (1964) (US); Equal Pay Act (1970) and Sex Discrimination Act (1975) (UK).

to foster success. The portrayal of the plant monster as inter-galactic sentient being with nefarious intent illustrates a shift towards a distinctly androgynous 'other' that equality was perceived to induce. Yet, science fiction cinema continues to be 'frequently [conventionally] gendered',[27] despite, David J. Hogan argues, the genre's ability to navigate popular anxieties, since '[e]xplorations of gender issues, war, xenophobia and other difficult topics are more easily accepted by viewers [of science fiction]'.[28] Portraying the alien invader as sentient vegetation provides a suitably uncanny monster for engaging with environmental concerns even as it underlines contemporary gender and civil rights equality.

Concerns about the environment were first highlighted in Rachel Carson's controversial book *Silent Spring* (1962), in which the negative impact of synthetic pesticide use was outlined in particularly Gothic terms to the consternation of the chemical industry. It sparked the environmental movement and resulted in dystopian ecological thrillers, such as director Richard Fleischer's *Soylent Green* (1973), which considered how 'an unanticipated consequence of human activity' antagonises nature and 'pollution is the "cause" of nature's revolt'.[29] Indeed, the cannibal-consumer rhetoric of *Soylent Green* is mirrored in many of these texts with equally unsettling results. Regardless of '[w]hether inexplicably, by individual encouragement or by scientific accident, "natural nasties" are on the increase' for most of the seventies,[30] producing plant horror narratives, Keetley suggests, that 'work to some degree in tandem with ecological politics—dramatizing the agency of plant life while showcasing the dire consequences of ignoring it'.[31] In the plant monster narratives discussed so far, concerns about human desire to control their immediate environment through scientific experiment have been expressed through man-eating plants that used gendering to engage with social concerns as well as anxieties about urbanisation, mass agriculture and market gardening. In this chapter, human interference enables the alien plant-life to initially expose and manipulate humankind's vulnerability for its own advantage in an exaggerated reflection of nature's agency. These extra-terrestrial

[27] King and Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema*, p.39.
[28] David J. Hogan, 'Introduction: Science Fiction and the Actual', in *Science Fiction America: Essays on SF Cinema*, ed. by David J. Hogan (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2006), pp.1-6 (p.3).
[29] Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, pp.61-2.
[30] Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, p.61.
[31] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.20.

alien plant monsters consume and subsume/assume human form, creating monstrous hybrid others that embody contemporary anxieties about gender equality and encourage us to recognise our relationship to the non-human.

It is pertinent to mention here, that there is a notable gap in plant monster fiction during the 1990s, which seems to correspond to a general decline in horror fiction consumption, alongside a shift, according to Steffen Hantke, from the 'natural' monster towards the very human monster of the serial killer.[32] With the sensationalism of the serial killers exposed in the 1980s providing inspiration in the 1990s for dark, potentially real horrors, the end of the Cold War and European (re)unification projects re-centred fears away from external threats towards internal anxieties, resulting in the decade's predominance of psychological thrillers. Aside from a few cameo roles, plant monsters generally take a back seat to the very real human threat of the 1990s killer-thrillers. Building on the environmental impacts identified by Carson decades earlier, the genetically modified cereals with built-in pest-control and other herbicides created by Monsanto in the 1990s generated public concern, including about the repercussions on health, which resulted in high-profile and lengthy court cases.[33] Despite producing unsettling concerns ripe for ecohorror, the consequences of the sensitive law-suits around one of the USA's largest chemical corporations, their scare tactics and the effects their GMO-crops demonstrated, were potentially too real and current to be the subject of plant monster fiction.[34] Although there are examples of plant monsters within manga, graphic novels, art and children's literature during this decade, (R.L. Stine's 1992 Goosebumps series, *Stay Out of the Basement,* features a genetically-modified plant monster, for instance), these are outside the scope of this current study, but worthy of a future project.

There are two less successful 'body-snatcher' films in the 1990s worth mentioning in terms of their engagement with concerns surrounding the environment and globalisation following the fall of the Iron Curtain. Firstly, the B-movie *Seedpeople* (Manoogian, dir.) from

[32] Hantke, 'The Rise of Popular Horror, 1971-2000', pp.159-187.
[33] Brian Tokar, 'Monsanto: A Profile of Corporate Arrogance', in *The Case Against the Global Economy*, ed. by Edward Goldsmith and Jerry Mander (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.92-105.
[34] Marie-Monique Robin, dir. 'The World According to Monsanto', *topdocumentaryfilms.com*, 2008 [accessed 9 April 2019];
Lessley Anderson, 'Why Does Everyone Hate Monsanto?', *modernfarmer.com*, 2014 [accessed 16 April 2019].

1992, can be viewed as a tongue-in-cheek alien "cereal killer" film that critiques GMO crops. One of the alien seedpods, initially mistaken for meteorites, germinates amongst the corn of an industrialised crop farm, before re-pollinating and taking over, firstly farmhands and gradually the entire neighbourhood of Comet Valley. The first 'seedperson' emerges after being cocooned in the strange plant's toxic sap – a clear reference to the anxieties of human exposure to chemical crop spraying. These imitation humans transform back to their alien seed form (a hairy coconut-shaped seed with long arms and a mandible) to further infect when challenged or confronted by real humans. The role of the plant in this film is purely as a reference marker, with the focus of monstrosity on the seed, underlining concerns about the potential damage to the natural world of GMO crops. The environmental message is couched mostly in intertextual references to other plant monster fiction but is epitomised by the oddball Dr Roller (Bernard Kates) who has a clear understanding of the potential destruction these 'seeds' can cause, including the environmental warning foreshadowed by Georgie Starbuck Galbraith's nature poem 'On a Seed',[35] displayed on his truck door.

Secondly, in Abel Ferrara's *Body Snatchers* (1993), teenager Marti Malone (Gabrielle Anwar) accompanies her dad Steve (Terry Kinney) and his new family on his inspection trip for the Environmental Protection Agency to a remote military base. While dad checks for toxic material (linked to storage of chemical liquids), the main protagonists become aware that the residents of the base are being replaced by duplicates, revealed to be plant-like aliens whose pods are taken from the local river and placed in the bedrooms of human targets. Gothic science fiction of the 1980s and 1990s, for Sara Wasson and Emily Alder, witnessed a shift from libertarian to reactionary ideologies that depicted 'humanity as under threat from malign forces'.[36] These malign forces, Andrew Tudor suggests, reflect a 'presumed conspiracy between the institutions of science, state, military and industry' with science seen as 'one among a range of ways in which power can be exerted over a

[35] *This was the goal of the leaf and the root. / For this did the blossom burn its hour. / This little grain is the ultimate fruit. / This is the awesome vessel of power. / For this is the source of the root and the bud…. / World unto world unto world remolded. / This is the seed, compact of God, / Wherein all mystery is enfolded.*
George Starbuck Galbraith, 'On a Seed/The Mystery of Seed', *The New York Times*, 6 May 1960.
[36] Wasson and Alder, *Gothic Science Fiction 1980-2010*, p.16.

desperately resisting population'.[37] The military setting along with the toxic waste investigation for this adaptation of the gradual conformist take-over, underlines public response to the institutional shift towards globalisation amid growing environmental concerns that required global agreement. The 1990s witnessed scientific consensus of the climate change and global warming phenomenon as a global issue with the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, initiating, in turn, a growth in eco-cinema and ecohorror at the turn of the millennium (explored in Chapter 5). However interesting in their own right, both *Seedpeople* and *Body Snatchers* focus on the alien-origin seed/pod as human nemesis rather than the plant, falling outside the scope of the current study.

4.2. Little Green (Wo)Men? - Man-eating Plants as Alien Invaders

Longstanding fears of female sexuality, nature, and the spiritual realm depicted as ethereal dryadic beauties in late Victorian and Edwardian tales,[38] have their roots, Angela Tenga claims, in the legendary Green Man figure: 'an ancient, pre-Christian man-plant hybrid that is traditionally associated with vegetative nature and rebirth'.[39] The foliate head, as it is also known, 'is a face with vegetation bursting from (or perhaps penetrating into) the nose and/or mouth'.[40] Western philosophical renderings of plants and nature as inherent deficiencies in human beings are depicted in the Green Man imagery signifying our eventual decline materially back into the earth, provoking ecophobic imaginings. This mythical head is often considered sinister and ominous, according to Dawn Keetley, since '[i]t depicts the seat of human consciousness, […] but vegetation, not language, bursts from its mouth', perpetuating the horror that 'we are (already) matter, and will always become vegetal matter'.[41] Moreover, these plant and vegetal musings are often aligned with the feminine, wild, chaotic human aspect,[42] providing an opportunity to reassess the iconic Green Man symbolism not only as a grotesque man-plant hybrid that embodies a vegetal alterity, but as a gendered representation that precludes binary ideology. In this chapter,

[37] Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, p.151.
[38] David Punter, 'Algernon Blackwood: nature and spirit', in *Ecogothic*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp.44-57 (p.55).
[39] Tenga, 'Seeds of Horror', p.59.
[40] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.2.
[41] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', pp.2-3 and 7.
[42] Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant* (2014).

aspects of the grotesque and the monstrous feminine collude in rendering the alien plants as modern Green Man/Woman figures that engage with contemporary dialogue on equality of the sexes.

Plant horror stems from fear of the Green Man resurrected for its time, 'albeit in a different visual form [to] that of its sculptured medieval ancestor'.[43] Adam Knee has argued this 'underpins the conceptualization of the "little green men" of the [science fiction] genre'.[44] In exploring the disturbingly uncanny gendering in the alien plant monster narratives below, extra-terrestrial plants aside, biologists and philosophers have long argued that plants are 'at the same time, "alien" in their being and in their relation to us'.[45] When nature is already deemed alien, plants easily become monstrous through our own ecophobic perspective that a material gothic trans-corporeality incites; when turned into an extra-terrestrial alien plant monster, the horror of humanity, when faced with its own material corporeality, looms large alongside it. Alien possession often speaks to the contemporary Cold War paranoia, where industrial / governmental conspiracy and control are figured as extra-terrestrial. Vincent Di Fate agrees that 'SF cinema holds a mirror to us and to our culture'.[46] However, Di Fate's argument does not consider the natural symbolism of the Green Man or the environment as a source for why we refer to aliens as 'little green men'. Despite an insightful comment that 'Don Siegel's terrifying, philosophically dark tale of alien takeover, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), proposes that although there are no little green men, displaced humans do come from big green seed pods',[47] he fails to develop this further. As this chapter asserts, implicitly, the 'big green seed pods' are gendered female, giving birth to human-alien reproductions in a contemporary rendering of the Green Man figure. As a gendered composite, the foliate head, I argue, confirms human ties with nature not just materially, but as a metaphor for re-reading attitudes to gender politics. Although alien plant monsters are often perceived

[43] Keetley, Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.23.
[44] Knee, 'Vegetable Discourses in the 1950s US Science Fiction Film', p.151.
[45] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.7.
[46] Vincent Di Fate, 'Where Do Little Green Men Come From? A Speculative Look at the Origins of a Pop Culture Icon', in *Science Fiction America: Essays on SF Cinema*, ed. by David J. Hogan (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2006), pp.69-93 (p.92).
[47] Di Fate, 'Where Do Little Green Men Come From?', p.85.

as androgynous, there is a persistent underlying suggestion that they are in fact 'little green women'.

No longer monsters of creation anthropomorphised for empathy, alien threats are also not just a non-human monstrous other that provides the dramatic tension, as Tudor would suggest.[48] Alien vegetable monsters, in fact, play a significant role as characters that provide perspective on contemporary gender equality, particularly through the intersection of their relationship with the human protagonists. If alien life-forms present challenges to man's superiority, as much as nature challenges containment, then alien plant monsters underline contemporary phallocentric fears: loss of control over others (human and nonhuman) and non-negotiated subordination. A focus on the material and corporeal interaction between alien plant monsters and the human characters suggests they provide more than a 'narrative function' of growing capitalist consumerism or denouncing communism.[49] Instead, they can be read as key protagonists that engage with their contemporary gender attitudes, roles, and behaviours.

Space aliens and other 'outlandish representations' of non-human entities were prolific in the 1950s and early 1960s US science fiction films, with the vegetal other a particularly threatening form of invasion.[50] Jack Finney's novel, *The Body Snatchers* (1955) and Don Siegel's film adaptation *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), already conceived the weird seed pods as alien intelligence attempting to take over Earth, alongside the alien plant creature of Christian Nyby's *The Thing from Another World* (1951), released amidst 'the flying saucer craze of the 1950s' and 'investigations into Communist infiltration of American society'.[51] These Cold War science fiction features may have inspired Steve Sekely's 1962 portrayal of the triffids as outer-space visitors rather than as Wyndham's scientifically-created original. Examining the various *Body Snatcher* versions within other socio-political debates, Erika Nelson has argued, whereas the novel portrays a 'romantic alliance against the pods', the 1956 film and subsequent remakes (1978, 1993 and 2007)

[48] Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists*, p.115.
[49] Knee, 'Vegetable Discourses in the 1950s US Science Fiction Film', p.154;
Lyndon W. Joslin, 'The Cold War in Orbit: Two Films of Aliens, Arsenals, and Interventions', in *Science Fiction America: Essays on SF Cinema*, ed. by David J. Hogan (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2006), pp.151-65 (p.162).
[50] Knee, 'Vegetable Discourses in the 1950s US Science Fiction Film', p.145.
[51] Di Fate, 'Where Do Little Green Men Come From?', pp. 77 and 79.

'depict problematic male-female and family relations that recall social changes taking place at the time the films were released',[52] suggesting gender remains a key topic for plant monster fiction. Nelson though, focuses on the anthropocentric concerns of the human characters and uses the alien pod-people as a platform for her analysis. In contrast, Knee's consideration of plants as alien life-forms in 1950s Sci-Fi film underlines that the pods represent a 'vegetable unconscious'; they are 'invasive, lacking emotion, and/or lacking individual dexterity (and therefore sometimes [turn] to others to do their bidding)', which is what invokes the horror.[53] In both *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986) and 'The Man-Eater of Surrey Green', (*The Avengers,* 1965), the alien plant monsters (through telepathy or manipulation) control the human botanists into providing them with appropriate growing conditions and then humans as food. While the loss of control and sliding down the food-chain provides a sense of corporeal horror, a gendered subtext indicates a contemporary fear of feminist and civil rights activism, as the white male is symbolically swallowed whole. Fears of the non-normative and feminist 'infiltration' within the contemporary white male-dominated spheres are subtextually evident in the alien of both 'Weeds' and the *Doctor Who* episodes, as it takes control through corporeal invasion – parasitically transforming the human host. As a phallocentric public imagines the effects of emerging equality laws on both sides of the Atlantic, the monstrous plant alien exerts power over the gardener-botanist through a gothic trans-corporeal commingling and becoming-plant.

Monsters from outer space instil a fear of alien otherness that clearly underpins the era's concerns about scientific and technological advances, while simultaneously referencing the period's changing normative gender constructs. Maria Beville has suggested that '[t]he classification of monsters into various types has long been an exercise in which the types reflect more about specific human fears than they do about the monster itself',[54] while J. J. Cohen has argued that the monster is a socio-cultural construct that responds to its contemporary context.[55] In a parallel to space exploration, commercial science developed a broader understanding of our own planet as the late 1960s and 1970s

[52] Erika Nelson, 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers: Gender and Sexuality in Four Film Adaptations', *Extrapolation*, 52.1 (2011), 51-74 (p.52).
[53] Knee, 'Vegetable Discourses in the 1950s US Science Fiction Film', p.151.
[54] Maria Beville, *The Unnameable Monster in Literature and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p.7.
[55] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

saw an increase in environmental awareness, with the formation of Greenpeace, the introduction of Earth Day, and the Endangered Species Act (1973). Equally, the fossil fuel crises and concerns about the widespread use of chemicals in agriculture with the unfettered use of genetically modified crops contributed to an ecological unease that continues today.[56] Such concerns are projected onto the alien plant monster, for as John Bruni explains, '[b]y the mid-1970s, the environmental movement had gained enough public recognition to be the centre of narratives that examined its possible outcomes and consequences'.[57] Critics have principally focused on the 'rampaging animals' of the 1970s revenge-of-nature films,[58] and on early twenty-first century cinema where 'imbuing the storm [and other natural elements] with agency and menace',[59] becomes the threat. Although not yet widely studied, the invasive alien plant monster narrative bridges these characterisations of environmental revenge, adapting the man-eating plant as an alien life-form that threatens humanity, rationalising plant agency and will as it re-situates humans further down the food chain.

As Asa Simon Mittman has indicated, monsters are constructed, named, defined and granted 'anthropocentric meaning that makes them "ours"'.[60] Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, too points out '[w]hen our monsters change, it reflects the fact that we … have changed as well'.[61] Adaptations of Wyndham's and Corman's texts of the previous chapter, Steve Sekely's *The Day of the Triffids* (1962) and Frank Oz's musical adaptation *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986), illustrate how the monstrous man-eating plant as alien is not only an update for its time but also a change that reflects modified attitudes. Re-visiting both the triffids and the man-eating Audrey is pivotal, as earlier texts have informed these iconic plant monsters, which in turn have influenced subsequent plant monster narratives. Yet,

[56] Stephen Rust, 'Hollywood and Climate Change' in *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, ed. by Stephen Rust, Salma Monani and Sean Cubitt (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 191-212 (p.194).
[57] John Bruni, 'Muddy Worlds: Re-Viewing Environmental Narratives', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television*, ed. by Michael Hauskeller, Curtis D. Carbonell, and Thomas D. Philbeck (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.299-308 (p.302).
[58] Muir, *Horror Films of the 1970s*, p.17.
[59] Rust, 'Hollywood and Climate Change', p.198.
[60] Asa Simon Mittman, 'Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and The Monstrous*, ed. by Asa Simon Mittman with Peter J. Dendle (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), pp.1-14 (p.1).
[61] Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, 'Invisible Monsters: Vision, Horror, and Contemporary Culture' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and The Monstrous*, ed. by Asa Simon Mittman with Peter J. Dendle (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), pp.275-89 (p.275).

King and Krzywinska argue, 'binary oppositions often employed in science fiction cinema are frequently gendered' for dramatic tension.[62] After all, '[m]ovies entertain us, but they also tell us who and what we are'.[63] As science fiction/horror films, the main focus appears to be alien versus human, but when considered as plant monster narratives, the aliens as gendered (feminised) nature offers more than simple dramatic effect, rather provides an avenue to consider a range of issues from depersonalisation and loss of individuality to gender identity/roles, civil and animal rights, and growing concerns about environmental degradation and public health.

Equally significant, *how* they invade opens a space for discussing contemporary gender politics through Stacy Alaimo's material trans-corporeality in consuming human flesh. Besides arriving on or being mistaken for a meteor, these alien plants commodify the human, using them as a resource/food. While the giantism and expedient growth of the anthropophagous plant monster is a feature of both literary plant monster and cinematic alien alike, seen as hyperbolic and ridiculous yet nevertheless uncannily threatening in its original form, it becomes more profoundly unsettling as an alternative sentient life-form acting upon its own desires. In Sekely's *The Day of the Triffids* (1962) the opening narration presents the mystery of the triffids, while the green flashes and space dust imply their origin throughout the opening credits. Although principally for cinematic effect and drama, Sekely's alien triffids grow rapidly and attack instantly during the meteor shower in comparison to the novel where a gradual commodification of triffid products initiates their 'revenge-of-nature' attack. Sekely's triffids appear to transfix their (sighted) prey momentarily with their grotesque giantism and gaping mouth-like 'flower' as the camera zooms in on first their shuffle from hiding to loom over the intended victim, pans out with the animalistic tendrils and stingers framing the shot, and flips back in for a close-up of the fearsome maw (see Figure 2). While in the novel, the triffids – true to a more scientific understanding of carnivorous plants – consume the decaying flesh of the human body as it liquifies, in the film, the alien origin offers an alternative biology providing a valid reason for the plants' ability to consume their human prey whole and instantly. In an early scene introducing the triffids, one of their initial attacks is on the greenhouse supervisor at Kew

[62] King and Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema*, p.39.
[63] Hogan, 'Introduction: Science Fiction and the Actual', p.5.

Gardens. During the meteor event, the audience witnesses the expedient growth of an unexplained triffid specimen, with the horror beginning as it looms into the screen from the dark, gloomy background. The terror of the sighted but unsuspecting supervisor is foregrounded before the camera angle swivels to him enrobed in tentacled appendages that draw him into the centre of the flower-mouth. As alien life-form, Wyndham's uncanny and dangerous carnivore is heightened in its ability to ingest whole live humans.

Figure 2: The viscous triffid maw as it looms into the screen on attack,
from *The Day of the Triffids*, Steve Sekely (dir.), Allied Artists (1962)

The alien status of the triffid is emphasised most in the scenes at the lighthouse island with marine biologists, Karen (Janette Scott) and Tom Goodwin (Kieron Moore), where the triffid targets them deliberately as the only potential food on the island. Karen tells Tom that she has seen 'one of those plants growing out there' and they go prepared to kill it. Discovering it is gone, they return to the lighthouse to find they have been outmanoeuvred in a display of intelligence by the triffid, which is waiting for them inside. When Karen screams, the camera once more zooms in on the plant's gaping 'mouth'. Sekely's close-work camera shows the triffid's glistening orifice (see Figure 2), highly suggestive of grotesque female genitalia, invoking ideas of *vagina dentata* and implying a monstrous female. It not only draws attention to the plant's consumption of *fresh* human, but de-stabilises gender categories in attacking Karen. Slimy, 'flower' heads notwithstanding, Sekely's alien triffids are more root than vibrant vegetation, with hairy, tentacle legs/arms that are more akin to the monsters of the giant spider movies of the

1950s.[64] While not explicitly gendered, the triffids nevertheless 'challenge notions of the body and of gender, blurring the boundaries created by humans to exert some kind of control over the unwieldy world around them'.[65] Suggestions of vegetable/animal, male/female are confounded throughout the alternate camera shots, disrupting categorisation even when Tom autopsies the life-less triffid in an attempt to determine what they are dealing with. Having chopped off its 'head' during the attack, Tom and Karen are horrified to discover that it is far from dead, being able to gothically 're-animate' itself and leave the lighthouse. This illustrates the Goodwins' misunderstanding of the alien triffid's vegetal nature – after all, cutting a rose does not kill the rosebush.

The triffid is presumed plant as it has none of the internal organs associated with animal (no digestive tract, no central nervous system). Yet, the triffids' animalistic behaviour suggests a hypermasculinity that underlines the contemporary rise of Women's Liberation. According to Dana Oswald, this trope of exaggerated stereotypical male behaviours is not only 'marked by inflated physical traits' but includes 'performances of aggression and domination'.[66] She argues, '[m]onsters operate as representations of human fears and desires', and 'gender is the playful intersection between body, behaviour, and context'.[67] During an era when the boundaries of gender roles were dissolving and employers were beginning to establish positive discrimination policies during recruitment towards women, and other minorities, the triffids demonstrate a hypermasculinity that challenges perceptions of a masculinised femininity that gender role re-assignation and the modern career woman pertained to exhibit. Hypermasculine monsters that are 'occupied by excessive, particularly cannibalistic, consumption, often serve as metaphors for human greed or poor governance', Oswald contends, 'but they also exhibit a kind of masculine tyranny and need for possession or inclusion'.[68] As a gendered eco-monster that engages with concerns of its time, the triffid's hypermasculinity, through its giantism, anthropophagism, and alien voraciousness, does more to reveal 'the fragility of the category of masculinity and the ways in which [it] may be feminized'.[69] Phallocentric fears

[64] See *Earth vs the Spider* (1958), *Tarantula!* (1955) and *The Spider* (1958).
[65] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', p.344.
[66] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', p.347.
[67] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', p.346-7.
[68] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', p.347.
[69] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', p.350.

of the contemporary liberated woman, and renewed efforts for non-discrimination of other minorities are projected onto the triffids in this version as alien monster. The assertive female human characters revert to cowering victims to be protected by the male protagonists, which further underlines the monstrous feminine perspective placed onto the triffids as hypermasculine feminists competing with men in the professional and public sphere.

The question of expanded gender roles and concerns about commodifying nature are also part of the sub-text of the quirky episode written by Philip Levene and directed by Sidney Hayers, 'The Man-eater of Surrey Green' (S4, E11: 1965), of the iconic British espionage TV series, *The Avengers*. Running from 1961-69, the main protagonist, John Steed (Patrick Macnee) is ably assisted by strong, assertive women – in this episode, the epitome of 1960s independent woman, Mrs Emma Peel (Diana Rigg). Ironically, despite her character's revolutionary stance as a modern woman championing feminism, the anti-feminist Rigg recently revealed that she earned less than the cameraman,[70] and that the part had originally been written for a man and had simply not been changed,[71] suggesting the role perpetuated the era's continuing historical view that feminists displayed distinctly masculine traits. In this episode, Steed investigates a string of missing botanists from government research facilities, the latest being acclaimed scientist, Laura Burford. While the audience is aware that the villain, whomever or whatever it is, uses high-pitched sound to hypnotise and communicate with the human horticulturalists, Burford's fiancée and lab partner, Dr. Alan Carter (William Job), remains strangely unaffected. With all routes (roots?) leading to eccentric botanist, Sir Lyle Peterson (Derek Farr), Steed chooses to scout his house for an explanation. Here he locates a hypnotically docile Burford and an experimental growing machine (later discovered to be for germinating a carnivorous alien plant life-form intent on taking over Earth).

There is a distinct, if somewhat sub-conscious, feminist tone underwriting this episode that oscillates between admiration and concern. The female human characters (unusually for plant monster narratives, there are quite a few) are all celebrated high

[70] AFP, 'Diana Rigg reveals protest about her lower pay on 'The Avengers'', *The Business Times*, 6 April 2019 [accessed 5 May 2019].
[71] HARDtalk, BBC News Channel, 'Interview with Diana Rigg', 2016, *YouTube* [accessed 06 May 2019].

achievers, while the (alien) plant imagery embodies the threat perceived within the public (male) imagination of growing feminist activism. In Peterson's conservatory-lobby (another liminal space), female nude mannequins are used as structure for a variety of climbing plants, in a set-dressing that points nostalgically to a Classic era and traditional constructs of femininity, whilst equally foreshadowing the alien plant invader overwhelming human-kind – a decor which Steed finds perturbing. Similarly, when the millionaire-horticulturalist, Peterson, reveals his larger than normal Venus Flytrap and demonstrates its feeding habits, much like Professor Jonkin did, the audience is reminded of Corman's Audrey Junior – causing Steed to shudder. Peterson's fanaticism about how plants can feel and think, sub-textually aligning him with the feminist cause, further unsettles Steed. When Steed finds a deadly cactus (note the return of this plant nasty) placed on the driver's seat of his car, his suspicion of Peterson's involvement in the disappearances is confirmed. Besides the smart, stylish Emma Peel, who discovers the space shuttle and alien pappus (essentially, a giant dandelion seed) while investigating Peterson's abandoned farmstead, the expert botanist called in to confirm and analyse the pappus is also female. Dr. Sheldon (Athene Seyler), who incidentally is more highly qualified than those whom Peterson is suspected of kidnapping, is a retired academic. The female human characters portray the modern woman as a blend of intelligence with femininity in the male imagination, while the plants in this episode are all threatening. From the stranglehold of the climbers, poisonous cactus, carnivorous venus-flytrap, to the alien plant, their threat potential embodies a monstrous female nature that challenges the phallocentric figure of the modern independent woman portrayed as smart and sexy.

After Sheldon establishes that the pappus is far from harmless, having embryonic brain cells that indicate the plant can think and reason, and the presence of an enzyme only found in humans that establishes its man-eating propensity, it becomes clear that Peterson is being manipulated into germinating these alien seeds. Realising Drs. Sheldon and Carter – both leaders in their fields overlooked in the kidnapping – are immune to the plant's hypnotic ability because their hearing aids distort the soundwaves, Steed produces hearing aids for himself and Peel to tackle Peterson and his army of alien man-eating seedlings. Warning Peel to be sure not to lose it, she quips, 'I'll be alright - the plant is only *man*-eating

after all',[72] reflecting the era's continuing battle of the sexes and unsettled gender roles while hinting at the *femme fatale* qualities of the alien plant. Despite her assertion, though, when the alien plant attacks Peterson's establishment, the female characters become the plant's intended victims, in a challenge to their complicit and accepted femininity. In a similar cinematic shooting to Sekely's *Day of the Triffids*, with the suggestive shift of camera angles and tentacle-like tendrils waving in the edge of shots (along with typical 1960-70s special effects of set crew rustling large houseplants at the edge of shots), the threatening vegetation menaces the troupe. As it flails about like a 'mad octopus', the plant again is not explicitly gendered, but demonstrates hypermasculinity in its giantism, domination, expedient growth, and targeting of other assertive females. The plant is eventually destroyed, and humanity saved by covering the hypnotised Emma Peel in herbicide as it tries to eat her. While much of the episode raises concerns about growing commodification of nature and industrialised farming through Peterson's research facility and the importance of the kidnapped horticulturalists, the gendered sub-text illustrates concerns about calls for equality. The successful women are still manipulated to a certain extent by the overwhelming hypermasculine plant, as first Laura Burford is conscripted hypnotically to the cause, followed by Dr. Sheldon, who succumbs to the plant as a potential snack when her hearing aid fails, to controlling Mrs Peel (on losing her hearing aid) to first destroy the instrument before pouring away the weed killer. These women may be successful in their own ways but are nevertheless traditionally feminised within a patriarchally-driven society.

Perhaps, '[a] different way of thinking about plant horror, then, is to read the moment when plants loom into vision, when they "invade"'.[73] Certainly in cinematic terms, plant monsters tend to dominate the screen at key moments of horror, signifying the loss of human control. For example, in Frank Oz's *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986), the power shift between Audrey II and Seymour is depicted through the plant's immense size: Audrey II not only dominates the entire space of the shop but also the camera shots (see Figure 3), as the homicidal megalomaniac plant personality reaches the pinnacle of its invasion plan. Mark Clark notes that while filmmakers often have no 'overt agenda, other than to entertain audiences', their movies 'usually unconsciously reveal the aspirations and

[72] 'Man-Eater of Surrey Green', *The Avengers* (ABC Television, 1965).
[73] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.22.

anxieties of their times'.[74] While still set in 1950s America, this iconic man-eating plant is a monster of its time and has been updated in Oz's 1986 musical adaptation to reflect contemporary anxieties about how gender equality disrupts normative constructs, reaffirming Oswald's hypermasculinity and suggesting a more aggressive eco-*femme fatale* than its predecessors. Although Seymour's (Rick Moranis) love interest and fellow florist, Audrey (Ellen Greene), suggests that Seymour 'tinkers around' with his exotic and unusual plants, the audience learns early in the film that Audrey II, as he names the plant (he later nicknames it 'Two-ey'), arrives on a flash of green lightning (note the significant colour) outside the Chinese Flower Market during a total eclipse of the sun. Seymour explains that it is the 'strange humming sound like something from another world' that draws him back to spot 'a weird plant […] just stuck in amongst the zinnias'.[75] The celestial event provides a clear indicator of the plant's galactic origins, with associated sound proposing this will be no ordinary plant.

Figure 3:Audrey II fills the shop and the screen:
note the tentacular roots on the edge of the frame
from Little Shop of Horrors, dir. by Frank Oz (Warner Bros., 1986).

Like other alien plants, Audrey II is ambiguously gendered, morphing during the film from a perceived benign feminised flowering-plant into a vegetable cyclops with a singularly-large mouth (instead of an eye), anthropophagous tendencies and gigantic stature (see Figure 3), as Audrey II becomes increasingly hypermasculine. For Graham Thompson, this was a key response in the 1980s to the growing fear of feminisation in

[74] Mark Clark, 'Scenes from a Marriage: The Sexual Politics of *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*', in *Science Fiction America: Essays on SF Cinema*, ed. by David J. Hogan (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2006), pp.166-175 (p.167).
[75] *Little Shop of Horrors*, dir. by Frank Oz (The Geffen Company/Warner Bros., 1986).

American culture.[76] Thompson argues that there was a conservative cultural 'backlash against women who put career ahead of family and motherhood',[77] thanks to 'affirmative-action policies that had sought to redress inequalities in employment and education' not only for women but for other sub-cultural groups.[78] Successful women have often deemed it necessary to compete with men by emulation and in the past have used a male pseudonym or proxy. By the 1980s the rise in gender neutral names such as Audrey (Francis, Lesley, Lindsay, Alex and shortening designated female names to unisex versions: Vic(toria), Dan(ielle), Pat(ricia)) reflects the growing desire for gender equality while recognising the residual bias women often faced in professional and public spheres.[79] Although Seymour continues to assert traditional associations of women and flowers in naming the plant after his love interest, Audrey (a typical 1950's female), awakened by the taste of human blood, the Audrey-plant displays all the facets of a hypermasculine monster. Audrey II's alien origin signals how uncomfortable the neo-conservative agenda of the 1980s found the dissolution of stable gender (and other) identities, as '[f]emale monsters … routinely take on male physical properties and adopt corresponding aspects of masculine gender',[80] traits that equally determine an eco-*femme fatale*. In fact, Lyle Conway's creation is voiced by Levi Stubbs from The Four Tops, depicting Audrey II as a male, black, alien plant that embodies many of the neo-conservative anxieties of 1980s America surrounding the rise of:

> civil rights, multiculturalism and feminism, for instance – that [for them] signalled a wrong turn in American history. The attempt to recover the 1950s often formed around a rhetoric of contented domesticity and so-called "family values" of respect, monogamy and simplicity.[81]

Although the human characters and setting in *Little Shop* pertain to a nostalgic idea of 1950s gender constructs, these traditional roles are sepias of 1980s issues. The human Audrey is the victim of domestic abuse at the hands of her sadomasochistic dentist boyfriend, Orin Scrivello (Steve Martin) reflecting 'the violence perpetrated against women

[76] Graham Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p.103.
[77] Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s*, p.32.
[78] Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s*, p.30.
[79] Ralph Slovenko, 'Unisex and Cross-Sex Names', *Journal of Psychiatry and Law*, vol.14:1 & 2, Spring-Summer 1986, pp. 249-326.
[80] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', p.354.
[81] Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s*, p.104.

in many of the films [during the 1980s]'.[82] Together with the murder and dismembering of Scrivello and Audrey II's other meals, often depicted in shadow, the suggested violence in *Little Shop* not only underlines the contemporary serial killings but jibes at the wider public debate concerning the effects of the plethora of contemporary slasher movies.[83] The physical aggression of the humans, whether at the behest of the plant or otherwise, offers a key to understanding the Audrey-plant through a gothic trans-corporeality.

Stacy Alaimo argues that 'we are permeable, emergent beings, reliant upon the others within and outside our porous borders', a trans-corporeality that philosophically recognises that we are 'never disconnected from our environment'.[84] This human-material incorporation of natural elements and particularly toxins is already gothic at its core in terms of cross-contamination; applied within a gothic context, trans-corporeality offers a focus on transgressive interconnections that underscore contemporary debates around calls for equality of the sexes, gender performance and civil rights. Audrey II provides Seymour with all his desires that he voices when the plant is small but which the plant fully understands after ingesting Seymour's blood, underlining material ecocritical theories of 'being permeable to harmful substances',[85] a growing concern in the 1970s-1990s in relation to pesticide poisoning.[86] In absorbing the essence of Seymour through the consumption of his blood (as toxin, perhaps), the anthropophagous plant blurs the nature/culture boundaries and begins a symbiotic relationship that allows the alien flora to manipulate Seymour into getting rid of his rival and feeding Audrey II as a single goal. By ingesting Seymour, the Audrey-plant in this version becomes more than a gothic doubling as the plant absorbs Seymour's hidden masculine desires, using these to control him for

[82] Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s*, p.102.
[83] As Xavier Aldana Reyes explains, 'The slasher horror subgenre, which developed in the 1970s and peaked in popularity in the 1980s, involves the stalking and murder of a group of characters by a, sometimes supernatural, psychopath' (*Gothic Cinema,* p.151), and coincided, according to Steffen Hantke, with the literary rise in the serial killer novel and splatterpunk, a subgenre 'dedicated primarily to depictions of graphic violence and bodily injury, degradation and decay'. Although a male dominated field that often illustrated 'sexualised violence specifically against female bodies', female and queer horror writers offered narratives focusing on 'heightened body awareness' and 'non-normative bodies in violation of strict gender norms' ('The Rise of Popular Horror, 1971-2000', pp.177 and 179).
[84] Alaimo, *Bodily Nature*s, p.156.
[85] Alaimo, *Bodily Nature*s, p.146.
[86] According to World Health Organization statistics, 'In 1985, the WHO estimated that there are 3 million acute, severe pesticide poisonings and 20,000 accidental deaths each year', cited in Jeremy Harris, *Chemical Pesticide Markets, Health Risks and Residues* (Oxon: CABI Publishing, 2000), p.2.

the plant's own will. While Audrey II highlights a role reversal of ideas that '[m]atter [and nature] is not a passive resource for human manipulation and consumption',[87] the plant's ever-increasing anthropomorphism exhibits gender performance that offers a challenge to contemporary ideas of masculinity and femininity in an age of equal rights.

Like its predecessor, Audrey II's man-eating propensity is often seen as reflecting the issue of capitalist consumption while famine elsewhere was on the increase,[88] yet eating is far less obvious in this film in comparison to Corman's original, with more emphasis on Audrey II's other-worldliness and plans for alien invasion. While such monster movies 'seem to fan the fear of nature, evolution, reproduction, and the female body'[89] that one expects from a plant monster, Oswald argues that '[i]n terms of gender, those monsters who bend it are, typically, women' who 'broaden the concept of gender by becoming, in a sense, transgender individuals' through the display of masculine traits.[90] Certainly, Audrey II disrupts assigned gender as the plant's physical and anthropomorphic growth expediates with every male consumed, displaying increased masculine behaviours that typify contemporary perceptions of the successful career woman. Signalling the plant's underlying eco-*femme fatale* origins where, 'by eating men, these monsters assert their own superior masculine gender, diminishing that of their victims, and demonstrating the authority that they hold over human bodies',[91] Audrey II's hypermasculinity challenges heteronormative gender boundaries and behaviours in a world that, despite equality laws and programmes, continued to be one of masculine dominated ideology. Hypermasculinity is personified in Audrey II through size, anthropophagism, aggression and voice, while the big lips of the plant's large mouth are suggestive of transvestitism that clearly questions gender-role reversal. Despite these overwhelmingly hypermasculine attributes, claims of being a 'Mean Green Mother from Outer Space' add to gender category confusion, clearly mapping Audrey II's transgender status strategically onto the plant's alien identity.[92]

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[87] Alaimo, *Bodily Nature*s, p.142.

[88] Several years of drought and famine in Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia were high-profile during the 1980s, A.T. Grove, 'The State of Africa in the 1980s', *The Geographical Journal* 152:2 (1986), 193-203. LiveAid and Comic Relief were the largest UK televised charity fund-raisers in 1985.

[89] Alaimo, *Bodily Nature*s, p.142.

[90] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', pp.353-4.

[91] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', p.348.

[92] Howard Ashman/Alan Menken, 'Mean Green Mother from Outer Space', in *Little Shop of Horrors*, dir. by Frank Oz (The Geffen Company/Warner Bros., 1986).

Having eaten very dominant male characters, Audrey II demonstrates heightened manipulation of the humans towards the end when s/he learns of Seymour's plan to marry the human Audrey and leave the plant to starve/die. As the plant sends Seymour (this time to the butcher shop) for one more meal, s/he telephones the human Audrey coaxing her to the shop in a reflection of Scrivello's bullying behaviour, highlighting the absorption, not just of human flesh but also any cultural values. In displaying such manipulative behaviour, the alien anthropophagous plant monster requires a reconsideration of 'scientific, philosophical and cultural' censure that 'attribute[s] agency to humans, instinct to animals, and the deterministic forces of nature to everything else'.[93] By eating socially toxic humans whose cultural values influence the plant's characteristics, Audrey II becomes a gothic trans-corporeal subject, reflecting the 'capitalist consumerism that transforms matter [and nature] into commodities'.[94] Alaimo argues that trans-corporeality examines not just the material interactions but 'how they *do* things – often unwelcome or unexpected things' to the human body,[95] reversed in Audrey II as the plant reacts to the effects of ingesting toxic cultural values. As Beville argues, 'the monster has gone through a process of change […] no longer projection onto exotic other but a mirror of human behaviour'.[96] After saving his fiancée from the aggressive clutches of the massive plant who tries to eat her, Seymour is approached by Patrick Martin (Jim Belushi), a representative of a seed company, about propagating Audrey II for world-wide distribution. In the official ending, a horrified Seymour electrocutes the monstrous alien plant to save humanity from being plant food, somewhat ironically, since as Dawn Keetley suggests, '[t]hese man-eating plants only hyperbolize a mundane fact about our relationship with plants, however: in the end, we become their nourishment'.[97] As the credits roll, the suggestion remains that this lesson in human hubris is lost in our capitalist consumerism as we see Seymour and Audrey begin their married life in the suburban show-home of Audrey's earlier day-dreams, with the final spotlight on the little 'Audrey' plant in the border. Nostalgically traditional gender roles are

[93] Alaimo, *Bodily Nature*s, p.143.
[94] Alaimo, *Bodily Nature*s, p.147.
[95] Alaimo, *Bodily Nature*s, p.146, (italics in original).
[96] Beville, *The Unnameable Monster in Literature and Film*, p.19.
[97] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.6.

re-affirmed, and the ambiguously gendered sub-cultural plant monster has, momentarily at least, been denied a more visible position within contemporary social acceptability.

Figure 4: Audrey II bursts through the screen in the ending of the 2012 Director's Cut. from Little Shop of Horrors: The Director's Cut *(Warner Bros., 2012).*

In the much darker Director's Cut (released 2012), the ending envisaged by Oz was rejected after a test audience expressed distaste at the overwhelming horror.[98] Instead of rescuing Audrey in the nick of time, she is mortally wounded and requests Seymour feed her to the plant to enable his success. Subsequently, a distressed Seymour attempts jumping off a building only to be stopped by corporate giant, Patrick Martin, who, already having cuttings of the galactic monster, explains his (and the plant's) plan to widely distribute mini 'Audreys'. In attempting to thwart the plant's plan of world domination, Seymour is also eaten. Thanks to the globalised distribution of 'Audrey' buds, the film ends with many giant plants destroying cities and neighbourhoods, eating people, while the US army wade unsuccessfully into the chaos. As Beville suggests, 'the monster's capacity to terrify and its aura of anxiety, […] originate[s] in our powerlessness to contain it',[99] given added weight when Audrey II bursts through the screen as the finale (see Figure 4). While a post-millennial audience may find the apocalyptic ending of the Director's Cut more fitting for its cultural values (see Chapter 5 for more on post-millennial context), this was, apparently, too horrific for a 1980s public to accept. Aside from the obvious concerns surrounding corporate conglomerate globalisation, this version also provides an

[98] Alec Kubas-Meyer, '"Little Shop" Director's Cut Lets You Suddenly See More', *Critics Academy,* 5 October 2012 [accessed 5 May 2019].
[99] Beville, *The Unnameable Monster in Literature and Film*, p.8.

undercurrent of concern about disrupted normative categories and the rising influence of sub-cultural groups.

It seems the idea of being consumed by a plant (whether through natural decomposition of the body or when still alive) is so disturbing that it is often hyperbolised to a comic extent, such as, John DeBello's spoof, *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes!* (1978) and Carl Monson's *Please Don't Eat My Mother!* (1973). Such comedy horror exemplifies Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik's 'comic turn' in the gothic, where 'terror is suspended and horror is held in abeyance', allowing the audience/reader to self-reflect and engage with their fears and anxieties.[100] The trans-corporeal alien plant blurs the boundaries between nature and culture through a cannibalistic consumption of human flesh as a cultural body, not only drawing attention to rising consumerism, but the perceived disappearance of gender boundaries as the introduction of politically correct nomenclatures in the 1970s and 1980s attempted to address gender bias.

4.3. The Vegetal Alien: Becoming Humanoid Plant

Even more unsettling than being eaten by your salad, it appears, is being taken over by sentient beansprouts. That fear, Dawn Keetley suggests, is 'not about remaining human (as we know it), but becoming some new kind of human. The Green Man… has persisted—challenging us to recognize our constitutive oneness with the vegetal'.[101] In this section, human oneness with the alien plant monster provides either a terrifyingly uncanny or darkly comic response to changing society and our material place in the world. The alien plant invasion narrative, Adam Knee contends, 'also appears to index contemporary gender anxieties'.[102] He argues that the aliens' reproductive (asexual) activities 'allows one to see this as a corollary of a more conventional war between the sexes' while 'those who did not take on these [conservative] roles ran the risk of being looked on with suspicion (in a paranoid age), as potentially morally and/or politically deviant'.[103] While this is one way to view the alien-plant, the gendered human-nonhuman entanglements explored in this section offers an alternative perspective as category and species boundaries are erased,

[100] Horner and Zlosnik, *Gothic and the Comic Turn*, p.3.
[101] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.25.
[102] Knee, 'Vegetable Discourses in the 1950s US Science Fiction Film', p.150.
[103] Knee, 'Vegetable Discourses in the 1950s US Science Fiction Film', p.148-9.

often challenging conservative views as outdated. By the 1970s, America faced 'many deep-seated concerns' such as 'The Vietnam War, the energy crisis, double-digit inflation, and the hostage situation in Iran',[104] that are underlined in alien horror narratives. Updated to reflect these anxieties, Philip Kaufman's version of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978) moves the narrative from a small town to the bustling city of San Francisco, where the alien pods engage with 'fears about creeping standardization, worries about the effects of global capitalism on diversity, and anxieties around the negotiation of difference (sexual as well as racial) in the public and private spaces of the modern United States'.[105] Arriving during the opening credits as space dust, the 'alien seeds sprout with amazing speed into red and pink flowers that quickly implant themselves within the verdant, moist, and colorful urban landscape', that for Natania Meeker and Antonia Szabari suggest 'forms of diversity and hybridity that are intensified rather than invented by the plants'.[106] The alien flowers correspond to the colourful human diversity that San Francisco is renowned for alongside a deferential nod to the iconic centre of the Flower Power Movement of the late sixties, meaning the alien plants fit in so well they are barely noticed by the city's inhabitants. Despite their alien origin, the body-snatcher pods illustrate that 'the place of the monster has shifted regularly from being a fearsome and exotic other with origins in faraway places, to a proximal other that bears uncanny and disturbing resemblance to ourselves'.[107] Even more disturbing perhaps, is that the apparent duplication of the residents goes beyond Gothic doubling, or alien replacement, but offers a gothic trans-corporeal commingling of human and (alien) plant. In discarding corporeal boundaries, these plant monsters reveal more about contemporary gender (and other) equality than fears of communist invasion.

Elisabeth Driscoll (Brooke Adams), yet another amateur orchid collector, brings home one of the pod flowers and tries, but fails, to identify it in a botany book, establishing its uniqueness and accepting it as a hybrid orchid. As per the earlier versions, the pod invaders 'morph into identical replicas of the city's inhabitants', although in Kaufman's version they do so 'in a process revealed to be analogous to that of a graft'.[108] Developing

[104] Muir, *Horror Films of the 1970s*, p.5.
[105] Meeker and Szabari, 'From the Century of the Pods to the Century of the Plants', p.52.
[106] Meeker and Szabari, 'From the Century of the Pods to the Century of the Plants', p.47.
[107] Beville, *The Unnameable Monster in Literature and Film*, p.19.
[108] Meeker and Szabari, 'From the Century of the Pods to the Century of the Plants', p.47.

this idea further, the act of grafting and subsequent moulding of the replicant pod-person indicates a material trans-corporeal merging of alien plant and human. This new form of human reiterates Driscoll's initial examination of the plant as hybrid, only now it is a chimera of plant and human. A 'chimera' (originally the Greek hybrid monster of lion-goat-serpent) is also described, according to Drew Ayers, by the OED as 'an organism (commonly a plant) in which tissues of genetically different constitution co-exist as a result of grafting, mutation, or some other process'.[109] Hence, Ayers claims, 'the chimera evokes feelings of dread and fear, and the posthuman hybrids of human and non-human are frequently imagined as a terrible and destructive "incongruous union"'.[110] In the scene where the Belicecs (Jeff Goldblum and Veronica Cartwright) and Driscoll are at Matthew Bennell's (Donald Sutherland) house, Bennell falls asleep in the deck chair while on watch in the garden. As he sleeps, the pod releases white tendrils that attach themselves to his hand and the flower pod bursts forth embryonic life, that he destroys on waking. While the process of duplication reveals 'the (re)productivity of plants to be both more profoundly feminine (in a ripely physiological sense) and more disturbingly effective than ever… [w]ith its vaginal images of the replicants emerging from their vegetal shrouds',[111] the alien-plant remains ambiguous despite gendered imagery of flower, and seed pod-birthing suggesting monstrous female nature.

Rather, the trans-corporeal plant-human merging indicated by the tendrils of the pod attaching and absorbing the material human body that challenges dualistic ideology for humanist philosophies that 'view the existence of the human and the non-human as intertwined and co-constitutive'.[112] To date, these alien plant infiltrators of the human body have not been explored as posthuman in any depth, nor has transhumanism, Dan Hassler-Forest argues, questioned 'systemic dichotomies', but offers a hybridisation with non-human other (principally, technology), 'without […] upsetting traditional binary distinctions, most notably gender difference'.[113] Kaufman's pod-people hybrids disrupt

[109] Drew Ayers, 'Chimera and Hybrids: The Digital Swarms of the Posthuman Image' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television*, ed. by Michael Hauskeller, Curtis D. Carbonell, and Thomas D. Philbeck (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp.99-108 (p.100).
[110] Ayers, 'Chimera and Hybrids', p.100.
[111] Meeker and Szabari, 'From the Century of the Pods to the Century of the Plants', p.47-48.
[112] Ayers, 'Chimera and Hybrids', p.101.
[113] Hassler-Forest, 'Of Iron Men and Green Monsters: Superheroes and Posthumanism', p.70.

conservative frameworks and heteronormativity in generating a 'web of becomings', that moves posthumanist thinking forward to consider the human as a site of constant change.[114] The terror comes from the lack of control over categorisation. The converted Dr. Kibner, for instance, adopts the pronoun 'we' and all replicants work towards a singular goal without recourse to gender roles. While many have focused on the replicant as a new alien species in place of the human resident, there is no indication (in earlier or in this version) of discarded human corpses. What the bin-men collect in the various versions of the body snatcher films is presumed to be evidence of the pod's existence given the half-full bin-liners that are handed over, implying that the alien and human bodies have materially merged, creating a vegetable posthuman body that discards conservative frameworks of 'unambiguous gender roles and patriarchal power'.[115] Recognising that the 'bulk of posthumanist theories emphasize a techno-futurism that melds human and machine', Alaimo calls for a posthumanism that is 'more hospitable to an environmental ethics' by 'recogniz[ing] the material interrelatedness of all beings, including the human'.[116] Yet, the body-snatcher plant is a vegetal Borg - a posthuman monstrous entity defined by Anna Powell as operating collectively, efficiently and dispassionately, strengthening the whole through assimilating others.[117] Within the gender politics of the late 1970s, where equality between the sexes and civil rights were a hot topic being navigated with trepidation, Kaufman's pod-people highlight concerns about how equal rights could contribute to lack of individualism. This is a particularly American socio-cultural concern in the wake of the 1950s conformist ideals of suburbia, incorporating some of the original paranoia of Jack Finney's novel (1955).

A similar, more straight-forward monstrous rendering of the human-plant hybrid is Stephen King's unfortunate protagonist, Jordy Verrill, in King's short story 'Weeds', first published in *Cavalier* magazine in 1976.[118] It was subsequently adapted for, and made popular in, the horror anthology film *Creepshow* (1982), written by King and directed by

[114] Alaimo, *Bodily Nature*s, p.150.
[115] Hassler-Forest, 'Of Iron Men and Green Monsters', p.69.
[116] Alaimo, *Bodily Nature*s, pp.150-1.
[117] Powell, 'Growing Your Own: Monsters from the Lab and Molecular Ethics in Posthumanist Film', pp.77-87.
[118] Stephen King, 'Weeds', (1976) reprinted in *Dark Screams: Volume One*, ed. by Brian J. Freeman and Richard Chizmar (New York: Hydra, 2014), pp.7-67.

George A. Romero. It was also published the same year by Penguin as a graphic novella with artwork by Bernie Wrightson, co-creator of *Swamp Thing* (see below), suggesting King's plant monster spoke to the popular imagination of the period. Labelled the 'Master of Horror', King, who plays the protagonist himself in the *Creepshow* version, emphasises the trans-corporeal horror in his alien plant monster. Like the hybrid monster Jordy becomes, Romero's short blends comic and film, while here, screen and short story are explored together as a unique text.[119] Faced with a similar vegetal Borg, it is Jordy's inability to navigate the terror of accepting a fluid merging of alien weed and human body that triggers a posthuman ecoGothic perspective of human materiality: water and nutrients for other life-forms. Like previous plant monster narratives, this tale pits a male human protagonist against the strange weed which although is not specifically gendered, can be equally read as an invasive eco-*femme fatale*.

Hick farmer, Jordy Verrill, watches a meteorite land on his New Hampshire farmstead that he is anxious to recover and sell to the local college professors to help pay off some of his debts. Armed with a bucket of water and an old broom, Jordy heads for the meteor site to put out the flames and claim his prize. Jordy gets more than he bargains for, starting with the blisters on his fingers that he gets from touching the meteor contents. The following morning, Jordy looks at his fingers where the blisters had broken and notices 'green stuff was growing out of them', 'like moss. Fuzzy short tendrils' of 'a darker, more vigorous green'.[120] He is, as he says himself, 'growin''.[121] Wherever there is moisture and he has touched, the alien growth sprouts until Jordy is 'a grotesque, shambling figure with green arms and a forest growing out of one eye socket', eventually looking 'like a walking privet hedge'.[122] By the end, monstrous nature responds to the detrimental cultural effects of large-scale farming on the environment in an attempt to question the commodification of nature in a comical but terrifying re-greening process.

[119] The screen version is a direct visual depiction of the literary narrative.
[120] King, 'Weeds', p.28.
[121] King, 'Weeds', p.50.
[122] King, 'Weeds', pp.57, 64.

This is not a symbiotic relationship. This alien plant life is sentient, parasitic and controlling. Even before Jordy's body is completely covered with the weed, they project their thoughts and desire for the resources which would enable their growth:

> *Cold water*! The thought was so focused, so steely, that it didn't seem like his own at all. Commanding, it came again: *Cold water!*[123]

until he can 'no longer control himself' and dives into a bathtub of water enabling the growth to expand 'with amazing, terrifying speed' rendering Jordy 'vaguely humanoid'.[124] Since the green mass of tendrils that 'seem to reach from the Green Man's mouth might also be penetrating the mouth from the outside',[125] Jordy begins to epitomize the Green Man figure, further emphasised by the plant as space-alien. Jordy's unfortunate demise occurs through what Nancy Tuana refers to as 'the viscous porosity of our bodies'.[126] Tuana argues that the human ingestion of carcinogens and other pollutants of industry as viscous entities interact with our porous bodies, underlining the interrelationality of nature (us as biological beings) and culture (man-made toxins) through material agency. Jordy's malignant growth can be read similarly as it is through his skin and flesh that the plant spreads and thrives, turning him into a plant-human chimera. Like a visible vegetal tumour, the plant feeds off Jordy's human flesh, merging and intertwining until plant and Jordy become one entity. The plant-human hybrid figure of Jordy Verrill implodes the nature/culture divide through a gothic trans-corporeality. Although not specifically gendered, female associations with nature, its alien-origin, and the lack of other human protagonists (male or female) offer the alien weed as monstrous feminine. Hence the plant-monster Jordy has become is not just a blurring of human and nonhuman, but both male and female, as the plant monster engages with the dissolution of gender boundaries in response to contemporary calls for equality.

Once the growth reaches 'the very meat of his brain', Jordy begins to comprehend the sinister telepathy between the tendril growths in him and those in the field, as they query: 'is the food good?', and 'Is he the only food?'[127] What remains of the human Jordy

[123] King, 'Weeds', pp.52-3.
[124] King, 'Weeds', pp.58, 59, 61.
[125] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.25.
[126] Tuana, 'Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katarina', p.200.
[127] King, 'Weeds', pp.62-3.

understands the plight of humanity and he decides to shoot himself in an effort to halt the weeds' progression. He is *allowed* to do so by the plants ('*Let him do what he wants.*'[128]) suggesting a lack of control and submission to the vegetal monster that is at the heart of Simon C. Estok's ecophobia, where '[i]magining the power and the danger of nonhuman agency often means imagining threats to human control' in ordering nature and culture.[129] Jordy is no longer human, but merely the shape of a man's body with a solitary eye as the balance of power and leafy growth overwhelm him. At this point in the narrative, Jordy is denied a gendered human identity, becoming an 'it'. A non-specific green monster that 'could not pull the trigger by *itself*, but the tendrils helped, perhaps curious to see if the bang would make the Jordy-food more tasty' (my emphasis in italics).[130] With the advancement of the equality agenda and perceived dissolution of masculine and feminine roles this plant-man hybrid provides an unsettling comic portrayal of conservative American perceptions as the alien plant-life subsumes the human form. Interestingly, there are once more no female characters in this tale, allowing the monstrous vegetal to be gendered as the masculine character is subsumed by feminist thinking in the form of the alien sentient being. Moreover, the materiality of the human body is reduced to plant food as the 'growth … absorb[s] every bit of moisture that Jordy's failing systems could produce'.[131] This material perspective of the human body as mostly water and other nutrients reiterates our true position within nature by undermining our self-imposed separateness from the natural world. With the rise of environmentalism and space exploration in the 1970s/1980s, this eco-monster hails a gothic response to human destruction of the planet.

The human body as host for alien life is a common trope in science fiction horror. While critics often examine this in terms of human resilience that simultaneously underlines the fragility of the human body, the alien plant invader is rarely part of these discussions. Yet plant invaders appear more disturbing because they remind us that 'we all, whether buried in the ground or scattered on the earth, become sustenance for plants'.[132]

[128] King, 'Weeds', p.64. (italics in original).
[129] Estok, 'Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia', p.135.
[130] King, 'Weeds', p.65.
[131] King, 'Weeds', pp.64-5.
[132] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.1.

Appropriating the human body as food/nutrients/host before it is defunct is even more unsettling, with the alien plant appearing in the 1970s on both sides of the Atlantic. The British TV series, *Doctor Who*, according to Lynette Porter, is 'the longest running single … SF [monster] series in British or American TV history',[133] featuring an alien plant invader amongst its vast collection of galactic monsters. A series of six episodes, the closing story of Season Thirteen, 'The Seeds of Doom' (1976) by Robert Banks Stewart (Douglas Camfield, dir.) recounts the eponymous Doctor's (Tom Baker) entanglement with a dangerous alien plant life-form:

> "I suppose you could call it a galactic weed, though it's deadlier than any weed you know. On most planets the animals eat the vegetation. On planets where the Krynoid gets established, the vegetation eats the animals".[134]

Drawing intertextually on the uncanny figure of the man-eating plant and vegetal alien invader of the 1950s (*The Day of the Triffids* and *The Thing from Another World*),[135] the story charts the discovery of the carnivorous Krynoid during an Antarctic expedition, to the plant collector's hubristic assistance in the Krynoid's attempt to take over Earth and the Doctor's help in thwarting the invasion. Despite its 11 million viewers making it the second most popular story of Season Thirteen and heralding 'a new kind of Doctor Who … which relied more on Gothic horror',[136] neither the Krynoid nor 'The Seeds of Doom' have received much criticism to date.[137]

Discovering two strange seed pods buried deep in the permafrost, lead scientist, Charles Winlett (John Gleeson) becomes infected when one cracks open during examination and a tendril/rootlet lashes out, ferociously attaching and constricting itself tightly around his arm and puncturing the skin (see Figure 5). Like King's weed and Kaufman's pod, the Krynoid transfers its material substance, infecting Winlett through his porous epidermis, producing green growths along his face, neck and shoulders - an illustration of Tuana's 'viscous porosity' as his human materiality blends with the alien

[133] Lynette Porter, *Tarnished Heroes, Charming Villains and Modern Monsters* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2010), p.37.
[134] '*Doctor Who* Classic Era: Dialogue Triumphs', *BBC archive*, [n.d.] [accessed 20 March 2019].
[135] David J. Howe, Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker, *Doctor Who: The Seventies* (London: Doctor Who Books, Virgin Publishing Ltd., 1994), p.98.
[136] Howe, Stammers and Walker, *Doctor Who: The Seventies*, pp.89, 98.
[137] A version of this section is due to appear in *Critical Approaches to Horror in* Doctor Who, ed. by Robert Kilker (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, forthcoming).

plant.[138] The alien corporeal invasion through Winlett's skin reveals 'permeable and shifting' dualistic boundaries of nature/culture, material/semiotic, sex/gender, that are 'deeply entrenched in bodies and practices',[139] becoming the site of the initial transformation. The viscid green growth suggests the decomposition of human flesh combining with the sticky sap of vegetation, dispelling the boundaries of plant and human.

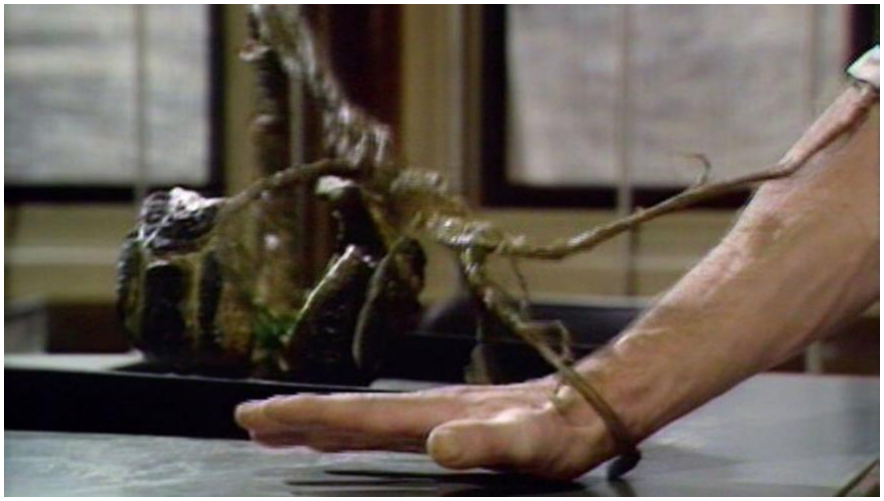

Figure 5: The tendrils lash out and penetrate the human epidermis of both Winlett and later Keeler, from Doctor Who: The Seeds of Doom (BBC TV, 1976).

The Krynoid rapidly subsumes the human form, encasing Winlett's body in a mass of intertwining vines, roots, and indistinguishable green matter (albeit, courtesy of 1970s low-budget special effects, in the form of a latex suit), becoming a liminal entity that interrogates both species and gender boundaries. When the Doctor and his assistant, Sarah Jane Smith (Elisabeth Sladen), arrive, Winlett is already turning into a plant – blood tests reveal there are no longer blood platelets but schizophytes (plant version) in his system. Winlett is becoming-plant as the materiality of the alien infiltrates the human body, disregarding boundaries, reflecting gender equality and environmental degradation as 'contemporary social issue[s] of concern' identified by the series' production team.[140] Although the Krynoid itself is not specifically gendered, it draws on the monstrous female figure, as the humans it invades and mutates are male scientists. Resembling the Jordy-privet hedge in King's story and invoking the Green Man figure, the Winlett-Krynoid is a

[138] Tuana, 'Viscous Porosity', pp.188-213.
[139] Tuana, 'Viscous Porosity', p.189.
[140] Howe, Stammers and Walker, *Doctor Who: The Seventies*, p.59.

'confusing composite' forming a liminal entity that violates boundaries,[141] between human and alien, man and nature, and by association, masculine and feminine constructs.

Science Fiction monsters are recognizable, Porter argues, because they 'typically react … or act simply out of habit or instinct. They are unpredictable and feared because no one knows what they may do next'.[142] The Winlett-Krynoid defies this categorisation, as it is unclear whether it is a confused Winlett seeking help/escape or the Krynoid wishing to infect others that rampages the base. As Porter claims, 'SF TV monsters … are often dehumanized. They are considered "it" instead of "he" or "she"'.[143] Yet, the plant-human composite, perhaps due to its human shape, continues to be called 'Charles' or 'Winlett' by the other characters even once that individuality is lost and the being lacks distinctive human features or face. The ecophobic horror occurs with the shift in balance of power as the cultural human body loses control to alien nature, a loss of control that reflects the sense of power-shift between the sexes typified within the gender politics of the 1970s. The alien power-struggle is eventually resolved when the Winlett-Krynoid is caught in an explosion meant for the Doctor and Sarah, suggesting a metaphorical return to the status-quo. Our heroes escape to chase Scorby (John Challis) and Arnold Keeler (Mark Jones) who have stolen a second pod for eccentric millionaire and plant collector, Harrison Chase (Tony Beckley), who is fully aware of the dangers it poses.

Confirming the trend for these gothic gardeners, Chase is introduced in the liminal space of his mansion conservatory-laboratory, surrounded by masses of exotic greenery, destabilising gender categorisation through a traditionally feminine association. Beckley's portrayal of Chase as a passive-aggressive modern man is underlined by the character's need for henchman, Scorby, to carry out the more hands-on violent tasks. Like Sir Lyle Peterson earlier, Chase asserts an underestimated recognition of his plants as more than inert decoration. Chase's fanatical ecologist stance is demonstrated when he challenges Richard Dunbar (Kenneth Gilbert) of the World Ecology Bureau on the 'mutilation and torture' of bonsai which he describes as the 'hideous, grotesque Japanese practice of

[141] Weinstock, 'Introduction: A Genealogy of Monster Theory', p.19.
[142] Porter, *Tarnished Heroes, Charming Villains and Modern Monsters*, p.37. (italics in original).
[143] Porter, *Tarnished Heroes, Charming Villains and Modern Monsters*, p.40.

miniaturising shrubs and trees'.[144] Environmental activism was often perceived in the 1970s as predominantly associated with women and transgressive others, largely since 'vegetarianism [within environmental politics] has a fundamentally philosophical dimension stemming from the biocentric view of the world'[145], and as we have seen, vegetarianism was linked to effeminacy. Chase epitomizes not only the new man, but an ecological figure also often depicted as effeminate. Chase's botanical research on his 'green friends' involves the effects of light and sound on plant-health, including a potentially sinister composting system that recycles back into the garden, 'lots of things – provided they're organic'.[146] As such, these plants are cannibals as they ingest the nutrients from other vegetable matter, and the occasional undesirable human, including Sergeant Henderson (Ray Barron) of UNIT, who becomes 'part of the garden'.[147] Chase's contact with the Krynoid enhances his vegetal existence, becoming the Krynoid's champion in underlining a gothic interconnectedness with nature and material trans-corporeal concepts when he asserts humans are dependent on plants 'for the air that you breathe, even the food that you eat',[148] while the plants have only one use for the human: compost – an idea that becomes more prevalent in Chapter 5.

Injecting the Krynoid pod with a growth hormone/chemical, Chase is curious to see it interact with human flesh and the unfortunate Keeler is similarly stung by the alien plant through its penetration of skin and flesh of his arm which is, strategically, off camera.[149] Keeler's metamorphosis offers a physical manifestation of becoming-plant in swift successive stages, although the visceral fragmentation and material disintegration of the human body is not graphically depicted. Nevertheless, there is a sense of revulsion that reflects Julia Kristeva's abjection, a concept arising from that which 'disturbs identity, system, order' through transgression of 'borders, positions, rules', by '[t]he in-between,

[144] 'The Seeds of Doom: Part 1', *Doctor Who*, (BBC Television, 1976). BritBox/PrimeVideo.
[145] Brendan Prendiville, 'British Environmentalism: A Party in Movement?', *Literature, History of Ideas, Images and Societies of the English-speaking World*, Vol.X11.8, 2014, para.17. https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.7119
[146] 'The Seeds of Doom: Part 4' (1976).
[147] 'The Seeds of Doom: Part 6' (1976).
[148] 'The Seeds of Doom: Part 6' (1976).
[149] By Seasons 13 and 14, *Doctor Who* was 'geared to the intelligent fourteen-year-old' and relied heavily on the Gothic style that suggestively portrayed 'the occasional flash of monster' rather than 'a succession of gory and shocking images', Howe, Stammers and Walker, *Doctor Who: The Seventies*, p.108.

the ambiguous, the composite'.[150] Depicted first as green-skinned, Keeler's 'whole body is changing'[151] as his skin erupts in green-brown, slimy wealds (see Figure 6) and his arms begin to swell.

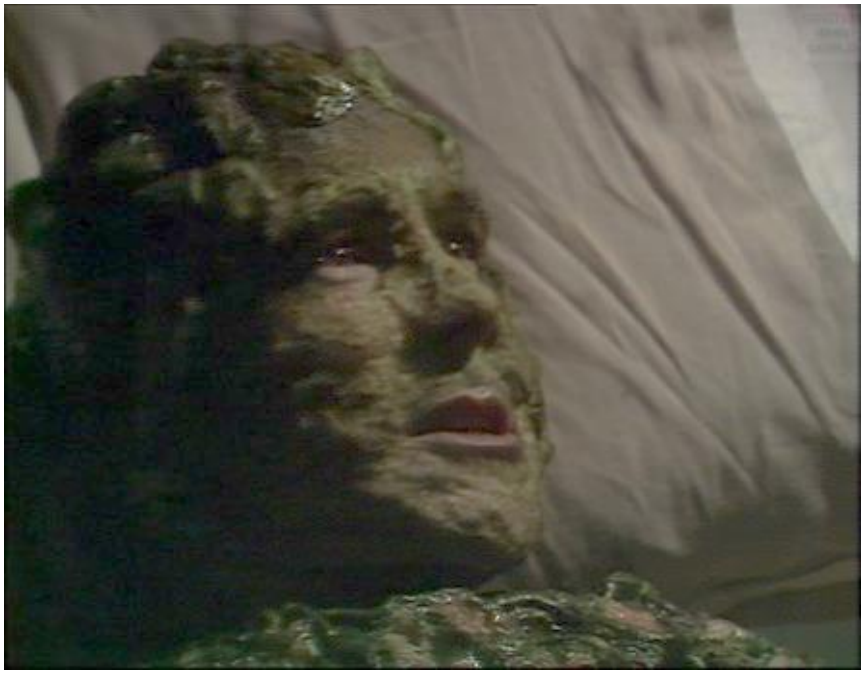

Figure 6: Keeler and Krynoid commingle into a 'new species of plant'. from Doctor Who: The Seeds of Doom (BBC TV, 1976).

The Krynoid transgresses the borders of the human body as Keeler becomes an abject figure that questions dualistic boundaries of human-nonhuman and by extension male and female roles in the popular imagination. Overseeing Keeler's 'privileged' change into 'a marvellous new species of plant',[152] unlike Winlett, Keeler is instantly dehumanized and referred to as 'a monster'. Camera shots of Keeler mid-mutation show his torso covered in a mass of gelatinous green tubular tendrils with only his face denoting he was once human (see Figure 6). As the Keeler-Krynoid changes further into an indistinguishable vegetal mass, he becomes fully monstrous in his unrecognisable state of flailing tendrils and shuffling greenery (see Figure 7).

[150] Kristeva, 'Approaching Abjection', in *The Monster Theory Reader*, p.97.
[151] 'The Seeds of Doom: Part 4' (1976).
[152] 'The Seeds of Doom: Part 4' (1976).

Figure 7: Keeler as a mature Krynoid-human plant monster, from Doctor Who: The Seeds of Doom (BBC TV, 1976).

Isolated by Chase, the Keeler-Krynoid is force-fed raw meat to speed up the transformation, indicating the Krynoid's carnivorous nature. After first invading and metamorphosing the human body into plant, it consumes/absorbs human individuals in the suggestive off-screen action. When Scorby chases Dunbar through the grounds, for example, the corrupt government official is attacked, killed, and supposedly consumed by the Keeler-Krynoid. Shot in the shadows, the Krynoid's monstrosity is exaggerated by the close-up frames that dominate the screen (see Figure 7), with Dunbar's demise signalled by off-camera screaming. As monstrous man-eating plant the Krynoid blurs species, material, and semiotic boundaries through a coemerging body exhibiting transgressive gender behaviour in the conservative phallocentric imagination. In becoming plant food, the consumed Dunbar signals that contemporary conservative attitudes towards the disintegration of gender roles are simply fuel for progressive thinking. The vegetal hybrid grows rapidly, reaching a giant ten foot, hyperbolizing the power-shift of contemporary equality and anti-discrimination laws on conservatively constructed cis-gender roles and behaviours.

The Krynoid's call to arms within the plant world highlights the plant monster's alien intentions but can also be attributed, a gothic trans-corporeality suggests, to the Krynoid's material subsuming of the human body, having absorbed the potentially toxic substance of

human hubris. Despite access to limited special effects, ideas of plant agency (murderous intent) are cleverly suggested in scenes shot in dense shrubbery on location at Athelhampton House, Dorset.[153] Together with clever camera angles and agitated shrubbery on the edge of shot, the actors' movements suggestively portray the characters under attack as they are enrobed in vines/ivy, apparently struggling as the plants attempt to strangle them. Unlike King's protagonist and Winlett in this story, who maintained some semblance of their human origins, the giant Krynoid (Ronald Gough and Keith Ashley) no longer retains the human form and transforms into a lumbering vegetal mass with flailing tentacles or pappi that attempts to eat the remaining humans trapped in the manor. Despite its outward vegetal monstrosity, the alien-plant intelligence communicates its desires by subverting the human form by attempting to bargain with the Doctor using Keeler's voice indicating that it remains a human-nonhuman hybrid. During a decade plagued by lengthy industrial disputes, rioting and violence in Northern Ireland, enhanced by power and fuel shortages,[154] the alien-plant's appropriation of Keeler's voice reflects the contemporary power struggles and break-down in communication between authorities and the public. Order is eventually restored by the UNIT team using defoliant sprays to control the Earthly plant-life and fire-bombing the Krynoid before it can spread its pods around the globe, mirroring some of the violent tactics during moments of real-world civil unrest reported on the TV news.

Uncertainty about equality of the sexes in the contemporary male imagination (the *Doctor Who* production team were predominantly male) are emphasised in the Krynoid's targeting of male victims. Despite the apparent androgynous alien aspect of the plant monster, gender continues to underline human-nature interactions. The alien-plant invasion begins with a seed pod – a rather male-oriented perspective and like the 'weed' in King's story, the Krynoid similarly subsumes the male host as vegetal agency overpowers conservative masculinity in an admixing of plant-human that draws on nature-female associations as the alien-plant infiltrates the male body. The Krynoid hybrid figure is transgressively gendered and situated in contrast to the two female human characters (Sarah Jane and flower portrait artist, Amelia Ducat) who serve as the accepted feminine

[153] Howe, Stammers and Walker, *Doctor Who: The Seventies*, p.90.
[154] Muir, *Horror Films of the 1970s*.

identities. While the character of Sarah Jane 'was conceived as a strong-willed and independent young woman' devised 'in keeping with changing attitudes towards the representation of women in the media',[155] her feisty attitude belies the damsel-in-distress she portrays several times within the story that allows the Doctor to illustrate male heroics. Sarah Jane does some rescuing of her own too, however, demonstrating the show's progressive attitude to gender equality but that the Krynoid challenges as a caricature of the masculinised career woman. The independent woman of the 1960s and 1970s, these British TV shows (*Doctor Who* and *The Avengers*) suggest, could compete with their male counterparts while maintaining their alluring femininity. With overt sexism waning in the 1980s, these roles were about to undergo a further change.

In 1971 Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson co-created another male plant-humanoid: the fictional superhero, the Swamp Thing, making Wrightson an obvious choice of artist for King's graphic novella based on 'Weeds'. A DC Comic graphic novel character, the marsh monster was popularised in director Wes Craven's film, *Swamp Thing* (1982), which subsequently inspired two TV series (1990 and 2019), a sequel, *Return of Swamp Thing* (1989) and an animated series (1991). While not all were big hits, the plant-human clearly fascinated the popular imagination. Set in the contemporary world of the DC universe, Craven's plant-human hybrid is the result of a bio-engineering sabotage that engages with growing concerns about agro-science, chemical and nuclear disposal, and land-reclamation schemes on the environment. With overt ecohorror, at a top-secret bio-engineering laboratory in the heart of American South swamp-land, Drs. Holland siblings, Alec (Ray Wise) and Linda (Nannette Brown) are working on separate projects. Contrary to gender expectations, Linda Holland is exploring a plant-based explosive that a minor lab accident reveals spawns rapid plant growth. Although female scientists featured in seventies' cinema, these were usually as assistants or of the more nurturing sciences.[156] Similarly, brother Alec is analysing his discovery of a hybrid plant-animal cell – a more passive, feminine-style science - amidst his vast collection of orchids. Once more the reappearance of the orchid generates a foreshadowing of the gothic plant horror plot associated with feminist gender politics. In *Dark Directions*, Kendall R. Phillips explores Craven's

[155] Howe, Stammers and Walker, *Doctor Who: The Seventies*, p.146.
[156] Mark Bould, *Science Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), pp.50-8.

interpretations of the gothic tradition and notes that 'Craven's films most directly inflect the Freudian notion of the uncanny',[157] identifying distinctly recognisable gothic tropes to unsettle the viewer's sense of familiarity. Phillips notes that many of Craven's films are concerned with the fusing of human-science and with nature added to the mix in *Swamp Thing*, any traditional demarcation of boundaries is undermined, specifically where '[t]he swamp is also a decidedly gothic space in which dark secrets … resurface', like Holland's murdered/damaged body.[158] The gothic blurring of plant-human is mirrored in the film's aesthetic 'bleeding of one type of narrative form into another' with the use of comic book visual techniques and transitional wipes between major scenes in the film.[159] As with its plant monster predecessors, liminal spaces and unruly vegetation preclude a physical manifestation of a gendered ecohorror in *Swamp Thing*.

Swamp Thing blends both masculine and feminine ideals, forming a monstrous creature in a plant/man hybrid that is linked to the liminal space of the swamp; a place of natural beauty that is equally dangerous. Alec Holland's transformation into the eponymous Swamp Thing (Dick Durock) is the result of Anton Arcane's (Louis Jordan) paramilitary attack on the laboratory whereby the Hollands are murdered, and Alec's body and their research end up in the heart of the swamp where marsh plants and man are fused. When the insurgents kidnap and attempt to drown visiting government official, Alice Cable (Adrienne Barbeau) in the swamp, a green human-like creature fights off the henchmen and drags Alice ashore. As the rebels track Alice around the swamp, the marsh monster repeatedly wades in to protect her and other innocents, and she eventually realises that it is a plant-hybridised Alec. As Swamp Thing, Holland epitomises the ambiguously gendered monster that transgresses the boundaries of nature/culture as his material body has commingled with the swamp vegetation to create a liminal being that is only monstrous in his hybridised disfigured body. Swamp Thing is both plant and Holland, a Green (Wo)Man figure that fuses binary gender categories, being hypermasculine in stature and strength (helped by Durock's brawny physique and hulking 6'5" height),[160] and

[157] Kendall R. Phillips, *Dark Directions: Romero, Craven, Carpenter, and the Modern Horror Film* (Edwardsville, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), p.74.
[158] Phillips, *Dark Directions*, pp.101, 103.
[159] Phillips, *Dark Directions*, p.103.
[160] 'Dick Durock biography', *IMDB*, [accessed 26 May 2021].

in harnessing the (feminine) regenerative power of nature. As protector of the space and those in it from harm, Swamp Thing harnesses the swamp's natural propensity for re-growth to restore himself and the innocent victims of Arcane's henchmen.

In Craven's gothic vision, Holland's hybridity with nature tempers the creature's monstrosity that allows him to ward off Arcane's predatory scientific villainy. Taking Holland's research potion 'neat' transforms Arcane into a boar-like creature in a clear Jekyll/Hyde reference to his inner evil which Swamp Thing must defeat. The ensuing battle between plant-hybrid and purist-science enacts contemporary anxieties about 'biomedical reductionism' that James Whorton identifies as stimulating the rise in alternative medicine during the 1970s and 1980s in response to the loss of confidence in scientific and medical establishments.[161] Whorton states that 'the untoward effects of many of the new drugs [in the 1960s] (the thalidomide tragedy having an especially profound impact)' meant '[r]enewed awareness of alternative medicine snowballed through the 1970s and 1980s' when 'cooperation between the two sides was unthinkable'.[162] Swamp Thing embodies a call towards a synergy between nature and science, further underlined by his inability to separate himself from the plant, materially or otherwise.

Hypermasculinity as displayed by Swamp Thing was prevalent in 1980s action-movie heroes, yet his strength comes from the combination of human-plant reflecting contemporary gender politics of working together for a common goal. In an era of the 'yuppie', where young couples worked collaboratively without recourse to gender-stereotyping roles, the swamp creature's hybridity, I argue, symbolises conquering the conservative institutional (patriarchal) values represented by Arcane's hideous transformation. Like King's hybrid protagonist, the marsh monster remains largely human in form and some of Alec Holland's humanity remains deep within the plant – his protectiveness of Alice, for instance, demonstrating his human empathy. In his brief dialogue with Alice, Alec speaks disjointedly, struggling to make himself understood by the remaining vestiges of his human body. Language is what distinguishes us from the non-human world, according to Graham J. Matthews, who argues that '[p]lant life lacks speech

[161] James Whorton M.D., 'Countercultural Healing: a brief history of Alternative Medicine in America', *PBS.org*, [accessed 24 July 2019].
[162] Whorton, 'Countercultural Healing'.

organs and communicates instead through its materiality and its posture'.[163] Unlike his 1970 predecessors, who are eventually overpowered by the vegetal alien, Swamp Thing remains a composite figure, with plant and man (nature/culture, male/female) defying categorisation in a synergic body.

The way the Swamp Thing character has changed through its several iterations is a good example of how plant monsters are revisited and adapted to engage with their contemporary concerns. Across a decade that witnessed rapid change with the Digital Revolution, the Swamp Thing character has evolved accordingly. Wein and Wrightson's original character is created when a scientist, Alex Olson, 'is caught in a lab explosion set by his jealous partner' that transforms him into 'a humanoid vegetable monster' when the chemicals interact with the swamp, and who then kills his former friend.[164] Crucially, as Michael Smith outlines, the Swamp Thing is '[u]nable to communicate or to convince Linda [his wife] he is actually Alex' before accepting his lot and disappearing into the swamp.[165] This 1971 Swamp Thing is a monster for its time: the human Alex is clearly the controlling force exemplified in his revenge killing, while the plant part of the Alex-hybrid renders communication impossible, depicting a monster that reflects the late-1960s and early-1970s American activism and conservative populism's 'silent majority' politics. This gothic mirroring plays out further within the character's own comic series (1972-76), where the renamed scientist, Alec Holland, 'is now working on a secret "bio-restorative formula" to end world hunger, and the explosion is set by mysterious corporate forces … [for] their somewhat vague but nefarious business interests'.[166] This is the character of Craven's film, which focuses on the accidental merger of man and plant during the attack on his laboratory in a corporate power struggle to control the scientific discovery. The film focuses on 'science's careless intervention into the natural order of things',[167] with the battle between Holland/Swamp Thing and Arcane reflecting concerns about uncontrollable conglomerates and their perceived immoral commercialisation of nature through science. While Holland is conducting experimental botany, he nevertheless 'has a reverence for the

[163] Matthews, 'What We Think About When We Think About Triffids', p.125.
[164] Michael Smith, 'Embracing Dionysius in Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing*', *Studies in the Novel,* 47.3 (2015), pp.365-380 (p.368).
[165] Smith, 'Embracing Dionysius in Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing*', p.368.
[166] Smith, 'Embracing Dionysius in Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing*', p.368.
[167] Phillips, *Dark Directions*, p.103.

natural world in which he works' - he is enthusiastic and appreciative of his orchids and the swamp; 'Arcane, on the other hand, sees both science and nature as merely instruments in his hands'.[168] Both of these 1970s plant monsters engage with contemporary anxieties about the environment, science, and the power of large-scale business models. But they also carry inflections of contemporary gender anxieties. These are plant-*men* demonstrating their heightened masculinity in an age of gender-neutral politics, who focus on protecting their love-interests: female scientists too, in a Hollywood development of the 1980s that paved the way towards depictions of strong, heroic female protagonists during the 'Girl Power' era of the 1990s.[169]

The monstrousness of Swamp Thing comes, Karen Houle argues, because we 'are built from the very carbons of [plants]'.[170] Despite the low-budget rubbery suit worn by Dick Durock, Craven's Swamp Thing illustrates the porosity of the human body, re-configuring Holland's DNA and exterior as a mass of green swamp vegetation when the formula interacts with man and marsh. Unlike the alien plant-life which invaded the human host by entering the skin and using the body as a live, mobile growbag, *Swamp Thing* suggests science is to blame for mutating plant-human organisms. When Arcane duplicates the formula, however, Swamp Thing reveals that it amplifies a person's inner qualities, transforming the villains into rat-like and boar-like hybrid creatures. Plant horror stems, it seems, from 'the unsettling sense that maybe we are also *like plants*',[171] as Holland's fascination with the swamp and his deeper understanding of the environment is apparently what has transformed him into Swamp Thing.

Craven's *Swamp Thing* (1982) revived the comic series with Alan Moore's *Saga of the Swamp Thing* (1984-1987).[172] While the graphic novel is not within the remit of the current project, Moore's character is radically revised in a reflection of his own - and contemporary – environmental politics through 'a subtext of wide-ranging environmental

[168] Phillips, *Dark Directions*, p.103.
[169] See: Susan Hopkins, *Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).
[170] Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', p.92.
[171] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.16, italics in original.
[172] Chris Gavaler and Nathaniel Goldberg, 'Alan Moore, Donald Davidson, and the Mind of Swampmen', *The Journal of Popular Culture,* 50.2 (2017).

destruction'.[173] In Moore's hands, 'the Swamp Thing is not a transformed and tortured man forced to live outside of civilization' but is 'an entirely vegetable entity, redefined not as a hybrid creature but as an earth elemental, a figure indebted to the Green Man of folklore', that only thinks it is the deceased Alec Holland.[174] Together with artists Stephen Bissette and John Totleben, Moore's plant elemental Swamp Thing is, Colin Beineke outlines, 'essentially transformed … from a man who happened to be green, to a Green Man—a figure composed of living vines, growing moss, decomposing leaves, and pure earth'.[175] Moore's incarnation of Swamp Thing as a contemporary Green Man is a sentient vegetal being that communicates with plant-life, effectively challenging binary gender (and other) categorisations by extracting the human from its composition. Moore also revives Swamp Thing's villainous counterpart, Floronic Man: really botanist Jason Woodrue, who uses an experimental formula to transform in Jekyll/Hyde fashion, to bring out the vegetal within.[176] Beineke argues that this 'plant/human hybrid … remains partially human' so only '*appear[s]* to be a Green Man' (italics in original).[177] Floronic Man can manipulate plant-life but when he attempts to communicate with 'the Green' (all plant-life) by ingesting parts of the Swamp Thing's defunct body-shell, as a human hybrid, this act drives him insane as his human consciousness devolves its ideas of human domination. Eating becomes a chief trans-corporeal component in advocating Moore's environmental message of oneness with nature. Swamp Thing and Abigail's conscious-melding event within 'the Green' is also instigated by Abigail's consumption of 'fruit' from the Swamp Thing's body. As Chris Gavaler and Nathaniel Goldberg outline, unlike Floronic Man, 'Moore's Swamp Thing is somehow triggered by Alec Holland's body, and the stuff of Alec Holland's memories and consciousness are somehow configured into a new plant body'.[178] In reconfiguring the Swamp Thing in this way, Moore generates a trans-corporeal manifestation of ecological

[173] Maggie Gray, 'A Gothic politics: Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* and radical ecology', in *Alan Moore and the Gothic Tradition*, ed. by Matthew J. A. Green (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp.42-62 (p.47).
[174] Smith, 'Embracing Dionysius in Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing*', p.369; Gray, 'A Gothic politics: Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* and radical ecology', p.47.
[175] Colin Beineke, '"Her Guardiner": Alan Moore's Swamp Thing as the Green Man', *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*, 5.4 (2011).
[176] Woodrue's transformation turns his hair into leaves and his skin resembles bark in emulation of a tree.
[177] Beineke, '"Her Guardiner"', para.18-19.
[178] Gavaler and Goldberg, 'Alan Moore, Donald Davidson, and the Mind of Swampmen', Minding the Swamp, para.3.

anxieties. His Swamp Thing is not so much a human-vegetable hybrid as a plant that has subsumed not just the material substance of Holland's body but the very essence of his being as well. As Maggie Gray argues, Moore's *Swamp Thing* 'stages many of the debates occurring within the contemporary green movement between anthropocentric and biocentric positions, through an exploration of the Gothic trope of monstrosity'.[179] Infusing plant-life with sentience and consciousness reflected the growing contemporary environmental movements, the emergence of ecofeminist theory and global calls for better understanding of the interconnectedness of nature and civilisation.[180] Swamp Thing can commune with all nature and provides a voice that advocates ecological harmony between human and non-human life – a message that continues to resonate into the 21st century. But what would such a voice sound like?

4.4. Alien Communication: Sentient Signs

While alien plant-forms discussed above use telepathy to command/control, or appropriate the vocal chords of the human host body to communicate their desires, in both Craven's film and Moore's graphic novel 'Swamp Thing speaks in a manner consistent with his vegetable nature'.[181] Craven's Swamp Thing, seemingly gasping for air as a result of his injuries, speaks disjointedly and, in fact, emphasises his struggle to negotiate his vegetative hybridity with his human vocal chords. The request to protect the research notebooks is a combined message from both Holland and the swamp to protect nature from human misappropriation of his discovery. The disjointed speech similarly reflects the last vestiges of his human form as the swamp DNA begins to take over (much as the environment does when humans abandon sites). Similarly, the speech of Moore's character is emphasised by the frequent use of ellipsis between a few or singular words. Beineke argues '[t]his slowness of speech, reflective of the slow yet steady growth of plant life, is seen mirrored in the Ents—the tree-shepherds—of J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings*',[182] suggesting the communication originates with their plant-selves.

[179] Gray, 'A Gothic politics: Alan Moore's *Swamp Thing* and radical ecology', p.49.
[180] Swamp Thing, in fact, foils Floronic Man's plot to rid the planet of animal and human life by reminding the Green that plants also need our carbon dioxide to survive.
[181] Beineke, '"Her Guardiner"', para.45.
[182] Beineke, '"Her Guardiner"', para.45.

Western philosophy has often deemed nature itself 'as an alien force', which plant neurobiologist, Stefano Mancuso argues is because plants are 'very distant from us, alien, to the point that sometimes it's even hard for us to remember they're alive'.[183] According to Richard Karban, it was the work of Charles Darwin, who established in 1880 'the widespread movements of plant tissues excited by light, gravity and contact' that first brought plants into the spotlight.[184] A growing awareness in environmental issues starting in the 1960s and resulting in environmental activism throughout the 1970s and 1980s, helped establish a greater recognition of other life-forms, seen most publicly through the deforestation protests of Earth First!'s Redwood Summer (US, 1990) and the London M11 link road protests (UK, 1993-4). Derogatively nick-named 'tree-huggers' by corporate industrialists, such activism nevertheless, stimulated '[r]esearch into plant communications (also called — "plant signalling") [which] began in earnest in North America around 1983'.[185] Writers have used this uncanny notion since the late Victorian period, but with growing political impetus on environmental issues during the 1980s, the idea that real-life plants (as opposed to fictitious orchids and triffids) have cognitive behaviours inspired some weird stories.

In the British TV series, *Tales of the Unexpected* (1979-1988), an episode entitled 'The Sound Machine' (1981) reveals how alien our Earthly environment truly is.[186] Although set in the summer of 1935, Roald Dahl's tale draws together many of the issues discussed so far into a 1980s context. The story opens with a panoramic shot of the quintessential English cottage gardens, spanning a rose-lined garden path and arriving at a shed at the bottom of the end-terraced house; a British suburbia. Inside, the protagonist is cross-checking data with an unidentifiable machine and from the opening dialogue between his female neighbour, Mrs Saunders (Margery Mason), and the local physician, Dr. Scott (James Warwick), the viewer learns the gentleman, Mr Klausner (Harry Andrews), is a botanist who conducts 'peculiar' experiments at odd hours. Here, instead of a greenhouse, the

[183] Marder, *Plant-Thinking*, p.125; Mancuso and Viola, *Brilliant Green*, p125; both quoted in Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.7.
[184] Karban, 'Plant behaviour and communication', p.727.
[185] Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', p.98.
[186] 'The Sound Machine', *Tales of the Unexpected* (ITV, 1981). BritBox.

contemporary garden shed – another distinctly male domain - doubles as Klausner's laboratory.

Mrs Saunders' scepticism of science is very clear as she reveals her concern about the strange noises and the dangers of such activities to the doctor, before he visits Klausner himself. Her anxiety towards the scientist's experiments not only mirrors previous female characters' distrust but reflects contemporary attitudes concerning the conflicting environmental scientific data being presented to the public. As Dr Scott makes his way to the garden shed, the camera centres and zooms in on Mrs Saunders' roses, foretelling their key to the plot. In the shed, Klausner explains to Scott that his machine is intended to reveal the sounds that the human ear is unable to detect on its own, adding that he believes there is 'a world of sound about us that just cannot be heard'.[187] After the doctor leaves, Klausner tests his machine in the garden where Mrs Saunders happens to be collecting roses for her vase. When Klausner realises that the screams he (and the viewer) hears through his machine comes from the rosebush as Mrs Saunders cuts the flowers, he attempts to explain this discovery to a horrified Mrs Saunders. Emphasised by the director's use of high-pitched screams, female/flower associations are re-affirmed as Klausner concludes that plants are alive, but that perhaps only flowers are sensitive and can feel pain, 'being weaker' than other vegetation.[188] When Klausner tests whether an old graveyard tree is made of sterner stuff, he hears a long deep (very masculine) groan as Klausner's axe strikes the tree, reasserting conservative gender-nature associations. In response to hurting a fellow male, Klausner expresses instant regret: 'I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry. It will heal, it will heal',[189] unlike with the roses. Nevertheless, as he departs, the camera catches the tree's branches in an uncanny rustling.

Repeating the experiment for Dr Scott, the tree emits a long deep groan seconds before a large branch comes crashing down onto the machine almost hitting Klausner who is pushed out of the way by Scott. The uncanny timing leaves the viewer questioning whether the tree released the branch intending to kill the perpetrator of pain as they buy into Klausner's belief that the tree is a sentient being. From the Department of Entomology

[187] 'The Sound Machine' (1981).
[188] 'The Sound Machine' (1981).
[189] 'The Sound Machine' (1981).

at the University of California, Karban explains that '[p]lants engage in three behaviours that we intuitively associate with cognition', in that they 'often anticipate environmental changes that have not yet occurred … appear to have a memory that influences their responses based on past experience' and 'communicate with other organisms'.[190] While the story has a clear, if uncanny, environmental call to respect nature, there is equally a gendered subtext. Identifying their aural distress reaffirms gender associations of flowers as female and trees as male, with Klausner's response to each underlining phallocentric attitudes to gender and nature. Whereas he is initially disquieted by the roses' screams and eventually asks Mrs Saunders to stop cutting the flowers, he nevertheless, deliberately plucks a daisy from the lawn to verify his data. In doing so, he demonstrates a blatant acceptance of the commodification of both nature and women – the rose as perfumed, pretty decoration; women as wives and mothers – within a domestic sphere. Yet, after chopping into the old tree in the graveyard, he is incredibly apologetic and becomes agitated about the damage he has caused. Klausner's position is obviously respect towards the wise old man embodied by the tree, situated in the public sphere denoted by the graveyard setting.

As Klausner considers the enormity the screams of a wheat-field would make, Scott commits him to the asylum. While the roses and the trees represent the gender dichotomy of patriarchal tradition, Klausner's ultimate musings focus on a plant that is traditionally non-gender specific in its associations. Considering the vocal ruckus that a whole generation of non-gender defined public could make is almost too much for the conservative-minded scientists (both Klausner and Scott) to consider – Klausner is almost catatonic with imagining the possibilities and Scott automatically deems him mentally unfit. The episode ends with Scott re-visiting the tree to retrieve what's left of the machine. While there, the tree's branches are again in a state of agitation, causing Scott to place his hands on the tree trunk and whisper, 'It's alright, it's alright'.[191] The use of gothic tropes (mad botanist, garden shed/laboratory, ancient graveyard tree) and the clever camera/special effects of the tree's uncanny movement not only taps into the contemporary

[190] Karban, 'Plant behaviour and communication', p.733.
[191] 'The Sound Machine' (1981).

environmental concerns but develops a gendered subtext around respect for all, including the non-human.

Environmental concerns and scientific research into cognitive behaviour of the non-human (animal) during the 1980s (and onwards) revitalised the vegan movement by underlining how animals produced for the dinner-plate are cognitive and sensitive beings.[192] Notions that plants (essentially our alternative food source) may also be deemed similarly alive and can communicate, albeit differently, provides darkly comic and richly uncanny material for engaging with environmental concerns through a gendered subtext. A similar American TV horror anthology series created by George A. Romero, *Tales from the Darkside* (1983-1988), includes a quirky tale directed by John Strysik entitled 'Love Hungry' (1988).[193] The tale essentially ridicules the notion of plant communication research, veganism, and contemporary obsession with dieting. Based on a short story by Roberts Gannaway, 'Food for Thought', protagonist Betsy Cowland (Sharon Madden) is a lonely telemarketer who surrounds herself with houseplants that she talks to in between calls indicating her empathy with her potted friends. Obsessed with dieting (to no avail), Betsy is always looking for the next fad or gadget, so is excited when she receives a package from the cryptic advertisement 'The Weight is Over' with claims to be able to solve her compulsive eating habits. As she leaves for a restaurant with her old high-school love interest, Elmo Shroud (Larry Gelman) who has returned to town, Betsy takes the earpiece sent in the package to help her eat less. It works – when she inserts the earpiece while waiting to be served, she hears the food of the other patrons screaming, putting her off eating. The next morning, Betsy receives a second package: a pair of glasses. With these, she can now also see faces on the fruit on her desk as well as hear them plead with her not to eat them. A dilemma ensues – having befriended her lunch, Betsy suffers a battle of moral conscience versus her hunger and desire for food when she discovers that she cannot remove the glasses or hearing aid. In a radical move to ensure that she does not eat her

[192] See discussions on animal rights and animal sentience in: Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1975); Peter Singer (ed.) *In Defence of Animals* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Mary Midgley, *Animals and Why they Matter* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983); Tom Reagan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Vicki Hearne, *Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name* (London: Heinemann, 1987); which equally advocate vegetarianism/veganism.
[193] 'Love Hungry', *Tales from the Darkside* S4.E11 (CBS, 1988). Amazon Prime Video.

new-found friends, Betsy sews her lips together. Both Betsy and fruit are subsequently found decaying.

One of the few twentieth-century stories here to feature a female protagonist, it offers a particularly feminist subtext in terms of image consciousness. Low-fat, low-calorie diets were trendy as women tried to imitate the slim TV and film icons and along with other 'yuppie' fashions, a diet was a must. Health and fitness trends were brought to TV screens and popularised by the likes of Rosemary Conley, Audrey Eyton, and Diana Moran aka the Green Goddess, while groups such as Weight Watchers flourished.[194] With the introduction of the microwave oven, pre-packaged ready meals and quick low-calorie convenience food was a growing business for high-speed lifestyles. Meal replacements such as SlimFast also 'hit [their] stride in the 1980s'.[195] Responding to contemporary concerns, this tale uses dark comedy to address anxieties about the food industry and its impact on the female image, tied to the rise of the animal rights movement and the on-going issues surrounding chemical spraying and GMO pest-resistant crops.

4.5. 'It's life, Jim, but not as we know it!'[196]

In the last three decades of the twentieth century the alien Other in the form of plant life challenged ideas surrounding gender equality and conservative perceptions of masculinity as gendered nature underlined environmental issues such as pollution, global warming and chemical over-use, and residual Cold War nuclear devastation. Amongst a variety of 'revenge of nature' films of the time, the trans-corporeal interactions of alien plants collapse human-nonhuman boundaries as both gender equality and anthropogenic effects on the environment are embroiled in the intersection of gender and nature. Despite the premise of these film and TV storylines as alien versus human, their vegetative nature broadens their scope, drawing on gothic and science fiction tropes to highlight contemporary concerns about environmental degradation and challenge conservative perceptions of all-inclusive gender politics. With the introduction of gender-neutral terminology in the public sphere (chairperson, police officer, office assistant, homemaker,

[194] Jane McClenaghan, 'The 1980s Diet Decade', *Vital Nutrition*, 2019 [accessed 5 May 2019].
[195] Mackenzie Wagoner, 'A History of the Diet By Decade: 11 Food Fads That Promised to Make Us Thin', *Vogue*, 2016.
[196] The Firm, 'Star Trekkin'', *Serious Fun* (Bark Records, 1987) [MP4].

…) the ambiguously gendered eco-monsters of TV and film encompass the period's fluid gender-role boundaries. These alien plant monsters are hypermasculine, subtly but trans-corporeally invasive in targeting human males as they chart the changing landscape of gender politics. Through trans-corporeal consumption, the numerous triffids on the march to take over the world become synonymous with the 1970s demonstrations, strikes, and environmental and feminist activism. These trans-corporeal alien plant-human hybrids of the latter twentieth century gain a voice and communicate their desires alongside growing public protests supporting minority movements. The inability of the human to defeat the alien plant monster or fend off its corporeal invasion suggests change is inevitable.

Hypermasculinity and the anthropophagous plant monster's apparent gender change through a gothic trans-corporeality challenges perceptions that women in leadership, management, or positions of power needed to display masculine attributes if they were to compete effectively in a male-dominated arena. Other alien plant-life 'bodysnatch', using corporeal porosity to reduce the human body to its materiality as a fertilizer bag of nutrients. The absence or minor roles of women in these plant-human hybrid tales situate the eco-monsters within the gender neutrality/equality debate by dissolving fixed-gender boundaries. Seen as increasingly androgynous the alien plant invader undermines conservative ideas of masculinity and femininity as ideas throughout the 1980s became focused on politically correct ethos regardless of gender, race, class, or beliefs. Together with the rise in environmental awareness of the (hu)man-made contribution to global warming and climate change, the materially gothic interconnectedness of plant monster and human highlights cultural identity shifts (gender particularly) while recognising the value of the non-human as a sentient life-form (alien or earthly) and not simply a natural resource for capitalist society.

Screen plant monsters helped to navigate a changing perception of gender through the later decades of the twentieth century towards a recognition of human identity. The technological advances of the 1990s and Digital Revolution of the post-millennium, brought fears of environmental degradation, but with a better-connected world, also fears of lost

human identity.[197] With the post-millennial anxieties of global financial crises, wide-scale terrorism and visible effects of climate change, 'united in diversity' policies witnessed an increasing acceptance of broader cultural and gender identities.[198] As the next chapter will show, negotiating the emergence of diverse gender identities sees a re-growth in the plant monster trope, cultivated for the anxieties of its time through a gothic trans-corporeality that manifests an environmental posthuman and ecoGothic body horror.

[197] Particularly visible in the rise of cyberpunk science fiction of the 1980s and 1990s that 'politically engaged with a globalised world' even as they questioned ideas of the human body and identity. Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint, *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p.155.
[198] 'United in diversity' is the European Union motto adopted in 2000 to encourage peace, prosperity, and integration, see: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_en.

Chapter 5: Plants in Bloom

5. Post-millennial plant horror: reworkings for a post-human age (2000–2015)

'Ecological awareness is weird: it has a twisted, looping form.'
Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology*[1]

If nineteenth-century *fin-de-siècle* anxieties produced some of the most profound Gothic texts, then the turn of the millennium ('a notable "boom" period [for the Gothic]')[2] would offer ample angst for gothic horror in the form of impending apocalypse of human society as we know it. The potential digital meltdown of the 'Y2K-bug' epitomised anxieties of global catastrophe, while the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the USA in 2001 added to rising fears about safety and end-of-the-world narratives. Together with concerns about environmental degradation through global warming and climate change and increasingly devastating natural disasters around the world (Iran earthquake, 2003; Indian Ocean tsunami, 2004; Hurricane Katrina, 2005), a re-emerging Gothic nature as a destructive power heralding Armageddon is hardly surprising. So too, the return of monstrous plants within apocalyptic horror exemplifies, as Timothy Morton argues above, this narrative form's 'twisted, looping' weirdness. It is within Morton's dark-ecological weird that this chapter explores not just 'a turn of events that has an uncanny appearance' but most importantly, 'the weird gap between the two'.[3] For as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, 'because of its ontological liminality, the monster notoriously appears at times of crisis' in order to question binary thinking.[4] This chapter investigates how the post-millennial plant monster is revived and revised to be a cunning and determined global competitor that brings contemporary eco-social issues around non-binary gender identity into focus. In doing so, it expands concepts of gothic trans-corporeality, ecophobic ideas of control and vegetal hybridity to develop what I term an ecoGothic Body Horror that contributes

[1] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, p.6.
[2] Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes, 'Introduction: The Gothic in the Twenty-First Century' in *Twenty-First-Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 1-16 (p.13).
[3] Morton, *Dark Ecology*, p.7.
[4] Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *The Monster Theory Reader*, p.40.

towards an environmental posthuman. Neither of these concepts have been discussed previously in relation to plant monsters or from an ecocritical standpoint, although there are some recent deliberations pertaining to an ecological posthuman. This study aims to advance these concepts within a material ecofeminist Gothic framework.

Whereas vegetable killers of the twentieth century are either carnivorous, vampiric, or poisonous in accordance with gender and cultural issues of their time, plant monsters in the twenty-first century focus on the destruction of humankind through an ecogothic trans-corporeal body horror that dispels the human-nature divide. Stacy Alaimo's eco-materialist theory demonstrates how, by polluting the environment, we are also polluting ourselves. She argues that the toxins released into the atmosphere/soil/water are absorbed by the plants that animals, and then humans through the food chain, subsequently ingest. Tracing this movement of such material as it travels from one body to another, transforming as it goes, is what she calls trans-corporeality.[5] Used as an ecogothic tool in these fictional narratives, the plant monster reverses this by ingesting the materiality of the human body, encapsulating not only the ecophobic attitudes outlined by Simon C. Estok,[6] but underlining contemporary gender concerns by using nature as a key protagonist (rather than simply a gothic setting) that interacts with the human characters. The Gothic narratives examined in this chapter question gendered social constructs re-situated in a wider set of contemporary concerns about our place in the world through plant monsters re-vamped for their time. It seems quite fitting then, that Simon Clark should revisit John Wyndham's well-known apocalyptic plant horror story, in a sequel entitled *The Night of the Triffids* (2001) that brings the triffid into the new millennium.[7] Mirroring the many critics who have argued that Wyndham's novel is a political commentary on contemporary fears of growing communism, Clark's novel also appears to contain political critique of America's growing influence globally since the end of the Cold War. However, in section one, a closer examination of the triffids themselves and the characters' engagement with the plants in this re-working reflects contemporary growing ecological awareness that stems from a realisation of the human place within the environment.

[5] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* (2010).
[6] Simon C. Estok, *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
[7] Simon Clark, *The Night of the Triffids* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2001).

Despite eco-feminist attempts to separate gender and nature, as these gothic trans-corporeal plant monsters demonstrate, they remain firmly intertwined, making plant monsters an ideal metaphor for discussing twenty-first century anxieties about both gender and the environment.[8] The turn of the millennium brought with it a determination to establish gender (and other) equality across society, along with the contemporary issues of trans-gender, acceptance of diverse sexuality, and politically correct stances on gender/racial/religious tolerance. As millennials negotiate gender reconstruction across a range of identities and lifestyles, old patriarchal mindsets have begun to shift, with nature and gender associations re-visited, up-ended and re-defined. Gendered millennial vegetable monsters draw on ideas of monstrous feminine nature only to dispel the binary gender boundaries using what I argue is ecoGothic Body Horror. The traditional associations of bizarre nature taking on humanity at its own game through aggressive male attributes of a female-gendered nature clearly represent contemporary notions of gender role re-assignment, alongside queer and trans-gender identity construction. As Harry Benshoff claims, the term '"queer" is not only what differs, … but ultimately is what opposes the binary definitions and proscriptions of a patriarchal heterosexism'.[9] While Dana Oswald asserts that 'monsters reveal that the slippery nature of gender derives from the body', Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues '[t]he monster is difference made flesh' and has come to represent 'significations of the feminine and the hypermasculine' as 'they ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, [and] our tolerance toward its expression'.[10] In section two, a contemporary re-working of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1891 ghost story 'The Giant Wisteria', Donna A. Leahey's 'The Wisteria' (2014) upgrades this gendered Gothic metaphor for domestic abuse through an uncanny body horror that discards the human-nature divide.[11] While this tale has a distinct feminist vibe, the monstrous merging of human and vegetal equally reflects twenty-first century debates around the broadening recognition of alternative gender

[8] Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).
[9] Harry Benshoff, 'The Monster and the Homosexual', in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp.226-240 (p.226).
[10] Oswald, 'Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguity', p.362; Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in *The Monster Theory Reader* (2020), pp.41 and 52.
[11] Donna A. Leahey, 'The Wisteria', in *Growing Concerns*, ed. by Alex Hurst (Fort Smith, AR: Chupa Cabra House, 2014), pp.9-20.

identities. For monsters also 'serve as secondary bodies through which the possibilities of other genders, other sexual practices, and other social customs can be explored'.[12] Coupled with the re-visiting and re-conceptualising of gendered nature, contemporary plant monsters through their trans-corporeal mutations of ecoGothic body horror depict 'those who overstep the boundaries of their gender roles or assigned sexual identity'.[13] Similarly, the revival of Edenic plant terror highlights traditional anxieties surrounding gender identity construction. The return of pre-historic plant species as the focus of apocalyptic narrative embodies Judeo-Christian concerns about contemporary society's moral and environmental compass. The Evans Light novella, *ArborEATum* (2013),[14] offers a scenario in which an ancient plant relic could wreak havoc on contemporary human society, suggesting a need to redress the damage done to the Earth. As the Edenic tree monsters demonstrate, 'definitions of the monstrous as constructed in the modern horror text are grounded in ancient religious and historical notions of abjection – particularly in relation to the following religious "abominations": sexual immorality and perversion; corporeal alteration, decay and death; human sacrifice; murder; the corpse; bodily wastes; the feminine body; and incest'.[15] This moral tale of pulp terror queries traditional binary gender roles through explicit ecoGothic body horror within a narrative that is itself a type of composite, combining both religious and mythological symbolism.

The millennial plant horror texts of the first two decades draw on an ecoGothic body horror that highlights a 'becoming-Other' linking non-binary gender identities with better environmental awareness. Contemporary monsters 'not only reveal certain material conditions' for the production of horror, but the violence exacted through body horror 'indicates a crisis of sexual identity', threatening their communities with their 'indeterminate gender and sexuality'.[16] In section three, texts such as Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* (2014) (and Alex Garland's film adaptation (2018) of the same title) underline non-binary gender-nature associations in an uncanny trans-corporeal dissolution of the human-nature divide. As the century marches onward, public navigation of emerging and

[12] Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', *The Monster Theory Reader* (2020), p.50.
[13] Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', *The Monster Theory Reader* (2020), p.42.
[14] Evans Light, *ArborEATum*, (Charlotte, N.C.: Corpus Press, 2013).
[15] Creed, 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', p.213.
[16] Halberstam, 'Parasites and Perverts: An Introduction to Gothic Monstrosity', p.152-3.

determined LGBTQ+ individualities are increasingly being represented by decidedly gender-neutral mosses and fungi – vegetable monstrosity in an androgynous bid against humanity as a species - that encompasses concerns about who we are and what our place in the world is. While fungus is a separate species kingdom, it is often included in the living ecology of non-human beings that 'almost cover 46% of the earth's surface' as botanical rather than zoological Other.[17] This is particularly visible in M.R. Carey's novel (2014) and Colm McCarthy's film adaptation (2017), *The Girl With All the Gifts*, where an anthropophagus infection from mutated fungal spores has rampaged through the global population. Carey's eponymous protagonist – the girl, Melanie – represents not only the dissociation of female gender and nature, but also the dissolution of the human-nature divide. She is a trans-corporeal symbiote of human and mycelium whose battle between her natural instinct to consume human flesh and her human feelings for her female teacher embody contemporary gender identity crises and appeals for social acceptance of LGBTQ+ communities. Aligning non-binary gender identities with nature in this way, allows for an eco-feminist reading of both gender and environmental debates. Drawing on developments in ecological debates and plant science, A. J. Colucci's *Seeders* (2014) offers a more explicit ecoGothic body horror for her trans-corporeal symbiote. The commingling of human-fungus in this tale generates a site for invasive and manipulative plant-thought. With hints of several preceding plant monsters, from Finney's *The Body Snatchers* (1955) to King's *Weeds* (1976), Colucci's contemporary re-working raises questions of gender, ecophobic control and the materiality of the human form, contributing to the development of an ecoGothic body horror and an environmental posthuman figure.

The theme of becoming-Other dominates the texts of this final section, with weird tales of plant-human ecoGothic body horror incorporating a gothic trans-corporeality and 'becoming-plant' that explore emerging recognition of the non-human alongside LGBTQ+ identity construction. Academically, the growing popularity of ecoGothic, ecohorror, eco-materialism and eco-philosophies in an age of environmental crisis emerges as a new wave of plant monsters are re-worked in response to a human identity that harbours fear of environmental devastation and loss of individuality. As Tom J. Hillard has suggested, since

[17] Alex Hurst, 'Foreword', in *Growing Concerns*, ed. by Alex Hurst (Fort Smith, AR.: Chupa Cabra House, 2014) [n.p.].

his initial ecocritical examination of Gothic Nature in 2009, 'a steady string of publications and the Gothic Nature I conference [and Gothic Nature Journal] have made clear that … a Gothic ecocriticism likely is here to stay'.[18] The publication of numerous anthologies since 2010, collecting both nineteenth-century and contemporary short stories featuring plant monsters attests to this growing interest.[19] Echoing Morton's weird ecological loop and ending as the study began with a range of short stories, the final section explores a selection of tales from two contemporary monster anthologies (one completely devoted to "Eco-horror").[20] Jeff Strand's 'Specimen 313' (2011) provides a unique perspective of the killer-plant narrative, with the main protagonist being the plant itself. Strand's ecoGothic stance responds to Karen Houle's claims that 'very little attention has been devoted to imagining what these unique expressions of plant-livings might actually be'.[21] Despite non-traditional body horror, which Xavier Aldana Reyes explains is the 'transformation and mutation of the [human] body', the protagonist nevertheless suffers a genuine 'corporeal nightmare'.[22] The displaced standpoint for this tale is precisely what ecofeminist Gothic calls for, using an alternative perspective to question binary gender-nature associations. Adopting a perspective that considers plant monsters as protagonists, the writers of these ecohorror narratives imbue plant-life with intelligence. Demonstrating a trans-corporeal ecoGothic body horror that reflects the uncertainty surrounding the adjustment to broader gender identity construction, 'Journal 6 of 8: Techniques in Grafting', 'Finding his Roots', and 'Don't Waste Anything' equally address widening concerns about our role in environmental destruction.[23] These plant monsters violate boundaries through material trans-corporeal fusion of human and plant bodies, generating an environmental posthuman. The 'category confusion' disturbs through a hybridisation that 'is especially

[18] Tom J. Hillard, 'Gothic Nature Revisited: Reflections on the Gothic of Ecocriticism', *Gothic Nature* 1 (2019), 21-33.
[19] Besides Chad Arment's (ed.) cryptobotanical anthologies (2012, 2013, 2014) from American publisher Coachwhip Publishing, collating nineteenth- and early twentieth-century short stories, Daisy Butcher's (ed.) *Evil Roots* (2019) from The British Library brings together a similar selection; contemporary Gothic anthologies are on the increase, often with a thematic focus, such as Alex Hurst's (ed.) *Growing Concerns*.
[20] Hurst, ed., *Growing Concerns* (2014); Christopher Golden, ed., *The Monster's Corner* (London: Piatkus, 2011).
[21] Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', p.97.
[22] Aldana Reyes, *Body Gothic*, pp.54 and 56.
[23] N. J. Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8: Techniques in Grafting', in *Growing Concerns*, ed. by Alex Hurst (Fort Smith, AR: Chupa Cabra House, 2014), pp.21-8; Barry Rosenberg, 'Finding His Roots', in *Growing Concerns*, ed. by Alex Hurst (Fort Smith, AR: Chupa Cabra House, 2014), pp.29-38; C. J. Andrew, "Don't Waste Anything', in *Growing Concerns*, ed. by Alex Hurst (Fort Smith, AR: Chupa Cabra House, 2014), pp.39-46.

frightening when the monster is partly human' since the 'uncertainty of what will be produced by the unnatural union is what frightens.'[24] In these texts, the corporeal horror that dispels the boundaries between human and nature offering non-binary gender within an environmental posthuman being and contributing to emerging discussions of this concept. Furthermore, these short stories bring the gothic gardener back into focus; gardeners that have a uniquely bizarre eco-materialist perspective that grotesquely highlights an awareness of our place in the natural world.

5.1. Human Apocalypse: Return of the Triffids

While the triffids in Simon Clark's novel reveal criticism of the USA's patriarchal-inflected rejection of climate change action, they also interrogate the relationship between the human and non-human. Amid contemporary concerns that environmental and socio-political progress had been stymied by burgeoning globalisation, Clark's sequel describes the millennial triffid as more intellectually evolved than its predecessor, highlighting the need for a renewed/reviewed eco-social structure. The walking (talking) man-eating triffids have been re-vamped for a contemporary audience to engage with post-millennial concerns of a changing eco-social landscape as responses to global terrorism, climate change crisis, and greater recognition for minority groups become main issues. As key protagonists, these re-worked plant monsters are imbued with even greater intelligence than previously asserted. Examining the triffids' mode of killing will consider how the poison of their lethal stings is one of the 'invisible monsters' that Jeffrey A. Weinstock argues is a discernible threat of the contemporary era.[25] The plants' infiltration of the human body through its poison dispels boundaries and highlights the ambiguity of nature since the triffid poison kills, but also offers the humans a mode of survival. It is the intentional targeting of the human characters that determine the plants as monsters with a statement to make. No longer will they hide in the borders; triffids are taking back control. And this is exactly the point the contemporary eco-monster wants to raise: the fallacy of control - over nature, cultural norms or social constructs such as gender and identity. Using a blended material ecofeminist Gothic approach, it becomes clear these eco-monsters

[24] Ronald Allan Lopez Cruz, 'Mutations and Metamorphoses: Body Horror is Biological Horror', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 40.4 (2012), Section: Loathsome Hybrids and Monstrous Offspring, para.4.
[25] Weinstock, 'Invisible Monsters', p.276.

underline the growing disquiet surrounding the balance of human-nature relations. With contemporary concerns about global warming and carbon footprints, the first decades of the millennium witnessed several eco-horror and nature-apocalypse narratives. Films such as director, James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) equally raise the eco-material view of nature's interconnectedness when Grace's (Sigourney Weaver) research team study the indigenous tribe's Ewah (the mother tree) and how all forest (planetary) life is a network.[26] While Cameron's ecophilic science fiction vilifies global capitalism and calls for a respect towards all life forms, nature in *Avatar* is horrific only in its misunderstood difference, revealed as the film progresses as beautiful when looked at properly. The plants in the ecoGothic tales here invoke a deeper-rooted ecophobia in their intentional invasion of the human body.

Perhaps the most well-known twenty-first-century film of plants actively seeking revenge through control of the human is M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening* (2008). Shyamalan's plant monsters do not consume but rather 'invade' through the release of a neurotoxin that affects the control function of the human brain. Weinstock suggests, ['w]hat stands out about *The Happenin*g is the literal form of intentionality attributed to nature'.[27] Imbuing the vegetation with intentionality draws on scientific research that plants can communicate with each other through mycorrhizal networks in their root systems.[28] In *The Happening*, the plants invade the human mind deliberately, the film suggests, through an airborne neurotoxin released by the plants in a coordinated effort to reduce the human population. The phenomenon sees swathes of people commit varied acts of self-destruction amongst the most manicured greenery (spaces of controlled nature) in the cities, i.e., Central Park, then suburbia, then rural townships, underlining concerns about environmental degradation and commodification. As ecoGothic protagonists in this unfolding human apocalypse, the plants also highlight the broadening of contemporary social structures, such as non-binary gender identities, seen in the film through the slippage of human control. Considering the plant monsters through a material ecofeminist Gothic as key characters in the narrative demonstrates not only how 'the concept of "nature" has long been enlisted to support racism, sexism, colonialism,

[26] *Avatar*, dir. by James Cameron (Twentieth-Century Fox, 2009).
[27] Weinstock, 'Invisible Monsters', p.287.
[28] Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees*, trans., Jane Billinghurst (London: William Collins, 2017); Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life* (London: The Bodley Head, 2020).

homophobia, and essentialisms' making it 'a rather volatile term, which feminists should approach with caution',[29] but also how culture (i.e. gender) can be helpful in re-situating a biocentric perspective as species and category boundaries shift. Plant monsters like Clark's triffids become increasingly visible protagonists (with the human as antagonist) as major concerns such as the environment, poverty, and identities become more globalised in the twenty-first century.

Simon Clark's sequel considers what became of the community of resettled survivors on the Isle of Wight some 25 years later as seen through the eyes of David Masen – son of Bill Masen and Josella of the original story.[30] The community is surviving well, upholding 'Old World' traditions, but when another solar event plunges the planet into darkness, the Isle of Wight suffers an inexplicable triffid invasion. During the initial attack, Masen observes 'that the lethal plants' behavioural patterns had altered; instead of making a kill and then taking root by its victim in order to feed as putrefaction set in, a triffid 'would now kill and move on straightaway in a relentless search for new victims'.[31] Already 'shrewd enough to follow a barrier until they found an opening', the triffids are clearly depicted as an intelligent and determined species.[32] Masen makes reference to their perceived intelligence repeatedly; when he crash-lands on a floating island of triffids, Masen fully considers the triffids are talking to each other about besieging him in his plane, believing '[t]hose infernal plants were intelligent' enough to understand his predicament.[33] Clark is conscious of the need to update his triffids to reflect contemporary concerns and environmental awareness. Wyndham's original eco-monster highlighted their ability to communicate and coordinate their invasion on the premise that the human society was placed at a disadvantage through sudden blindness (see Chapter 3). Clark's protagonist acknowledges differences in the triffids that imbue them with plant intelligence and intent. On seeing how quickly the meteorologist's body has been exsanguinated, Masen observes '[m]odern triffids made short work of their prey'.[34] The triffids have evolved: they are more

[29] Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p.11.
[30] Also adapted in 2014 for Big Finish Productions by Clark as an audio drama, aired on BBC Radio 4 Extra as a 5-episode series in 2016 and 2018.
[31] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.50.
[32] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.51.
[33] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.87.
[34] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.89.

prolific ('I'd never seen such an intense concentration'),[35] larger ('Nor beheld any of such prodigious size'),[36] have mutated ('an aquatic species')[37] and are organised ('it became clear to me that this was no haphazard rampage by a few triffids but a coordinated attack').[38] Throughout Masen's narrative, the triffids he encounters are described as having intelligence and murderous intent; able to 'make a decision',[39] '[conceal] the variant as a secret weapon',[40] sting 'with uncanny accuracy'[41] and turn the 'cone on top of the stem' as if it wanted 'to *look* at the mass of humanity'.[42] As human society attempts to rebuild itself along pre-apocalypse values, the triffids have mutated and evolved suggesting it would not be 'long before they leapfrogged over humble humanity'.[43] Stacy Alaimo argues that '[p]opular science writing … is one of the most crucial genres for environmentalism, yet it remains relatively neglected within the environmental humanities, ecocultural studies, and science studies'.[44] Clark's triffids, though, clearly engage with concerns about anthropocentric hubris, climate change and carbon footprints; the battle between human and triffid reflecting the conflict between consumerist and environmentalist attitudes at the turn of the millennium.

While the triffids adapt their methods of invasion with a sentience that disturbs Masen and exaggerates concepts of plant intelligence – an unsettling development, no doubt - their main threat to human civilisation is the poison used by the plant to kill warm-blooded creatures. The androcentric focus on the human apocalypse glosses over the fact that the triffids are 'choking open fields and city streets alike', and their carnivorous nature is not just man-eating, as Masen trips over 'felled bird or cat' in the first incursion.[45] Yet the triffid attack increasingly appears focused on the 'Old World' patriarchal communities, challenging contemporary resistance to acknowledging non-binary gender identities. The poison tendril of the triffid is the plant's protection mechanism against the

[35] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.172.
[36] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.172.
[37] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.315.
[38] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.423.
[39] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.418.
[40] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p. 419.
[41] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.420.
[42] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.420, italic in original.
[43] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.249.
[44] Alaimo, *Exposed*, p.3.
[45] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.38 and p.50.

commodification of their oil, used by the 'Old World' and the surviving Isle of Wight community as a key resource. Although Wyndham's original triffid attack saw them taking advantage of the mass blinding, these modern plants have quickly learnt to aim their toxic tendril at the human body's weakest protection – the face and specifically the eyes. While this new attack is initially launched during a solar blackout – again taking advantage of the lack of human vision, they have become a cannier adversary, demonstrating several organised attacks. Together with their underestimated intelligence, their lethal whip-like stinger remains their greatest weapon. The poison lashed by the tendrils is so toxic that a single contact with the skin can kill a human instantly. Yet, Masen discovers that there are some humans that can miraculously survive in close proximity to the triffids without the latter posing any threat: a young girl (Christina) he finds living on the floating triffid island survives her dash through the triffid copse when he startles her; and a small settlement of 'American Indians from the Algonquin tribe' who are 'living in a camp with no perimeter fence' where 'children [are] playing in a grove of triffids' without any concerns.[46] What is more 'the plants don't notice them, either' due to '[t]he simple fact … that those people are immune. Triffids can't harm them'.[47] In both instances, the sense of understanding and respecting, living within and at one with, their environment offers Masen clues to surviving the plant monster apocalypse.

The bulk of the narrative (much like Wyndham's) focuses on the re-formulation of post-apocalypse societies, with the American enclave's capitalist exploitation and 'segregation of blacks and unsighted people' by the wealthy elite held up in contrast to Masen's cooperative communal society as a critique of contemporary globalisation.[48] Through Masen's kidnap by an outlaw group poignantly called 'The Foresters', with whom Masen sides, the narrative engages with contemporary debates on the balancing of capitalist practices with environmental concerns. Here, the triffids – and both Masen's and Christina's link to them – seem to play a minor role and could potentially be overlooked in any literary criticism, of which there is little, other than some comparison of Clark's writing

[46] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, pp.232-3.
[47] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, pp.232-3.
[48] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.188.

to Wyndham's.[49] However, as in Wyndham's novel, the triffids remain overlooked as monstrous protagonists, even though modern plants depicted as evolving sentient life-forms warrant closer examination. Although Masen spends significant time cladding himself with protection against the toxic sting, the biophilic Foresters illustrate that there is a trans-corporeal solution to the human-plant struggle for control. Both Christina and the Algonquin tribe 'peacefully coexisted with triffids' because the triffids 'realized that their stings were useless against those people [so] stopped wasting their venom'.[50] Two aspects converge here in underlining environmental calls for respect of nature: the triffids are acknowledged as sentient life-forms that can recognise and decision-make, and the power-shift of control between plant and human has dissipated through a mystic oneness with these vengeful plants. Like the Na'Vi demonstrate in *Avatar*, the Algonquin have an understanding and connection to the triffids that a material trans-corporeality reveals comes from their constant proximity and ingestion of mild doses of vaporous triffid poison. This indigenous connection is reiterated in the BBC TV 2-part, modernised drama adaptation *The Day of the Triffids* (2009) where a tribal mask from the jungles of Zaire that Bill Masen (Dougray Scott) has kept from the day his mother was killed by triffids and he was rescued, provides the groups' immunity to a triffid attack at the end of the narrative.[51] Trapped by Torrence (Eddie Izzard) and his men, Masen applies triffid poison through the mask to the eyes of each group member, having remembered that a tribal Zairean did the same to him when he was rescued as a child. Signalling a material trans-corporeality, this temporary blinding through the application of triffid poison imitates an inoculation effect that allows the group to pass through the triffids un-harmed, as the plants 'recognise' part of themselves within the humans.

Clark's novel interrogates these human-nature relations and human fallacy of control over nature (and others) when the plants begin to 'control' New York City. The infiltration of the sixty-foot giant triffids into Fielding/Torrence's utopic Manhattan is

[49] Winner of the 2002 *British Fantasy Award for Best Novel* and official sequel authorised by the John Wyndham estate, 'Clark has faithfully recreated Wyndham's style' (*The Scotsman*, 2001), 'Clark manages to combine his voice almost seamlessly with that of John Wyndham' (*SFX*, 2001) and 'stays faithful to the spirit of the original' (*Time Out*, 2001). James Whittington, 'New From Big Finish – The Night Of The Triffids', *horrorchannel,* 2014.

[50] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.234.

[51] *The Day of the Triffids*, dir. by Nick Copus (BBC Wales, 2009).

considered a lesser evil than the arrogant, egotistical leadership of the novel's antagonist. The triffids launch 'a coordinated attack' that results in the New Yorkers, who are metaphorically blind in their following of Fielding/Torrence's capitalist regime, witnessing the thousands of slaves living in the 'grim neighbourhood' north of their enclave walls. These monstrous plant protagonists appear to root for the underdogs, forcing the post-apocalypse New Yorkers to recognise the monstrosity in their own blindness to their selective segregation. Although generally indiscriminate in their anthropophagy, the monstrous triffids turn hero in assisting the Foresters time and again in achieving their extraction plans and countering social injustices. When Fielding/Torrence's men attack their base camp, the Foresters escape capture by, in Gabriel Deed's words, 'leav[ing] the job of defence [of the camp/Foresters] to the big green guys'.[52] As eco-monsters, the triffids engage with contemporary debates on consumerism, capitalism, environmentalism, racism and widening gender identity at the beginning of a new millennium. Although Alaimo argues 'we must recognize animal cultures, animal memories, animal pleasures, and animal homes, making space for them within all-too-human landscapes, as it is no longer possible, within the anthropocene, to imagine they will survive somewhere else',[53] I would argue that the same does not necessarily apply to plants. Despite their apparent immobility, plants are far more versatile than nonhuman animals: they can - and do - continually adapt to their surroundings and re-establish themselves. This ability is now a staple trope in ecohorror/apocalyptic film narratives where the demise of human civilisation features urban areas being reclaimed by nature and vegetation. For Simon C. Estok, ecophobia stems from the terror this lack of human control over nature generates, as it manifests our contemporary eco-social anxieties.[54] In Clark's novel, the triffid plants' intentional organisation of control over human space interrogates environmentalist attitudes to urbanisation and calls for greening urban areas, while the militaristic triffid attack on both the New York and Isle of Wight enclaves comments on contemporary climate change protests within an expanded consumerist culture.

[52] Clark, *The Night of the Triffids*, p.259.
[53] Alaimo, *Exposed*, p.30.
[54] Estok, 'Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia', pp.130-140.

Adapting the modern triffids for their time, Clark's protagonist persistently develops the idea of triffid intelligence. Masen's androcentric perspective focuses on the consumption of triffid (and therefore minute portions of toxin) as a trans-corporeal solution for human survival amongst the triffids, in a reversal of the triffid's trans-corporeal acquisition of intellectual cunning. In Wyndham's novel, the triffid horror stems from the consumption of the human body, which, as already discussed, dispels the nature-culture boundaries with the triffid absorbing culture through the human as food. Clark's updated triffids further the concept, suggesting that through the consumption of human bodies, the triffids have absorbed human intellect, as demonstrated by their organisation, recognition, and intentional attacks. Clark's triffids no longer kill to eat; they just kill to destroy, to exact control – a species genocide that is predominantly a human trait that they have acquired through ingesting human flesh, in a gothic trans-corporeality that shifts the balance of power between human and plant. These triffids discard the boundaries of human and nonhuman towards a hybrid that ultimately controls the vestiges of human society by corralling it into small enclaves. The novel ends with David Masen commenting on the bleak outlook for the future; the damage wrought by the cloud of interstellar dust on the crops has meant food is scarce and communities have been forced to ally themselves against the triffids as they become 'more aggressive now than they have ever been before', raising the unspoken question of who is farming whom? As a modern allegory of ecohorror, Clark's protagonist challenges androcentric perspectives on human superiority by situating the surviving human characters within a world where nature already has the upper hand.

The triffids have never been specifically gendered in either novel. However, the hypermasculine monstrosity of the evolved millennial triffids as sentient plant-life seeking control over the human communities offers shifting perspectives that champion non-binary gender identities. The triffid attacks are predominantly on communities where traditional binary gender roles are still evident (the Isle of Wight and General Fielding's Manhattan community), while the harmonious plant-indigenous tribe settlement offers acceptance of non-heteronormative identities underlined in a power-shift narrative that challenges Western cultural traditions closely associating women with nature and men with culture or

reason.[55] Traditional female gender dualisms of benevolence and nurturing when contrasted with monstrous and out of control wildness are mirrored in the nature dualisms of Mother Nature versus Gothic Nature that Elizabeth Parker suggests leads to 'confusion … between ecophobic and gynophobic anxieties'.[56] However, the triffids themselves, through their varied mutations, explore a broader spectrum of gender identities within their contemporary context. The trans-corporeal oneness through the toxicity of the triffids, revealed at stages throughout the novel (Christina, the Alongquin, then finally, Bill Masen and his Isle of Wight contemporaries), dismisses gender/nature dichotomies. None of the human characters are gardeners in the common concept of ordering and controlling nature, apart from perhaps Bill Masen, who continues to study and extract oil for his community to use and the general farming of docked specimens. Rather the narrator encounters humans whose environmental proclivities mean their proximity to the plants have afforded them some protection. Their human bodies have developed an immunity through ingesting mediocre amounts of the poison through triffid stew or handling safe specimens. They become the revived hope of a new human society; one that calls for contemporary society to dispel toxicity around gender and the environment by recognising inclusion and acceptance as the way forward. And yet, the novel's ending is far from reconciliatory; David Masen ends his transcript going into yet another battle with the triffids as the human community strives to re-establish old cisgender roles and human dominion over nature.

5.2. Floral Revenant: Revisiting Binary Thinking Through ecoGothic Body Horror

Jeffrey A. Weinstock has argued that 'we inevitably make our own monsters with the ingredients we have on hand, so the recipe keeps changing-even when the monsters themselves have been passed down from generation to generation'.[57] The key ingredient in this new post-millennial recipe is body horror. In cinematic terms, body horror involves visceral attacks, blood and gore in the tradition of slasher films and splatterpunk, while Gothic body horror, according to Xavier Aldana Reyes, involves 'the hybridisation of the

[55] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).
[56] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.114.
[57] Weinstock, 'Invisible Monsters', p.275.

body' through multiple, seemingly incompatible forms.[58] The plant monsters of the twenty-first century may be familiar, but they do not so much consume as transform, combine, merge with the human body – sometimes viscerally, sometimes more subtly – in ways that open debates on ecological awareness through the material ecoGothic body. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests the hybrid monster's 'corporal fluidity' reflects the 'simultaneity of anxiety and desire' that 'ensures that the monster will always dangerously entice'; it occupies the 'ambiguous, primal space between fear and attraction' and in doing so it 'is the abjected fragment that enables the formation of all kinds of identities-personal, national, cultural, economic, sexual, psychological, universal, particular'.[59] Jack Halberstam too, points out that contemporary monsters 'have stabilized into an amalgam of sex and gender' that 'not only reveal certain material conditions' for the production of horror, but the violence exacted through body horror 'indicates a crisis of sexual identity' by monsters that threaten their communities with their 'indeterminate gender and sexuality'.[60] When such monsters involve the commingling of plant-human, their ecoGothic abhorrence reflects 'modern preoccupation with boundaries and their collapse',[61] particularly in relation to contemporary society's anxieties with gender and nature.

A wonderful example of this re-working of plant monsters for a post-millennial era is the short story, 'The Wisteria' by Donna A. Leahey (2014).[62] Clearly inspired by Charlotte Perkins Gilman's ghost story 'The Giant Wistaria' (1891), Leahey's tale exemplifies the rise in ecoGothic body horror for the twenty-first century reader.[63] In Gilman's tale, a group of friends rent an old wisteria-covered house in anticipation of experiencing a haunting. Keen to conjure some ghostly background, their attention turns to the massive, twisted wisteria invading the porch, describing it 'like a writhing body – cringing - beseeching'.[64] Deciding the damage the wisteria has done to the porch is potentially lethal, the tenants organise

[58] Aldana Reyes, *Body Gothic*, p.54.
[59] Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', *The Monster Theory Reader* (2020), p.51.
[60] Halberstam, 'Parasites and Perverts', p.152-3.
[61] Halberstam, 'Parasites and Perverts', p.167.
[62] Leahey, 'The Wisteria', pp.9-20; an extended version of this analysis appears in *Stratified Nature: Women's Writing Past, Present, and Future*, ed. by Marie Hendry (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, forthcoming).
[63] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 'The Giant Wistaria' (1891) in *Arboris Mysterius: Stories of the Uncanny and Undescribed from the Botanical Kingdom*, ed. by Chad Arment (Greenville, Ohio: Coachwhip Publications, 2014), pp.9-17.
[64] Gilman, 'The Giant Wistaria', p.13.

for the porch to be repaired – with as little disturbance to the plant as possible. Triggered by their focus on the wisteria, a haunting occurs through a shared vivid dream in which the 'scandal, shame and tragedy' of the previous Puritan owners/occupants is revealed when the preserved body of a tiny baby is found in the old well and the workmen find the skeleton of a woman 'in the strangling grasp of the roots of the great wistaria'.[65] In a similar vein, H.P. Lovecraft's 'The Tree' (1920), tells of a successful artist murdered by his jealous colleague and when buried under his favourite olive tree, it takes on the artist's likeness before collapsing during a storm, destroying house, art and murderer. These plants are not particularly predatory killers, but rather demonstrate the uncanny as they appear to take on the form of the unavenged victims buried within their roots. Such macabre portrayals invite a material ecofeminist Gothic analysis of their supernatural gothic trans-corporeality that sees human and tree merge to enact a bizarre haunting.

Body horror of the post-millennium focuses on 'anxieties surrounding transformation, mutation and contagion' of the body,[66] that a gothic trans-corporeal commingling of human and plant illustrate in a physical form. The material and often visceral trans-corporeal human-plant mutations and transformations in the texts of this chapter contemplate the contemporary changing gender landscape through a distinctive manifestation of ecoGothic body horror. Given its close association with the house and domestic settings, the wisteria 'becomes a complex metaphor for the oppression of women', frequently appearing in gothic tales of female entrapment and patriarchal control.[67] Like Gilman, Leahey uses the wisteria to underline the contemporary issues of emotional domestic abuse. Indeed, 'Postfeminist Gothic', Gina Wisker asserts, 'revitalises feminism's broader issues, including gender equality, inclusivity and diversity' through 'reimagine[d] familiar Gothic figures', inevitably encompassing contemporary '[v]iolence and oppression'.[68] Leahey includes the plant as a gendered protagonist through trans-corporeal ecoGothic body horror, giving the wisteria metaphor a twenty-first-century

[65] Butcher, *Evil Roots*, p.77; Gilman, 'The Giant Wistaria', p.17.
[66] Aldana Reyes, *Body Gothic*, p.54.
[67] Matthew Wynn Sivils, 'Vegetal Haunting: The Gothic Plant in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction', in *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, ed. by Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp.161-174 (p.171).
[68] Gina Wisker, 'Postfeminist Gothic', in *Twenty-First-Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp.47-59 (pp.51-2).

physicality. The tale begins with a domestic argument about the potential damage the 5-year-old wisteria is doing to the siding and deck of the couple's house as the tendrils are 'stretching towards the roof … as if the plant were trying to get into the house'.[69] The female narrator's (Gia) domestic abuse from her adulterous husband (Charles) plays out through the husband's missing cat, found entangled in the wisteria vines. After struggling to free the cat, she notices 'leaves coming out of the [puncture] wounds' indicating the vines had been inside the cat's body, suggesting the ominous carnivory of the wisteria.[70] When Gia attempts to prune the roots, she exposes a seemingly recent human skeleton buried under the deck, stripped of its flesh by the anthropophagus vine. On Charles' arrival, wisteria and corpse actively merge as 'a skeletal hand pushed out of the earth … At the same time, vines and leaves wrapped themselves around the bones, weaving themselves about, forming the shape of a human arm' eventually becoming a recognisable effigy of Charles' former mistress, intent on exacting revenge on him for her murder.[71] The ecoGothic body horror of Leahey's contemporary version of the wisteria emphasises a material commingling of plant-human as the carnivorous vine, having trans-corporeally absorbed the body's flesh, creates a liminal yet physical revenant through the living plant re-forming around the skeletal structure. This transformed plant-human monster seeks reprisal for the physical abuse suffered in human form, attacking Charles by wrapping itself around him and dragging him violently into the ground. The horror stems, not only in the unsettling anthropophagy of the female gendered vine, but in a 'becoming-plant' that serves to remind us of the power of nature over man. Although Halberstam argues that monsters 'can represent gender, race, nationality, class and sexuality in one body',[72] offering a broader interpretation of the wisteria as a gendered eco-monster, Leahey's tale reworks the wisteria metaphor for a contemporary feminist dialogue of domestic abuse and oppression through an ecoGothic body horror. Drawing attention to the verb 'domesticate', Stacy Alaimo's material ecofeminist perspective asserts it 'signifies both care and control' and 'resulted in confinement and suffering', while:

[69] Leahey, 'The Wisteria', p.10.
[70] Leahey, 'The Wisteria', p.14.
[71] Leahey, 'The Wisteria', p.16.
[72] Halberstam, 'Parasites and Perverts', p.165.

> domestication of household pets in Western cultures tends to familiarize them, enlisting them into subordinate positions with the "family" of humans' ensuring the human position of control. An alternative, and rarely used, definition of domesticate, "to live familiarly or at home (with)," suggests that it is possible to imagine human habitation as living with, rather than walling out, other creatures.[73]

Leahey's transgressive wisteria illustrates the ambiguity associated with gendered nature within its contemporary context through an ecoGothic body horror that serves to highlight the intrinsic oppression of non-human nature and non-heteronormative identities in Western thought. The ultimate combining of vengeful woman with the female-associated plant brings this wisteria as eco-*femme fatale* into the twenty-first century.

5.3. Ancient Roots: Revising Gender Through Edenic Terror

One iteration of the monstrous plant within the new millennial ecoGothic body horror is the return of the prehistoric plant and Evans Light's novella*, ArborEATum* (2013) provides a clear interconnection of environmental and gender issues through what I refer to here as Edenic terror.[74] Other texts such as *The Ruins* (Scott B. Smith, dir., 2008), *Seeds of Destruction* (Paul Ziller, dir., 2011) and Taona D. Chiveneko's novel, *The Hangman's Replacement: Sprout of Disruption* (2013) all equally draw on the ecoGothic body horror of Edenic terror. However, these are either situated in uncultivated exotic locations (*The Ruins* and *The Hangman's Replacement*) and are therefore outside the scope of this study, or in the case of *Seeds of Destruction*, involves mutation but does not affect or mutilate the human body. Edenic terror is centred around an ecophobia at the heart of a Puritanical Gothicized Nature, Elizabeth Parker explains, since 'the *Garden* of Eden is a wholly ordered and cultivated paradise' with transgression resulting in expulsion into 'disordered wilderness' that has left humanity constantly seeking to control nature in attempts to recreate it (italics in original).[75] At the centre of this Gothic transgression is the Tree of Knowledge and its forbidden fruit that has propagated the persistent gendering of nature in Western patriarchal tradition.

[73] Alaimo, *Exposed*, p.19.
[74] Light, *ArborEATum*, no page numbers available.
[75] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, pp.63-6.

Light's cleverly worded novella, *Arbore*at*um,* is a weird tale that weaves Christian iconology with Native American legend about anthropophagic trees. Combining ideas of the Garden of Eden, mythology of apple trees and the American Roanoke/Croatoan legend of the mysterious disappearance of an entire village in the sixteenth century, Light's tale subverts the familiar themes through an ecoGothic body horror that questions Anglo-American conservative gender identification. The benign Christian myth of an ideal garden is shattered by the evil intent of these prehistoric anthropophagus trees. The story surrounds protagonist, Micah Jenkins and his family, who follow staunch Puritan, Lemuel and his family across the mid-nineteenth century dust-bowl prairies. After months of travelling and lack of food, they eventually arrive at a lush oasis valley where they decide to stop and carve out a new life. In the shade of the massive apple trees, they have apparently found their new Eden. Ignoring the CRO-AT-OAN carvings and the symbolic omen of the 'grotesquely shaped wooden bush, its knurled branches resembling a man with limbs tied into pretzel-like knots',[76] the pilgrims settle into the abandoned dwellings oblivious to the explicit ecoGothic body horror to come. As Micah and Anna begin to explore their emerging sexual desires, they are placed in contrast to the pious attitudes of the adults around them and underscored by the Judeo-Christian iconography of the fertile garden, apple trees and the fall of man leading to banishment from the Garden.[77] The horror begins when the younger children collect the large, red, juicy apples that fall from the trees only for the roots to reach out of the ground and pull their bodies into the earth, consuming their flesh, leaving only the husks of skin when Micah tries to rescue some of them. As Micah prepares to meet Anna for their first sexual encounter, the religious metaphors of falling apples, forbidden fruit, the eating of the apples – their flesh, juice, exquisite flavour – all suggestive of seduction, are ironically dispelled when the apple trees begin to consume the innocent children. This plant monster has evolved from the vampire trees of the mid-war period that exuded particularly masculine traits in its oppression of the human female gardener; these ancient life-forms lure the human children of either gender through the large and perfect apples. The Edenic connotations of apple trees have

[76] Light, *ArborEATum*, Chapter II, para. 1.

[77] Apples 'symbolise fertility' and 'sexual appetite' according to Lisa Rowe Fraustino, 'At the Core of The Giving Tree's Signifying Apples' in *You Are What You Eat: Literary Probes into the Palate*, ed. by Annette M. Magid (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 284-306 (pp.286 and 288).

been traditionally associated with women, either in their benign life-giving role or, more often, the demonization of women, particularly in Gothic tales. From children's literature, like Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*, where the apple tree is the boy protagonist's surrogate mother, providing a playground for solace initially and later other needs until there is nothing left to give, to associations of the wicked step-mother and the poison apple in Snow White, apple trees have traditionally been linked with a female gender role.[78] Parker has shown that 'the essential elements of the story of Eden (the man, the woman, the fruit, the snake, the transgression, and the punishment) are often present, though *distorted*, in the Gothic', and 'the forbidden fruit becomes the poisoned apple' (italics in original).[79] The tree monsters in Light's novella are disguised as benign Mother Nature, offering the apples as potential food. These apples, conversely, are far more sinister and transgressive as they turn predator, devouring the children instead, in a particularly gruesome description of body horror. Light's use of anthropophagic trees within a perverse Eden offers an evil Other within a modern allegory that engages with conservative America's unease about the disappearance of heteronormative codes and cisgender beliefs in a world of ever-widening gender identity recognition.

These monstrous Edenic trees challenge the continuing prejudice towards LGBTQ+ identities through the explicit body horror of the tree's consumption of three of the young children, Chastity, Piety and Nathan, whose names only add to an implicit reading of a conservative angst towards non-cisgender identity. The biblical and Hebrew names reference the pilgrim families' apparent conservatism and non-binary prejudice undermined by the Edenic tree devouring these religiously-named and innocent children. The sexual connotations offered by the body horror as the tree gobbles the innocent young humans not only proposes a conservative horror and continued prejudice towards LGBTQ+ communities that raising awareness and increasing openness about non-heteronormative identities destroys innocence, but also offers an unsettling allusion to child sexual abuse. After Micah realises that Chastity has disappeared, 'like she was sucked straight down into

[78] 'As fruit-bearing tree of life it is female', Neumann (1955), *The Great Mother*, pp.48-49.
[79] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.66.

the ground' according to Nathan, he watches Piety try to pick up an enormous apple next to him.[80] As she does so:

> [s]harp wooden appendages shot out from it, stabbing deep into the young girl's delicate palms. The skin on the back of her hands ripped open, the protrusions making a wet slurp as they pierced upwards through her flesh … blood throbbing from her wrists in silky crimson ribbons.[81]

Micah watches as 'the apple, the *thing* that had sewn itself into her flesh, yanked her wounded hands violently downward' into the dirt 'with so much force that her head snapped back'.[82] The tree's consumption of the children through the traditional botanical manner of the roots in the ground highlights the materiality of the human body, while the ecoGothic body horror stems from the corporal consumption prior to its decomposition and the preliminary merging of tree-root and human as the roots penetrate the little girl's arms. The idea of the tree-root sewing itself to the human body, merging with it to become a single entity underlines the material trans-corporeality that ecoGothic body horror relies upon in generating plant monsters for a contemporary audience. This ferocious penetration is followed by the girl's body being violently 'yanked down again, and again' underneath the ground by the roots of the tree until she has been completely swallowed by the dirt, leaving only 'two empty shoes',[83] in a ghostly image of genocide. The penetration and consumption of innocent children imbues this gothic tale with suggestions of child abuse, sexual exploitation, and loss of innocence through the gothic re-working of the Edenic and Mother Tree references generally perceived in Judeo-Christian culture as traditionalist interpretations of protection.

Micah's desire for Anna is momentarily overlapped by his desire for the real fruit at his feet when his sensual consumption of the apple mimics his intended triste. He is:

> overwhelmed by his desire for the real fruit … fragrant … sweetness … He plucked an apple … cool, smooth to the touch … he brought it to his mouth, lips quivering with anticipation … Unable to resist the intense allure of the fruit … A bolt of exquisite flavour … the delicate, creamy flesh, sticky juice dripping from his chin.[84]

[80] Light, *Abor*eat*um*, Chapter VI, para. 12.
[81] Light, *Abor*eat*um*, Chapter VI, para. 18-19.
[82] Light, *Abor*eat*um*, Chapter VI, para. 19-20, emphasis in original.
[83] Light, *Abor*eat*um*, Chapter VI, para. 21.
[84] Light, *Abor*eat*um*, Chapter V, para. 22-24.

Micah is not harmed by the apple, rather it mirrors his adolescent sexual desire as he consumes it. His transgression of the community's rules in expressing his sexual identity by meeting Anna in the night are echoed in the consumption of the tree monster's fruit, whereby Micah's identity exploration is condoned by the apple tree.

This pre-historic legendary grove reverses human views on nature as a commodity. The children are gathering baskets of apples for the adults to preserve, store or trade as a consumable commodity. However, the humans become consumables when the trees eat them in violent acts of ecoGothic body horror as Micah witnesses more children's 'fragile bodies ripping and contorting' as they vanish; '[s]hrill screams were choked silent with a mouthful of dirt and a gurgle of blood, as tiny guts squeezed up and out of their mouths' in the process of being dragged viciously underground by the tree.[85] The act of ripping their bodies apart in a frenzy of consumption points to 'the horror of a secular present [that] paints the body as a vulnerable bag of flesh and bones without any meaning beyond that which is socially constructed'.[86] Like Gia's husband in Leahey's tale, the little bodies are pulled underground alive, sucked into the earth and consumed by the roots, reducing their human bodies to food, devoid of individual identity. When Nathan gets trapped by a circle of apples and in his panic, steps on one, the tree, through the apple, grabs Nathan by the foot and Micah grabs his wrists, resulting in a 'game of tug-of-war that was quickly devouring his young friend'.[87] The tree is much stronger and pulls the boy's body out of his skin, leaving Micah 'clutching the limp, empty shell' of Nathan.[88] This act of dragging Nathan out of his skin offers ecoGothic body horror as a means for engaging with post-millennial identity crises with the introduction of a wide-range of gender identities, since skin is a key component in identity construction. Skin, Halberstam argues, 'houses the body, and it is figured in Gothic as the ultimate boundary, the material that divides the inside from the outside' where 'the particularities of deviant race, class, national, and gender markings' are inscribed with sexuality as Other.[89] In removing Nathan and the other children from their skin in a visceral flaying, these transgressive Edenic trees exact

[85] Light, *Abor*eat*um*, Chapter VI, para. 26.
[86] Aldana Reyes, *Body Gothic*, p.170.
[87] Light, *Abor*eat*um*, Chapter VI, para. 26-29.
[88] Light, *Abor*eat*um*, Chapter VI, para. 26-29.
[89] Halberstam, 'Parasites and Perverts', pp.153-4.

punishment through an ecoGothic body horror that dispels binary categorisation, removes identity construction and reduces the human body to consumable material. As Micah tries to explain how the children have disappeared to the incredulous adults, the tree spews all the bones of its recent feast down on them, providing evidence of the orchard's anthropophagy. When an enraged Lemuel grabs an apple to stuff into Micah's 'lying mouth', he too is attacked by 'sharp wooden appendages piercing and twisting their way through [his] hand, wrapping around his wrist, slicing into his skin'.[90] The attack on the conservatively Puritan zealot suggests traditional binary gender constructs need to be dissolved to allow space for broader gender identity constructs to flourish without discrimination.

5.4. Nature Rules – Creating a Posthuman ecoGothic Through Body Horror

Reconsidering the 'explosion of [scientific] research and peer-reviewed articles into [plant behaviour], appearing in every major scientific journal', as key to understanding 'the unique qualities of plants or plant-lives', Karen Houle asserts that *'becoming-plant* would involve our extension and ideas entering into composition with *something else*' (italics in original).[91] Trans-corporeal ecoGothic body horror that involves a commingling of human and nature in the texts that follow, illustrates a becoming-plant that offers the development of an environmental posthuman. Previous chapters have shown the plant monster demonstrating a certain degree of agency, from those of weird fiction expressing desire for human flesh to science fiction's alien plants that specifically seek human destruction through consumption or absorption. What the plant monster of the new millennium displays is a more subtle sense of plant intelligence in seeking revenge for human disregard of plant-life itself and seeing the environment as a commodity. Some of the texts explored here also include fungi, lichen or moss that although another species kingdom and often 'part of the same conversation',[92] is one that would equally warrant a similar study in its own right given the wide range of fungal fiends in fiction and growing

[90] Light, *Abore*at*um*, Chapter VII, p.7.
[91] Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', pp.97-8.
[92] Butcher, *Evil Roots*, p.9.

interest in this species generally.[93] While *Annihilation* (Alex Garland, dir., 2018, based on Jeff VanderMeer's 2014 novel) and *The Girl with all the Gifts* (Colm McCarthy, dir., 2016, based on Mike Carey's 2014 novel) revolve around this adjunct species kingdom for their monstrous nature,[94] these texts include ecoGothic posthuman hybrid figures and provide contextuality for the contemporaneous novel by A.J. Colucci, *Seeders* (2014), which draws on the symbiotic relationship between fungus and plant to engender a human trans-corporeal becoming-other. Moving beyond traditional nature-gender associations, the inclusion of another species within a broader vegetation reflects post-millennial gender diversification. These tales concern the destruction of contemporary humankind to forge a better future – one that protects (or improves) the natural world. Their trans-corporeal becoming-Other figures invoke a monstrous femininity that questions female-nature associations through physical mutation of the human body. Hybridisation and mutation are key body horror concepts illustrated in cinema and novel, where becoming-Other through vegetal transformation offers a dialogue with post-millennial identity formation and non-binary gender politics. Harry Benschoff contends that '[q]ueer seeks to go beyond … traditional gender roles to encompass a more inclusive, amorphous, and ambiguous contraheterosexuality [insisting] that issues of race, gender, disability, and class be addressed within its politics' thereby 'linking the queer corpus with the figure of the Other'.[95] In the novels and the films, vegetal mergings and transformations of the human body interrogate gender-nature, human-nonhuman associations and relations, dispelling taxonomic (and other) boundaries that, I argue, represent the post-millennial gender landscape courtesy of LGBTQ+ communities.

In *Annihilation*, both VanderMeer and Garland offer a clear environmental message: become one with nature or suffer human demise. Their settings are an uncanny and disorienting blend of habitats, with flora and fauna out of place and weirdly mutated

[93] The growing number of ecohorror films featuring fungal monstrosity and weird fungal fiction has yet to receive any focused critical analysis. There are however, general critical works, see: Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Anne Pringle, 'Establishing New Worlds: The Lichens of Petersham', in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, ed. by Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, Nils Bubandt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp.157-167; Merlin Sheldrake, *Entangled Life* (London: The Bodley Head, 2020).

[94] Both films follow their respective novels closely, with pertinent differences between each media identified within each short analysis.

[95] Benshoff, 'The Monster and the Homosexual', p.227.

species that fascinate and horrify simultaneously, confusing in their lack of categorisation and attributed to the atmospheric bubble induced by the prolific fungal growth/lichen within its boundaries. All-consumed with the crisis of identity, VanderMeer's novel is deliberately ambiguous and void of specificities: the coastal zone experiencing the environmental anomaly is referred to as 'Area X', the all-female team are identified only by their scientific professions, and they are unable to identify the mutated non-human beings they discover on the expedition.[96] Even the narrator-protagonist remains nameless, referring to herself as 'the biologist' or her nickname, 'Ghost Bird', which itself is suggestive of a lack of corporeal identity. This anonymisation underlines contemporary responses to globalisation and trepidation towards navigating identity, from anonymising personal data,[97] to social media and virtual avatars that allow individuals to create alternative personas. By interrogating the shifting (species) boundaries, commentary on expanding gender identity construction is highlighted in the anonymity, ambiguity and hybridity offered in both novel and film in contrast to the single-gender team. All female scientists, the team itself ambiguously champions feminism while equally re-affirming women-nature associations in the assumption they will succeed where their male counterparts failed to understand or adapt to the event.

The plethora of mutations within the film's Shimmer (Area X) are taxonomically corrupt: a crocodile with shark teeth, a stag with flowers on its antlers, and following an attack, a bear with a human scream, each a manifestation of gothic trans-corporeality as what each eats becomes a part of their physicality. Such seemingly impossible scientific hybridisation underlines growing climate change anxieties and the ability of nature, unlike humans, to adapt easily to its circumstances. The uncanny nature found in Area X reflects the growing unease in our lack of control or ability to compartmentalise the world around us, including our own identities. Reflecting wider recognition and inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community, emerging non-binary gender definitions are highlighted in the overt starkness of the bizarre mutations Area X offers.

[96] Jeff VanderMeer, *Annihilation* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014).

[97] Such as the use of personnel numbers for Human Resources and tax, National Insurance and Social Security numbers, NHS numbers (in the UK) intended to protect an individual's privacy, but which equally effaces identity markers.

Complex identity mapping of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious beliefs, political leanings and so on,[98] have emerged to reflect the variety of gender identities being recognised from the growing LGBTQ+ movement. In *Annihilation*, post-millennial concerns – the new gender landscape and climate change fears – are foregrounded through two specific incidents of trans-corporeal ecoGothic body horror. In Alex Garland's adaptation, which interestingly names the protagonists, when the team approach the base camp of the previous expedition, the camera focuses on the colourful mutant lichens found on the walls of the various buildings, which Lena (Natalie Portman), describes as being 'malignant, like tumours'.[99] Elizabeth Parker argues that this 'cancerous imagery' is 'one of humankind's most feared "monsters" of the modern age',[100] and I would add, one that is not discerning with regard to identity. While Parker sees the 'exponential growth of The Shimmer' as 'the consuming threat of the forest',[101] I read this new expanding environment as contemporary recognition of the increasing variety of gender identities and growing ecological awareness. On entering the camp, the team find an explosion of technicolour growth in an empty swimming pool revealed to be a former expedition member with lichen, fungi and flowers growing from his dismembered skeleton. The *Annihilation* team find the fate of their quasi-colleague horrific as they fail to adjust to or understand their modified surroundings. The splatter image epitomises an eco-materialist gothic that displaces the human body as a fertiliser grow-bag for the plant-life of the anomaly. It is this visual imagery of body horror that allows the idea of Area X to question humankind's place within our environment, providing a gothic trans-corporeality where the cyclical exchange of matter sees the human body -an identifying signifier – as mere plant food. Trans-corporeal ideas explored through the man-eating plant monsters of an earlier decade resurface here through an alien mutation of nature that emphasises the materiality of the human body through a diorama of ecoGothic body horror. The explosion of colourful lichen, fungus and flower from the body engorges and distorts the human skeleton in a clear dissolution of binary boundaries. Reading the rainbow of colours exhibited by the vegetation as representing the LGBTQ+ community, the dissolution of the male scientist/soldier's body clearly underlines the

[98] For example, contemporary Equal Opportunity and Diversity Forms attached to all Human Resource activities.
[99] *Annihilation*, dir. by Alex Garland (Skydance Media, 2018).
[100] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.160.
[101] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.160.

millennial shift away from patriarchal binary constructs as gender-nature associations that link women with nature and men with culture are ambiguously reinforced and upended with the seeming destruction of the male body. Notably, within the novel in a chapter cleverly entitled 'Integration', VanderMeer's biologist finds the body of the *female* anthropologist merged with the strange fungus and lichen, the ecoGothic body horror here dispelling traditional gender-nature associations. This trans-corporeal body is the anthropologist: a profession that studies social interactions and constructs throughout history, and consumed in this fashion, offers a challenge to society to re-think traditional identity constructs in the face of emerging non-binary gender definitions.

An equally unnerving yet more benign scene of ecoGothic body horror in Garland's film is when physicist Josie (Tessa Thompson) declares she understands how The Shimmer works and does not want to continue 'fighting' but rather accepts her fate to merge with nature. At an abandoned, over-grown village where the plant-life has uncannily replicated the human shape, resembling families of human effigies, Josie discovers the plants have some human DNA. These are human-plant hybrids produced through an uncanny gothic trans-corporeality. Whereas the man-eating eco-monsters previously subsumed the human consciousness and characteristics through the material body as food, in Area X, nature and human merge at a molecular level manifesting a physical memory where social constructs such as gender have been erased or at least dispersed. When Josie submits to her fate, she begins to sprout flowers through her skin. The porous boundary of the human body and source of identity is punctured and Josie walks away to become one with nature as she transforms into another plant-human effigy in the village, demonstrating what Karen Houle calls 'becoming-plant'.[102] For Simon C. Estok, this demonstration of nature overpowering the human body through a mutation creates horror based on ecophobia, arguing that the horror of ecoGothic stems from a deep-seated fear of nature's power, its ability to defy control and an uncertainty of our own human instincts.[103] Philosopher Michael Marder suggests that it is a long tradition of Western philosophy to dispel or control the vegetative nature of the human condition that defies our ability to empathise

[102] Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', pp.89-116.
[103] Estok, 'Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia'.

with our environment, a basis for ecophobia.[104] However, as Parker argues, Josie's voluntary trans-corporeal plant-becoming, while 'undeniably haunting' in defiance of 'the human-nonhuman dualism', is 'not necessarily negative'.[105] In a post-millennial age of increasing environmental awareness, it is hardly surprising that contemporary apocalyptic tales envisage a need for an overhaul of the human condition and society. VanderMeer's uncanny manifestations of the vegetal-within provides overt commentary on environmental anxieties but also succinctly engages with gender identity debates for the post-millennial generation. Within the expanding Area X, labelling becomes not only unimportant but almost impossible, with mutations dispelling boundaries of traditional thinking and naming, biological sex and gender, human and non-human as the diversity of classifications refuse traditional binaries. The narrator's acceptance of the Shimmer's effects and understanding that all must change as it expands, rather than attempting to stop it, suggests post-millennial society must also rethink the nature/culture boundaries.

Rethinking society and gender boundaries for the post-millennial age is also at the heart of M.R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014) and its 2016 cinematic (close) adaptation by director, Colm McCarthy.[106] Set in the not-too-distant future, humankind has been ravaged by a mutated fungal parasite that turns those infected into mindless insatiable flesh-eaters referred to as "hungries", dividing humanity into those who crave flesh and those who are "dinner". While the story surrounds the struggle for survival of a small group of non-infected adult authority figures and the eponymous young girl (Melanie), a material ecofeminist Gothic reveals how nature is used to instigate a global change to society. Both novel and film cite a documentary by renowned biologist, David Attenborough, on a parasitic fungus known to infect ants in tropical rainforests, the "zombie-ant fungus",[107] which has mutated to cross the species boundaries, causing humanity's devastation. Grounding this fictional apocalyptic epidemic within a real-world natural phenomenon, already uncanny in its existing behaviour, offers a clear indication of

[104] Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant*.
[105] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.134.
[106] M.R. Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts* (London: Orbit, 2014); *The Girl with All the Gifts*, dir. by Colm McCarthy (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016).
[107] *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis* infects carpenter ants 'draining it of nutrients and hijacking its mind' before sending 'a long stalk through the ant's head, growing into a bulbous capsule full of spores' that it disperses to eventually colonise the rest of the ant nest. Ed Yong, 'How the Zombie Fungus Takes Over Ants' Bodies to Control Their Minds', *The Atlantic*, 14 November 2017 [accessed: 20 August 2021].

an underlying concern about how the natural world is more adaptable than the early twenty-first-century human. Through its fictitious mutation in transitioning across species boundaries to infect humans, this fungal antagonist coincides with contemporary fears of global pandemics with strains of animal flu infecting humans. Infections in humans around the world from swine flu (2009-10) and avian flu (2013-4)[108] caused global anxiety as zoonotic pathogens crossed the invisible boundaries from animals to humans, something which had previously either never been detected or demonstrated in the evolutionary speed of the natural world. Fictionalising a real-life fungus in a deliberate ecoGothic transgression that explores the symbiotic nature of mycological species and human underlines these ecophobic concerns. Metaphorically, as an asexual (botanical) species with gender-less associations, a fungal parasite is a fitting natural villain for a post-millennial society that is attempting to embrace previously marginalised and LGBTQ+ identities.

The text's division of society into animalistic predators and human as prey, could be read as a political commentary on post-millennial attitudes to consumerism in contention with growing environmental calls for a reduction in mindless consumption. Yet, it also offers the protagonist as an ecoGothic posthuman figure that underlines post-millennial uncertainty in the face of climate change crisis and identity construction within an increasingly virtual world. Melanie is a transgressive protagonist who disrupts the story's post-apocalyptic binary society. She is a second-generation hungry, who has retained the ability to think, reason and to some extent, control her instinctive hunger for flesh. She is neither mindless hungry nor entirely human but one of a group of '[h]igh-functioning hungries',[109] that elude categorisation. Melanie and others like her are a new generational species that has evolved a symbiotic relationship with the parasitic fungus that signals the need for change. Recognising her hybrid status as an evolved species better adapted for and with more in-depth understanding of this new world, Melanie's posthuman hybridity

[108] In 2013, avian influenza 'resulted in over 1500 reported human cases and many human deaths', World Health Organisation, 'Influenza (Avian and other zoonotic), 13 November 2018, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/influenza-(avian-and-other-zoonotic), [accessed: 04/07/2022]; more recently, deaths from the virulent SARS-CoV-19 pandemic originating in bats (2019-) have totalled 6,334,728 globally by July 2022, Source: World Health Organization, COVID-19 Dashboard, https://covid19.who.int/ [accessed: 4/7/2022].

[109] Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts*, p.56.

symbolises the voice of a post-millennial generation where non-binary identities are more acceptable.

After a group of hybrid feral children attack the surviving humans from the secure compound, Melanie convinces an infected Sergeant Parks to set fire to the fungal forest discovered on the edge of the city. Releasing the parasitic spores into the wind to spread the infection across the globe, Melanie explains that as there is no cure for the plague; they must embrace a new future. The fungal infection's evolution from parasite to symbiote suggests the 'children [of the hungries] will be okay and they'll be the ones who live and grow up and have children of their own and make a new world. "But only if you *let* them grow up," she finishes'.[110] Melanie's decision to re-set society by ending existing humanity suggests the need to modify thinking for a workable future that calls for mutual respect of those identities that have been notably ostracised. She argues that this change will only happen if '[e]verybody turns into a hungry all at once' so the children will 'be different. … They'll be the *next* people'.[111] The novel's ending engages with contemporary debates in empowering the second-generation hungries: a symbiotic fungal-human that can rationalise while the fungus 'gets its nourishment only when the host eats' rather than feeding on the brain it is embedded in.[112] This fungal-human hybrid draws on both ecophobia and alterity to create an ecoGothic posthuman figure that disrupts binary thinking. In elaborating a posthuman Gothic, Anya Heise-von der Lippe asserts that '[i]t revolves around our fear of becoming Other' seen through uncanny, monstrous others that devise 'liminal states and involvements of the human' that raise 'questions of (human) identity constructions'.[113] Generally, these monstrous involvements focus on the technological posthuman hybrid or potentially animal-human confusions. Melanie's reflex to convert the remaining non-infected humans by releasing the fungal spores to resolve the world's conflict points this post-apocalyptic narrative towards a posthuman ecoGothic.

[110] Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts*, p.456, emphasis in original.
[111] Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts*, p.456, emphasis in original.
[112] Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts*, p.432.
[113] Anya Heise-von der Lippe, 'Posthuman Gothic' in *Twenty-First-Century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp.218-230 (p.218).

The complexity of mycological organisms mirrors the complexity of the human condition. When parasitic fungus and human merge at the start of the story, the result is a plague of humans who have been turned into mindless, insatiable cannibals, demonstrating an ecophobia of one of nature's least understood yet most crucial organisms for a healthy habitat. As the most prolific species on Earth, the fungal kingdom provides the basis for new and existing eco-systems, predominantly their symbiotic relationship with plants (and other life-forms and materials).[114] Fears of uncontrollable nature have stalked Western mindsets for generations, but the infiltration of the human brain by a fungal parasite reinvigorates, for a contemporary society, the uncanny symbol of The Green Man that emerges as an ecoGothic zombie. Situated as predators in the early stages of the novel, the hungries are human vessels controlled by the needs of a natural organism, quickly established as the non-human monster and the common target of destruction by both societies of non-infected humans: the Beaconists (the elite professionals inside the safe zone) and the Junkers (the unfortunates outside the fences). The hungries are appropriated human bodies condemned as an Other to be feared and relegated to the outside of normal society; they are fungal, representing a non-binary gender that cannot be easily categorised. The evolution of the pathogen into a symbiote reflects ecocritical calls for greater human understanding of their place within an environmental context. Melanie and the feral children, as symbiotic hungries become ecoGothic posthuman figures that engage with millennial acceptance of more complex ideas about identity for a society aiming for a world that respects personal gender and sexual identities.[115] These ecoGothic posthuman texts share the uncanny physicality of trans-corporeality through the merging of human and non-human, symbolising the fluid gender identity boundaries of LGBTQ+ communities. The species hybridisation is initially perceived as a toxic other, the monstrosity of category boundary transgression dissipating as the plotline progresses towards a clear suggestion that an acceptance of these uncanny others is vital for a harmonious future and more balanced version of humanity. These posthuman ecoGothic hybrids are only monsters to the old versions of humanity and it is

[114] Sheldrake, *Entangled Life* (2020).
[115] Henrietta L. Moore, 'Difference and Recognition: Postmillennial Identities and Social Justice', *Signs* 25:4, *Feminisms at a Millennium* (Summer 2000), pp. 1129-1132.

the open-minded protagonists who foresee the benefits of acceptance and understanding, dispelling monstrosity for a new, improved human species.

The post-millennial plant monster has a deliberate plan: to assert its control and shatter the human delusion of dominance over nature. Plant control of the human body in the form of a contemporary body-snatcher is the premise of American writer and environmentalist, A. J. Colucci's *Seeders* (2014).[116] Here, the plant invasion epitomises a gothic trans-corporeality through uncanny ecoGothic body horror that brings contemporary environmental concerns and gender issues together in an unsettling disruption of human/nature boundaries. After his apparent suicide, Professor George Brookes bequeaths his island home to his daughter, Isabelle, and her family; a hidden, precious diamond to his companion; and what is left of his research into plant sentience to neurobiologist, Dr. Jules Beecher. Stranded together on the island until the next supply boat, caught in a storm and with Beecher becoming increasingly unstable after his discovery in Brookes' outdoor laboratory, Isabelle's family fall victim to the local vegetation through an uncanny trans-corporeal commingling whereby hierarchical boundaries are upended as the plants take control. All vegetation on the island has a wide-spread fungal infection that Isabelle's younger son, Sean, is first to notice when plucking an ivy-leaf 'with dark velvety bumps that left a stain of purple on his thumb'.[117] Disguised as moss, '[t]he fungus seemed to be everywhere … camouflaging itself … there wasn't a single plant not infected'.[118] Beecher quickly ascertains that the fungus is ergot – a mycotoxin of the *Claviceps* fungi that infests cereals and grasses – that has inexplicably mutated to infest the diverse vegetation of the entire island.[119] Like Carey and VanderMeer, the use of scientifically-evidenced, real-world mycology as a basis for a weird environmental event allows Colucci to draw on the liminality of this bizarre growth for the uncanny and unsettling link between human and non-human. However, unlike the previous texts, the infecting spores are not the direct nemeses here but facilitate Colucci's eco-monster. As Beecher articulates, '[i]t's not really the fungus that worries me, but the plants themselves'

[116] A. J. Colucci, *Seeders* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2014).
[117] Colucci, *Seeders*, p.71.
[118] Colucci, *Seeders*, pp.107-8.
[119] Colucci, *Seeders*, p.111; Konnie H.Plumlee, DVM, MS, Dipl ABVT, ACVIM, 'Chapter 23-Mycotoxins', in *Clinical Veterinary Toxicology* (2004), pp.231-281.

as it is '[i]ts relationship with the plants that makes it all possible. How they hear our thoughts. Communicate. Understand'.[120] As Merlin Sheldrake explains, the 'relationships between plants and mycorrhizal fungi [mean] plants can connect' with each other via these complex networks.[121] For Colucci's protagonists, the horror derives from the commingling of plant, fungus and human, creating a connection that allows the vegetal world to communicate their thoughts and feelings, subsequently manipulating the humans' actions.

Like King's Jordy Verrill, who is infected and eventually subsumed by the weeds, the spores invade the bodies and minds of both botanist (Beecher) and plant-lover (Sean), linking them to the island vegetation through the mycorrhizal network that transforms them into environmental posthuman figures. Although the strange fungus-laden plants of the island affect all the characters in some way, these 'gardeners' are the ones specifically targeted and ultimately transformed. Beecher's ability to understand the experience of plant-life through synthesising temporal waves is reminiscent of the short story by Roald Dahl, *The Sound Machine*, discussed previously. This is hardly surprising, as Colucci admits she was influenced by Dahl's story and inspired by plant biologist, Stefano Mancuso, to re-think views on plant intelligence when researching for the novel.[122] Becoming one with the plant by aligning brainwaves comes at a physical cost, though; one that involves an ecoGothic body horror. The trans-corporeal effect of the combination of mycorrhiza and the material human body allows the island's plant-life to understand human concepts, such as murder. This is revealed when Beecher discovers George's woodland laboratory and searching for the vital connection, finds it in:

> the nine human bodies he unearthed. They lay chest-down in the dirt, heads turned to the side, the back of their skulls partly removed. Most were still in various stages of the rooting process, the flesh preserved but hardened like clay. The cadavers were gaunt and deflated in the center, as if their organs had collapsed. The fungus was heavily rooted throughout the bodies, concentrated at the heads where it enveloped their brains. It covered the frontal lobes and needled its way into gray matter. Probing. Learning. Planning.[123]

[120] Colucci, *Seeders*, pp.134, 136.
[121] Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, p.13.
[122] A.J. Colucci, 'Author Q&A', *ajcolucci.com* [accessed 16 May 2020].
[123] Colucci, *Seeders*, p.215.

The corpses reveal the materiality of the human body as the fungus absorbs the nutrients and decomposes George's former interns, moving throughout to consume the hummus of the human flesh. The material gothic rooting into the human brains allows the mycorrhizal network to cross the species divide and connect man and plant.

Perhaps because the author is a woman, but whether consciously or not, the plants prey on the men on the island foremost, using the scientific arrogance of the adult males to win control of the human inhabitants. The ensuing violence and threat of malevolent infection stems, the text suggests, from the male hosts, hence trans-corporeally absorbing the concept of murder, a specifically human idea, from a masculine brain. In commingling plant and man (both dead and alive) serves to highlight uncomfortable social prejudices in contemporary society, despite advances in acknowledging non-binary gender identities and inclusive policies. An ecoGothic body horror is further elucidated in the rash of black bumps along Sean's and Beecher's hairlines, that by the end, 'covered its entirety [of Beecher's face], as well as most of his neck' while 'the velutinous bumps had spread quickly down [Sean's] left cheek',[124] indicating the merger of plant-human mind. The horror stems from the fungal creep just under the skin that threatens to burst through with black mushrooms at any moment, placing Beecher and Sean within a liminality of life and death, human and non-human. The physical commingling of plant-human coupled with the aligning of electrical oscillations generates a terrifying posthuman hybrid of not just corporal materiality but of conscious thought, suggesting the loss of control over mind and body. The powerful interconnection of plant-fungus-human creates a distinctly posthuman eco-monster through a gothic trans-corporeality that requires us to consider the nonhuman perspective, which despite the growing compendium of work by eco-philosophers, such as Michael Marder and Luce Irigaray,[125] continues to provoke ecophobic terror. This non-androcentric perspective offers the millennial reader a way to negotiate a society of continually blurring boundaries, challenging them to re-think the interactions of human and nonhuman beings.

[124] Colucci, *Seeders*, p.295

[125] Eco-philosophers (and ecofeminists) argue that a nonhuman perspective is required for understanding humanity's place within an environmental context. See: Irigaray and Marder, *Through Vegetal Being*.

As posthuman ecoGothic figures that surrender to enacting plant-thought, Sean and Beecher symbolise the issue at the heart of Estok's ecophobia: '[i]magining the power and the danger of nonhuman agency often means imagining threats to human control … [hence] ecophobia turns nature into a fearsome object in need of our control'.[126] The infected Beecher maims and murders those who attempt to obstruct the global distribution of infected plants required in order that humanity might better understand the environmental devastation of the modern world. By the end of the novel, when Isabelle returns to the island to be reunited with Sean, she discovers he has been 'completely enveloped' in and throughout his body with the fungus, almost past recognition as '[f]ungus mushroomed from his ear' indicating 'they were deep inside his brain'.[127] Acting as a living specimen that allows the plants to study humans through him, Sean enables the plants to communicate what they want people to do 'without killing each other', and Isabelle is finally forced to succumb to plant control.[128] In being a live plant-fungus-human admixture, Sean is a posthuman ecoGothic figure that signifies an environmental ethos whilst simultaneously representing contemporary cultural diversity. Like Carey's protagonist, Melanie, who symbolises the move away from binary gender identity, Sean's entwining with both plant and fungus symbiote also embodies the expanding recognition of sexual identities encompassed within the LGBTQ+ movement. The loss of human control in becoming one with the plants underlines not only our lack of control over the environment as indicated by climate change but also points to the contraction and subsequent fractioning of gender identities into non-binary constructs that ecofeminist philosophers argue is needed for plant-thinking. In true ecophobic vision, the eponymous seeders (the nine bodies hosting the rooting specimens) are the result of George Brookes' genetic engineering. The scientific interference with nature is once more vilified in his 'new genetic hybrid' fungus that 'could grow on virtually any plant' forming 'a symbiotic relationship against a common enemy' – people.[129] Once more, the notion of becoming-plant takes on a terrifying form that emerges as a trans-corporeal eco-monster, but one that suggests an alternative eco-critical perspective is the route to understanding and peace:

[126] Estok, 'Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia', p.135.
[127] Colucci, *Seeders*, pp.317-8.
[128] Colucci, *Seeders*, pp.318, 314-5.
[129] Colucci, *Seeders*, p.313.

> The messages [from the plants] came fast and easily now and she understood everything from the beginning of time. We were part of it all, every creature on earth, no one species greater than any other. It was so simple, and all this time the answers were right in front of us and we didn't even know it.[130]

As we seek to understand ourselves, not least through wider gender identities, we also seek to understand the nonhuman world with which we interact. This conversation is unveiled through the trans-corporeal ecoGothic body horror of the monstrous plant-human hybrid; one that ultimately establishes a posthuman ecoGothic figure that suggests diverse gender identity in a vegetal commingling offers potential for a more ecological-aware contemporary world view.

5.5. The Horror in Becoming-Plant: Environmental Posthuman Perspectives

As climate change, social and environmental justice, pandemic and infection, and financial market crises become increasingly recognised on a world-side scale, writers employ alternative perspectives that focus on the materiality of the human body and the interconnectedness of human and non-human through the New Weird and speculative eco-horror. Like the posthuman ecoGothic figures they often include, New Weird texts, Carl H. Sederholm asserts, 'blend various strands of horror, science fiction and fantasy into a hybrid whole' that 'makes everything potentially uncanny and mystifying'.[131] As the texts in this section show, this is achieved through what Xavier Aldana Reyes explains is 'a re-imagining of motifs and characters, via transplantation into … [recognisable, fictitious] environments',[132] that the monstrous plant and gothic gardener embrace. The fictitious gardeners/botanists of the post-millennial eco-horror tales that follow illustrate an environmental posthuman perspective through an ecoGothic body horror that dispels the illusion of human superiority in reducing the human body to its material parts. Providing commentary on globalised society through the viewpoints of carnivorous plant life, writers attribute sentience to vegetable monsters as a species in competition for space and

[130] Colucci, *Seeders*, p.320.
[131] Carl H. Sederholm, 'The New Weird' in *Twenty-First-Century Gothic*, ed. by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 161-173 (p.162).
[132] Xavier Aldana Reyes, 'Post-Millennial Horror, 2000-2016', in *Horror: A Literary History*, ed. by Xavier Aldana Reyes (London: The British Library, 2016), pp.189-214 (p.206).

resources with humanity. In response, an emerging academic field of global ecoGothic has begun to engage with these growing post-millennial concerns and the changing perspectives towards non-human life.[133] However, I contend that gender identity continues to stalk these vegetable monsters even as ecoGothic frameworks dispel dichotomous thinking and post-millennial writers develop specifically environmental posthuman characters that highlight the materiality of the human body to engage a new generation.[134] The texts in this section re-visit and re-work the plant monsters of earlier tales for a post-millennial audience and their complex fears about identity loss, the rise in postfeminism and environmental degradation. The uncanny familiarity of the vegetable terrors of these new writers is distorted by the explicit body horror – a reflection, perhaps, of a somewhat anaesthetised audience in a century that started with real-life terror of both human and natural causes.[135] Despite contemporary ecofeminist attempts to separate environment from (particularly female) gender, both topics appear to implode within these tales of ecoGothic body horror in a way that reflects contemporary anxieties of what Gina Wisker describes as 'postfeminism's exploration of violence'.[136] Growing disquiet about environmental degradation often appears to be side-lined despite the global importance, while recognition of non-binary gender identity and progress towards gender equality seem similarly thwarted. While generally the texts in this section can be read as the interaction and power dynamic between human and non-human, the ecoGothic body horror indicates there continues to be engagement with gender debates. In a digitally absorbed, fast-paced post-millennial landscape, a new wave of plant monsters emerges within the short story format for a twenty-first century audience. The relationship between these new vegetable monsters and their human gardening companions (or foes) highlights

[133] Sharae Deckard, 'Uncanny States: Global EcoGothic and the World-Ecology in Rana Dasgupta's *Tokyo Cancelled*', in *Ecogothic*, ed. by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp.177-194.

[134] In *Millennial Momentum: How a New Generation Is Remaking America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais argue that 'young Millennials [are] a generation of young people that is, by most measures, accomplished, self-confident, group-oriented, and optimistic' but equally often considered 'self-important, entitled and, ultimately, indecisive young people', but above all 'support racial and ethnic equality and inclusion, and look for win-win solutions that advance the welfare of everyone', moreover, 'are also increasingly tolerant of homosexuality, … leading this change in beliefs', pp.29, 31 and 33.

[135] Notably, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the devastation of the Boxing Day tsunami of Indonesia in 2004 and of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and the Global Recession of 2007.

[136] Wisker, 'Postfeminist Gothic', p.51.

the fluidity of gender boundaries through a re-visioning of the perspectives of human and non-human. These stories emphasise a material interconnectedness between plant and human, simultaneously underlining environmental concerns and shifting interpretations of gender identity constructs. The material ecoGothic body horror and gothic trans-corporeality present plants as monstrous posthuman ecoGothic tropes and offer the gothic gardener as an environmental posthuman figure.

In discussing the philosophical notion of 'becoming-plant', Karen Houle offers a deeper look at Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory to suggest that becoming-plant involves more than a shared experience, but rather is a 'heterogenous alliance' with the non-human vegetal.[137] Yet she argues, '[v]ery little attention has been devoted to imagining what these unique expressions of plant-livings might actually be'.[138] The contemporary short stories in this section show that our concern with the androcentric destruction of our environment is starting to change as fiction writers move towards this imagining within the New Weird and ecohorror genres. Published in 2011, one of the first anthologies to consider this alternative perspective was *The Monster's Corner: Stories through Inhuman Eyes* edited by Christopher Golden. In this collection, Jeff Strand's 'Specimen 313' offers the man-eating plant's narrative voice; an attempt to become-plant and review ideas about monstrosity.[139] Strand's protagonist, Max, 'whose real name was Specimen 278', is a post-millennial re-working of the iconic man-eating plant Audrey II.[140] Told from Max's perspective, the 'gene-spliced Venus Flytrap' recounts life in the 'greenhouse laboratory' with the mad botanist, Dr. Prethorius, and the interactions with the other plants, particularly his new neighbour, Jenny (Specimen 313).[141] Strand's story appears to be simply an empathetic anthropomorphic plant love-story, but there are some ecoGothic aspects to Strand's narrative that qualify it as a becoming-plant tale. From the outset, the plant narrator acknowledges that his human name has been attributed to him by Dr. Prethorius, referring to his 'real name' and that of the other plants in the greenhouse as 'Specimen …', distancing the anthropomorphism of human assignation. Naming, discussed

[137] Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', p.97.
[138] Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', p.97.
[139] Jeff Strand, 'Specimen 313', in *The Monster's Corner: Stories through Inhuman Eyes*, ed. by Christopher Golden (New York: Piatkus, 2011), pp.287-302.
[140] Strand, 'Specimen 313', p. 287.
[141] Strand, 'Specimen 313', pp.288, 287.

previously, is a distinctly human manner of attributing identity and in attempting to imagine Houle's 'unique expressions of plant-livings',[142] Strand makes this subtle distinction. Putting the reader in the plant's pot (shoes), Strand brings vegetal life into focus, outlining the empathy between plant species and a clear androphobia that places contemporary gender and environmental concerns under the spotlight.

In the tale, Max and Jenny's violent consumption of the humans brought into the greenhouse by Dr. Prethorius is placed in contention with the mad botanist's murderous disregard for his plants. When Prethorius lures hobos into the greenhouse to inspect his star plants, 'Max's powerful leaves slammed shut over the vagrant's arm, severing it at the shoulder' and on another occasion, Jenny's 'leaves closed over the top half of his body with a loud *crunch*', '*chewing*' him up before she 'bent down and gobbled up the lower half of the man's body'.[143] The simplicity of the body horror intentionally portrays the plants' perception of the humans as food, underlining the materiality of the human body, accompanied by a vegetal inscrutability that monstrously abounds in the lack of concern for these human victims by either plant or gardener.[144] When Prethorius kidnaps a young woman, who pleads with him in front of the plants that she has a baby at home, neither human nor plant is moved by her entreaties. Rather, when Prethorius shoots her, 'Max happily open[s] his leaves' and bites the woman's arms off.[145] In adopting the plant monster perspective, the ecoGothic body horror in this tale focuses more viscerally on the torture inflicted on the plants. We learn that 'a minor rampage by Specimen 201 [ends] with the unfortunate plant being clipped to shreds with a pair of garden shears'; of 'what had happened to Specimen 159, who'd been dug up and discarded-thrown into a corner' taking 'several agonizing days to dry up and starve to death'; similarly, Specimen 90 who has an axe taken to his roots somewhat ironically '[calls] them all [the plants] monster for just watching him die'; and the threat of 'acid on the leaves' when Max is being de-homed in favour of Specimen 314.[146] This lethal torture asks us to consider the repercussions of our human actions on non-human beings by highlighting the true monster as, not the man-

[142] Houle, 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral', p.97.
[143] Strand, 'Specimen 313', pp.288 and 292.
[144] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.9.
[145] Strand, 'Specimen 313', p.294.
[146] Strand, 'Specimen 313', pp.287, 289, 296 and 299.

eating plant, but the cruel human botanist. We are asked to suspend our ecophobic tendencies and to envisage the world from a vegetal perspective, but in doing so we are also asked to reconsider gender roles. As eco-*femmes fatales*, previous man-eating flytraps have demonstrated a distinct hypermasculinity (see Chapter 4), but this female Venus Flytrap, Jenny/Specimen 313, reflects the independent, strong female (human) protagonists of contemporary narratives. Jenny conforms to certain expected female traits: she is 'about a foot shorter [than Max], with leaves that were narrower',[147] but as a more advanced specimen, she has greater mobility and more powerful maw that positions her as Max's champion. When Prethorius begins to dig up and discard Max for a newer hybrid, Jenny uproots herself from her pot, in triffid fashion, to grab the insane gardener, ultimately feeding him to the unfortunate Max, who lists precariously in his half-empty pot of earth. The gendering of both plant characters simultaneously asserts traditional binary constructs even as it challenges the boundaries through an alternative, non-androcentric perspective, failing nevertheless to separate sexuated gender-nature associations.

Viewed through the imaginings of plant-becoming, Strand also revisits the mad scientist trope. Like his nineteenth-century counterparts, Dr. Prethorius is the ridiculed eco-Frankenstein, creating gothic mutations for ill-intent. Particularly reminiscent of Hawthorne's Rappaccini, he has 'create[d] a cherry tree with fruits that ooze deadly poison' and 'blades of grass sharp enough to slice off your fingers' alongside his man-eating flytraps.[148] A staple trope of the Gothic, Prethorius is 'emotionally aloof, delusional and driven by obsession, typical characteristics of the mad scientist in horror films'.[149] He envisages himself as the master of a plant army, having 'bred [Jenny and Max] specifically to hunger for human flesh', he claims, just prior to his timely demise.[150] Throughout this narrative Strand plays with traditional gender associations, morphing the boundaries of binary thinking and confusing the distinction between human and nonhuman. His plant-imagining upends and re-defines ecophobic attitudes through a redefined ecoGothic body horror that underlines contemporary environmental debates through eco-materiality. For both Prethorius and the plants, humans are just plant food. When Prethorius shoots the

[147] Strand, 'Specimen 313', p.290.
[148] Strand, 'Specimen 313', p.300.
[149] Aldana Reyes, *Gothic Cinema*, pp.12 and 156.
[150] Strand, 'Specimen 313', p.299.

young woman in a fit of pique, he contemplates 'grind[ing] up the rest of her and mix[ing] her into the soil' as fertilizer in a particularly eco-material sense of body horror.[151] Deliberately reducing the human body to its material essence for plants to absorb appeared as early as 1976 in Doctor Who's 'Seeds of Doom' (see Chapter 4), but is an environmental posthuman concept that re-appears significantly within post-millennial plant monster narratives.

The materiality of the human body and the trans-corporeal monstrosity of becoming-plant are key features of the stories that follow in elaborating an environmental posthuman. With the emerging interest in eco-horror, Chupa Cabra House published an anthology of plant horror *Growing Concerns* (2014), edited by Alex Hurst. A collection of sentient, flesh-eating plant beasties, its stories draw on a range of ecoGothic body horror to dispel the gendered boundaries of human and nonhuman in questioning our place in the world. Like Prethorius, the gardening protagonists of the following selected short stories demonstrate an eccentric eco-materialist perspective of their fellow humans. The material breakdown and trans-corporeal transformations of the human body accompany a disintegration of the traditional cisgender constructs and the human-nonhuman boundaries. Notions of the human flesh as fertilizer is at the heart of C.J. Andrew's 'Don't Waste Anything' (2014).[152] With elements of an inverted Eden, a young woman lures a lustful date through her online advert to accompany her home, where she shows him her thriving vegetable garden that she is obviously proud of. Humouring her in anticipation of great sex, he crouches to examine a pumpkin patch, when she hits him on the head with a spade. Waking up naked and hanging by his wrists in the garage, what he believes to be 'some sort of BDSM thing' rapidly becomes something far more sinister when she reveals that she does not need him for sex but 'I need you to help me with my garden'.[153] The female gardener recounts how she killed her useless husband, turned some of him into doggy treats and used the rest of him in the garden. Horrified by her revelation, the incarcerated man attempts unsuccessfully to re-take control of the situation and his fate, but on reiterating that she does not like waste, she confronts him: 'How do you contribute

[151] Strand, 'Specimen 313', p.295.
[152] C. J. Andrew, 'Don't Waste Anything', in *Growing Concerns*, ed. by Alex Hurst (Fort Smith, AR: Chupa Cabra House, 2014), pp.39-46.
[153] Andrew, 'Don't Waste Anything', pp.41-3.

to the world? You are a used car salesman for god's sake. The world doesn't need another one of those. You are a waste to our society'.[154] The success of her garden produce, it turns out, is thanks to the human fertilizer. In eating the delicious harvest of fruit and vegetables that she sells to local restaurants, she asserts a gothic trans-corporeal cannibalism, in explaining, '[w]hen people eat my fruits and vegetables there is a little bit Rick [sic] and a few other foolish men like you in them. It is a beautiful circle.'[155] Her use of the human body in this way demonstrates a clear trans-corporeal body horror that visualises a transgression of human/nature boundaries as these men materially become-plant. With the Eden references, there is a sense of the religious 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust' epithet that Dawn Keetley appropriates as '[f]lesh to food',[156] and queries whether the true monster is the plant or the gardener. The materiality of the human body is emphasised in the young woman's explicit description of her breaking down of the various body parts which she applies according to the requirements of her garden produce. The abject horror is furthered in her intentions with her current victim to 'keep you alive and harvest portions of you as I need them' in contrast to the usual reaping of her garden plants, since 'you have within you enough nutrients to feed my garden for a whole growing season'.[157] The young woman's eco-material perception places plants and their fruit above the lives of certain males in a re-assertion of the female-nature association that engages with modern post-feminist ideology.[158]

Within this narrative there is a clear sense of a gender power-shift with the serial killer character – traditionally a male figure – being the female gardener. Edenic references comparing the tomatoes to juicy red apples with their connotations of sexual desire at both the start and the end of the narrative, along with the prolific growth of the garden provide a traditional backdrop to the monstrous female figure of Western patriarchy. Her disregard for the 'foolish men' that she has decomposed indicates a blurring of established gender constructs as she has clearly overpowered them. Other than their material use, she shows

[154] Andrew, 'Don't Waste Anything', p.44.
[155] Andrew, 'Don't Waste Anything', p.45.
[156] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.1.
[157] Andrew, 'Don't Waste Anything', p.45.
[158] In 'Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times', *Subjectivity*, 25, (2008), pp.432–445, Rosalind Gill argues that the post-feminist figure is a 'sexualised' subject displaying a modern femininity that is 'powerful, playful and narcissistic', constantly challenging traditional notions of femininity, p.438.

a distinct disinterested in the opposite sex, situating her as a postfeminist figure that illustrates a 'modernized neoliberal version of femininity' emphasising 'discourses of ''pleasing oneself'''.[159] Her amusement at his suggestion that she is into kinky sex together with her perception of his material body purely as garden fertilizer undermines both binary gender constructs.

In what Parker calls 'perverse Eden',[160] 'Journal 6 of 8: Techniques in Grafting' (2014) by N. J. Magas offers a visceral, grotesque body horror for its trans-corporeal ecoGothic becoming-plant.[161] The uncanny plants in this garden emphasises the material human body as spare parts in a grotesque posthuman ecoGothic that hyperbolises the disintegration of category boundaries. These plants dismember and incorporate the various components of the human body. The gardener of this diary narrative tends 'a garden of carnivorous child-killing death plants' near the grounds of a private school where a little girl has recently disappeared.[162] Searching for his missing daughter, Violet, Jackson Laster becomes an unwitting guest who sacrifices 'his humanity the unfortunate moment he entered [the] garden' as he is arranged 'on the ground beside Violet's remains', ready to share the same fate.[163] In a particularly visceral description, there is not much of the young girl left other than:

> the frothy leftovers of decomposed fatty tissue and a pale, fragile, skull-drawn face, something not quite human but uncomfortably familiar all the same. In just over two weeks my garden has slowly taken from her what it needs. Her eyes have reopened on one of the newer blinking-eye stalks, and pieces of her hair have sprouted out of the sticky pores of the spider vine. Unfortunately, now that most of her little body has been digested, there's not much left for the plants.[164]

Grotesque plant-human hybrids dominate this garden with specimens that 'blink by shyly closing red petals around each gelatin [eye-]ball', 'gum-tooth flowers' and shrubs that breathe 'with real lungs buried deep underground in its roots' as the plants of this death garden re-appropriate the various parts of the human bodies buried within its borders by

[159] Gill, 'Culture and Subjectivity in Neoliberal and Postfeminist Times', p.441.
[160] Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, p.63.
[161] N.J. Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8: Techniques in Grafting', in *Growing Concerns*, ed. by Alex Hurst (Fort Smith, AR: Chupa Cabra House, 2014), pp.21-28.
[162] Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8', p.21.
[163] Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8', pp.22-3.
[164] Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8', p.22.

the gardener.[165] The gardener's narrative is disturbing in the materially-factual manner of describing the dead girl's disintegrated and re-distributed body parts. The high-profile child abductions (and murders) of the late 1990s – early 2000s[166] are echoed in the gardener's reference to Violet simply as a 'food supply'.[167] But the narrator is not a killer and in an unusual manner, respects both life and death, as he struggles with positioning Jackson within the garden:

> Staking a man is something altogether different from staking a plant. … Violet had already been dead when I found her, so I hadn't needed to see her as anything other than compost, but Jackson was still breathing.[168]

The bulk of the narrative centres around the gardener's use of Jackson's live body to imbue the Death Garden with necessary nutrients for longer (much like the previous protagonist) and to enable the growth of his precious death-flower. To save his plant, which is more important to him than Jackson's life, the gardener transplants the 'tiny little purple shoot [from] the throat of a dead girl' into Jackson's abdomen. Cutting into the pinned-down Jackson with a pair of scissors, the narrator recounts cutting 'skin, fat and muscle' expecting blood 'but he started oozing something else too'.[169] This visceral gore is part of the violence and abjection of transgressive body horror outlined by Aldana Reyes as 'representation[s] of the body exceeding itself or falling apart, either opening up or being altered past the point where it would be recognised by normative understandings of human corporeality'.[170] Transplanting the 'long, tuber-like root' into the Jackson grow-bag works, and the 'trio of beautiful, purple feather-like stamen' begin to unfurl.[171] Jackson does not die, but rather is a liminal entity that 'become[s] symbiotic with death'.[172] He remains alive, 'his skin is still warm' yet plants and fungi grow from his body; '[h]is lungs still breathe – in pieces mind you – claimed here and there in the roots of all the plants that have sprung up

[165] Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8', pp.22, 24 and 28.
[166] Cases such as Jamie Bolger, Madeleine McCann, Sarah Payne and high-profile arrests such as Belgium's Marc Dutreux, some of whose victims were found dismembered in a chest freezer, were prolonged front-page news and the focus of much public outcry at this time.
[167] Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8', p.22.
[168] Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8', p.24.
[169] Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8', p.26.
[170] Aldana Reyes, *Body Goth*ic, p.11.
[171] Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8', p.27.
[172] Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8', p.28.

from and around his body'.[173] Through its ecoGothic body horror this narrative transgresses and discards the boundaries of human/nonhuman, nature/culture, and in doing so also, gender. The human body parts are 'renewed and recycled among every new plant that grows up to share in [the nutrients of their] body', creating an altogether bizarre, physical becoming-plant. It highlights the human body as matter and voids it of humanity, resituating our place in the cycle of life through an environmental posthuman perspective. Opening that liminal space between life and death while focusing on protecting the central purple flower recalls the transgressions of life and death, gender and sexual identity in Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Rappaccini's Daughter'. Reworked for a contemporary audience through eco-Gothic body horror, post-millennial non-binary gender identity construction is inherent in that liminal space signposted by the blended-colour purple.

Generating plant-human hybrids through the materialism of body horror creates a complex liminal space or being that reflects the merging and ever-increasing changes faced by millennial society. In Barry Rosenberg's 'Finding his Roots' (2014) 'becoming-plant' is the consequential fate of environmental science.[174] The protagonist, William Reedy, aptly nicknamed Weedy, is a socially inept, plant behavioural postgraduate researcher in a small team attempting to find ways to control where and how well farming crops grow. Weedy's research into controlling the invasive alligator weed is sneered at, as he believes the key to controlling the plant is through understanding how plants communicate. His close connection to the alligator weed does not just stem from his childhood obsession with the plants, but Weedy's method for communicating with the alligator weed is to consume meristem cells from the plants in a lipid capsule. As a result of this trans-corporeal ingestion, Weedy gradually begins to change as plant and human commingle, forming a posthuman ecoGothic figure. His colleagues, who become unwitting parties to his experiment, notice green highlights in his hair and his usually meek demeanour becomes more assertive as the vigorous weed becomes part of his DNA. Displeased with Gerry's advances towards Sonya, Weedy laces their coffees with meristem cells from different Mother plants. They too, begin to become-plant, their 'green auras seep into the crowded

[173] Magas, 'Journal 6 of 8', p.28.
[174] Barry Rosenberg, 'Finding His Roots', in *Growing Concerns*, ed. by Alex Hurst (Fort Smith, AR: Chupa Cabra House, 2014), pp.29-38.

cafeteria', but Sonya now finds Gerry distasteful and Weedy eventually wins the girl.[175] As Weedy's becoming-plant advances, his human cells become commingled with plant as first his hair, then skin and the whites of his eyes turn green, while his tongue showed 'hints of green veins reminiscent of a leaf'.[176] Needing to replenish his reduced meristem cells, when Weedy eats some of the alligator weed down by the lake 'he felt like a cannibal', an acknowledgment of his vegetal self, enhanced by his trans-corporeal becoming.[177] Increasingly, Weedy establishes the plants at the lake as family; he gets a 'sense of belonging', they are 'his brother plants' and after he drowns Gerry in the lake, Weedy's thoughts are communal with the plants: 'We've acted. No one will offend us again. Yes, Weedy felt it: not I, but we'.[178] By the end of the narrative, Weedy takes off his shoes, digs his feet into the earth, takes root and 'became one with his brothers, his fellow clones'.[179] Rosenberg's protagonist uses science to physically become-plant in an uncanny eco-Gothic trans-corporeal act of ingesting plant cells. He becomes a liminal being, a hybrid plant-human that disregards the boundaries of human-nonhuman, challenging heteronormativity in Weedy's desire to become-plant. Demonstrating an environmental posthuman perspective in advancing the interconnections between human and non-human beings, although the story contains a traditional cisgender love-triangle, it challenges alterity. Weedy's liminal being and his sexual encounter with the equally meristem-filled Sonya offers a contemporary recognition of non-binary, non-cisgender identities in their ambiguous vegetal-human states. Likening their post-coitus separation to 'pulling a plant out of the soil or of pulling joined roots apart',[180] disrupts notions of traditional cis-gender human interactions. In a physical becoming-plant that sees the human take root amongst the alligator weed near the lake, Weedy offers an environmental posthuman perspective of the world as a diverse and complex set of interconnections that need to be embraced.

As contemporary society contends with revaluations of gender and wider eco-social relationships, gothic authors offer reinterpretations of plant monsters that recognise them

[175] Rosenberg, 'Finding His Roots', p.34.
[176] Rosenberg, 'Finding His Roots', p.37.
[177] Rosenberg, 'Finding His Roots', p.37.
[178] Rosenberg, 'Finding His Roots', p.38.
[179] Rosenberg, 'Finding His Roots', p.38.
[180] Rosenberg, 'Finding His Roots', p.37.

as sentient non-human beings, with feelings and emotions, intelligence and determination, and ultimately with a hunger for the material of the human body. Through a viscerally physical ecoGothic body horror, post-millennial concerns about the future of the planet and what it means to be human are represented through an intrinsically-linked commingling of human body and vegetation. Explored through a gothic trans-corporeality, the plant horror stems, not just as Dawn Keetley suggests, from the material reality that 'each of us becomes the landscape from which we spend our lives trying to distinguish ourselves',[181] but from the recognition that not just in death, we are part of the world we live in. The plant monsters of these narratives hyperbolise 'our suppression of the plant' and 'their relation to us' through their 'unrelenting desire to overrun, assimilate, and dominate',[182] using the living human as food. The violent disruption of bodily boundaries creates a posthuman ecoGothic figure that embraces significant contemporary gender category shifts that the vegetal world, through its unruly and uncontrollable growth, is most apt to represent.

[181] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.6.
[182] Keetley, 'Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror', p.7.

Harvesting the Fruit: Conclusion

Crossing the boundaries, as the Gothic often does, into interdisciplinary ecocriticism and green philosophies, this study has developed a material eco-feminist Gothic framework for exploring the intersection of gender and nature illustrated by plant monsters as an alternative way of considering the changing focus of contemporary gender debates of the long twentieth century (1890-2015). By inverting Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality in this study, the material interchange between plant monster and human victims offers a gothic trans-corporeality that unveils a 'versatile signifier' with any number of semiotic meanings.[1] It has been particularly useful in scrutinising plant fiends as gendered eco-monsters that, I argue, engage with changing definitions of femininity, masculinity, and sexual identity. Despite feminist calls to separate long-standing associations between nature and women, plant monsters remain entwined with gender, particularly, I have illustrated, in the cultivated plant monster. Throughout this study, gender remains integral to the plant monster trope and vegetal thinking explored through a web of entanglements that discard dichotomous boundaries of culture/nature, male/female, human/nonhuman.

Engaging with the cultural context of their time, plant monsters are revived and re-worked throughout the long twentieth century. The vegetal monster, so recently lurking in the shadows of criticism, 'comes in many guises and reappears in many places',[2] as is evident in its appearance in a variety of genres and media. Although often 'in mainstream narratives [nature] comes to the surface as a resource and not as an actor',[3] the fictional cultivated plant monster is figured as gendered protagonist, defying hierarchical boundaries of control and challenging commodification, androcentric superiority and human exceptionalism, even as they engage with contemporary gender attitudes. Worthy of their own teratological category as gendered eco-monsters with potential for any number of semiotic discourses, this study has specifically argued that the intersection of

[1] Miller, 'Lives of the Monster Plants', p.462.
[2] Miller, 'Lives of the Monster Plants', p.462.
[3] Maria Paula Diogo, Ivo Louro and Davide Scarso, 'Uncanny Nature: Why the concept of Anthropocene is relevant for historians of technology', *Journal of the International Committee for the History of Technology*, 23 (2017), 25-35 (p.26).

gender and nature allows each to be understood through the other in the material entanglement of human and nonhuman.

We have seen how late-nineteenth century weird tales appropriated traditional gender-nature associations as patriarchal dichotomies of femininity and fears of the emerging New Woman were projected onto monstrous exotic flowers that I interpret as a distinctive fatal woman figure. Cultivated within 'the predominantly male preserve of the greenhouse', Sue Edney explains, 'exotic Others could be brought to the peak of their cultivation, providing obvious tropes for a gendered gardening discourse, in which the female and the monstrous are uncomfortably entwined'.[4] These vegetal monstrosities are deliberately configured as what I have identified as eco-*femmes fatales* that not only challenge conservative fears of the feminist New Woman, but as overtly sexualised, female gendered plants, they engage with concerns about commodification and objectification of both nature and women. The image of female independence, with women taking on more roles outside of domestic duties during the inter-war and immediate post-War periods, continues to draw on traditional gender-nature associations as vampiric trees and vines within the expanded domestic confines of the garden engage with contemporary attempts to re-instate conservative gender roles and where non-conforming behaviour is challenged. A domestic, and therefore, female space, the garden can be read as a site of resistance, an ambiguous space where the sense of manipulated, controlled, and enclosed nature is always on the cusp of rioting and where gender definitions are upended and redrawn. As plants with an unusual carnivorous penchant for male human blood undermine their gothic gardeners' hubristic attempts at control, vampiric eco-*femmes fatales* also adapt the monstrous feminine figure of Medusa with her serpent hair, entrapping their prey with numerous tendrils/tentacles as they confront a masculinity in crisis. Evoking 'both phallic and vagina-dentatal' imagery,[5] I have argued that tentacled hybrid plants offer monstrous feminine narratives that transgress the boundaries of species and gender through a

[4] Sue Edney, 'Introduction: Phantoms, fantasy and uncanny flowers', in *EcoGothic Gardens in the Long Nineteenth Century: Phantoms, Fantasy and Uncanny Flowers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp.1-15 (pp.10-11).

[5] Shelley Saguaro, 'Botanical Tentacles and the Chthulucene' in *Plants in Science Fiction: Speculative Vegetation*, ed. by Katherine E. Bishop, David Higgins and Jerry Määttä (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2020), pp.56-80 (p.64).

material gothic trans-corporeality that exposes unease with new definitions of femininity and masculinity within the popular male imagination.

With conflicting attitudes towards gender roles during the Cold War era, ambiguities of place, plant and human are invoked through shifting boundaries, liminal spaces such as porches, and fuliginous gendering of plant and human that a material gothic trans-corporeality underlines. The interactions between non-conforming human and transgressively gendered anthropophagus plant hyperbolises the contemporary conflicting gender ideology, increasingly caricaturing conservative unease towards modern redefinitions of femininity and masculinity. With concerns about women's rights and the environmental movements predominant in the mid-twentieth century, speculative fiction developed some of the most iconic anthropophagus plant monsters that would be adapted, re-visited and re-worked to engage with contemporary gender (including sexuality) and ecological concerns: the walking, talking, man-eating triffids and Audrey-plant. Although the Gothic traditionally focuses on the female body as a site for inscribing phallocentric fears, the gender ambiguity of plant monster, gardener, and 'food' in these tales challenges the era's conflicting attitudes to gender as these narratives begin to adopt progressive thinking. I have argued that through a gothic trans-corporeality that inverts the transgressive movement of material toxins, in consuming human flesh these plant monsters absorb and display distinctive gender traits that trouble definitions of femininity/masculinity and highlight an increasing disintegration of category boundaries in numerous strange plant-becomings that challenge conservative ideas and assert more progressive definitions.

As the public imagination is captured by the silver screen and space exploration becomes a popular site for visualising terror, re-workings of iconic (and other) plant monsters as alien in origin have prompted a re-consideration of the Green Man figure within this study as a masculinised eco-*femme fatale* through its ambiguously gendered hybrid commingling of human and nature, man and plant. Transgressive, ostentatious man-eating vegetal aliens confuse category boundaries through material corporeal invasion that witness a shift towards more progressive gender-nature associations. Echoing the Green Man icon, the human male protagonists of these plant monster narratives are subsumed

by the vegetal alien, in a gothic trans-corporeal plant-becoming that highlights concerns about modern masculine constructs, advancing female equality and anthropogenic environmental degradation. Nature emerges not as a quirky passive setting but as agentic; exaggerated in speculative fiction as sentient, nonhuman protagonists that emphasise human materiality. These vegetal aliens defy human ideas of control, exerting their own plant-will on their gardeners as they invade in very physical trans-corporeal commingling. By focusing on the material interaction between human and plant, I argue that conservative gender definitions are challenged as category boundaries are dissolved, carving an alternative perspective to engage with contemporary gender-nature debates through these narratives. When plant and human (usually male) merge, it is the plant that prevails, as patriarchal perceptions of gender are hyperbolically upended in a monstrous feminine plant-becoming that underlines emerging equality and changing gender definitions and behaviours.

The revival of monstrous plants and explicit material interconnections between human and vegetal in the twenty-first century, this study has found, coincides with non-binary identity construction in a time of global and environmental crises. Plant monsters are once more re-worked for their contemporary moment as uncanny plant monsters transgress species and category boundaries through what I have identified as ecoGothic body horror where the human body – both dead and alive – is viscerally invaded, dismembered and consumed. Producing an ecophobic vision that reflects uncertainty in the popular imagination about the climate change crisis and navigating post-millennial non-binary gender identity constructs, nature-gender associations have started to shift away from flowers and plants to another vegetative species kingdom – fungi, moss and lichen. As a companion species to plant monsters in the post-millennial texts selected in this study, fungi feature as the catalyst for what I have argued is a posthuman ecoGothic figure: a species commingling that defies category and gender boundaries. Given the broad spectrum of mycelium, its rhizomatic underground growth, interactions with the living and the dead, and its alien reproductive system through spores, fungal fiends are equally worthy of exploring further as ecoGothic/ecohorror tropes, particularly coming into

ecophobic focus as the twenty-first century progresses.[6] For 'although fungi have long been lumped together with plants',[7] fungal monsters of speculative fiction equally invade the popular imagination and are deserving of their own similar research that this study points towards.

The Gothic Gardener has been a crucial component in assisting the plant monster on this gendered journey and has received little (if any) attention previous to this study. Invariably a curious and exotic plant collector, these human abettors have highlighted the futility of attempting to control nature and keep order in the garden. As mad scientist/botanist figures seeking fame and fortune, they have equally been forced to navigate changing power-structures in the face of their own modified gender identity roles and behaviours. Just as the plant monsters metamorphosised across the long twentieth century, so too, the Gothic Gardeners displayed an adapted, progressive, and increasingly less androcentric perspective. By the twenty-first century, these plant monster accomplices demonstrate an environmental posthuman perspective that reduces the human body to its basic materiality, exploding the corporeal within the liminal boundaries of the garden.

This research set out to explore the intersectionality of gender and nature in the heretofore little-considered plant monster narrative, developing a material eco-feminist Gothic as a 'distinctive combination of ecocriticism with Gothic' concepts to reinvigorate critical debates by considering the human relationship to the often dangerous, literary environment.[8] With a focus on how these frequently gendered relationships transgress boundaries of all kinds, the bodily 'mutations, mutilations, and (often violent) transformations' that 'blur the line between human and nonhuman' vegetal through what I term ecoGothic body horror, demonstrates how 'environmental concerns are not isolated from concerns such as health and disability or from existential crises'.[9] The commingling highlighted through a gothic trans-corporeality has also opened avenues for shaping a posthuman ecoGothic figure in this study, engaging with emerging conversations on

[6] See: *The Spore* (Matt Cunningham, dir. 2021), *In The Earth* (Ben Wheatley, dir., 2021), *Gaia* (Jaco Bouwer, dir., 2021).
[7] Sheldrake, *Entangled Life*, p.10.
[8] Edney, 'Introduction: Phantoms, fantasy and uncanny flowers', p.7.
[9] Christy Tidwell, 'Spiraling Inward and Outward: Junji Ito's *Uzmaki* and the Scope of Ecohorror', in *Fear and Nature: Ecohorror Studies in the Anthropocene*, ed. by Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), pp.42-67 (pp.42-3).

environmental posthumanism wherein 'the material interrelatedness of all beings, including the human' recognises the trans-corporeal agencies of nature that 'reconfigure the very boundaries of the human'.[10] There is an expansive plant monster world out there – this research is only a small part of what is becoming a much larger body of ecoGothic criticism. The small sample of monstrous vegetation in this study is indicative of the plant monster's semiotic possibilities. Nevertheless, this study has established that gender and nature are intrinsically linked and by focusing on the gender-nature intersectionality, demonstrated that these eco-monsters offer alternative critical perspectives for considering both as these change over time. In developing a gothic trans-corporeal body horror, I offer a key critical concept for exploring the human-vegetal interactions that allow contemporary gender definitions to be re-assessed. Equally, considering the plant monsters through this new ecoGothic framework, I demonstrate how ecophobic attitudes to nature are initially gendered as monstrous female, gradually becoming more progressive and universally materialistic as non-binary gender constructs come into focus. While this study shows that plant (and fungal) monsters should not be too readily dismissed as simple hyperbolic caricatures, further ecoGothic enquiry into plant monster narratives is clearly warranted. The semiotic possibilities that these gendered eco-monsters offer across a wider genre spectrum (graphic novel, games, children's literature) provide an opportunity to re-engage with gender, sexual and other identity construction through uncanny and monstrous nature that also engages with unsettling environmental concerns made clearer through a gendered lens. Indeed, I posit that a material ecofeminist Gothic approach could advance scholarship beyond plant monster narratives to consider the semiotics of gendered nature across a variety of genres.

[10] Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, pp.151, 154.

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