

Introduction

Ecohorror in the Anthropocene

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and Carter Soles*

We live in ecohorrific times.

Wildfires are spreading across the US West, burning more land every year and endangering the lives of millions—human and nonhuman, both in the present and into the future.¹ Record-breaking heat waves are dramatically affecting Europe, disrupting transportation and agriculture and threatening people's lives.² India is suffering from both droughts and floods;³ hundreds of people died in 2019 and tens to hundreds of millions of people have been affected. Greenland is melting, losing 12.5 billion tons of ice in one day in August 2019 and breaking the record for a one-day melt.⁴ The planet's sixth mass extinction of species is ongoing—25 percent of species are currently threatened with extinction, while the current rate of extinction is tens to hundreds of times higher than the normal background rate of extinction and accelerating.⁵ Meanwhile, the US government has taken action to weaken environmental protections, including the Endangered Species Act.⁶ As this planetary ecohorror has become more visible, it is unsurprising that ecohorror narratives have become more widespread as well.

Contemporary ecohorror narratives can be read as a response to real-world environmental fears, but this connection is not new; horror and the Anthropocene share a longer history.⁷ John Clute places the start of fantastic literature—including horror—between 1750 and 1800, “a span of time during which the inhabitants of the West begin to understand that the world is in fact a planet and begin almost immediately to develop the planet they have grasped.”⁸ This is, as Sarah Dillon observes, approximately the same

2 period proposed as the start of the Anthropocene, “in which case, fantastic literature would be, by definition, the Literature of the Anthropocene.”⁹ This connection becomes more explicit in contemporary horror, which, Dillon argues, “is moving from a literature of cosmic fear to a literature of planetary fear.”¹⁰ In the early twenty-first century, she writes, we have a “*self-consciousness* that we are living in the Anthropocene” that was not present before.¹¹

This self-consciousness builds upon long-established anxieties about science and scientific development in both horror in general and ecohorror specifically. As Jason Colavito writes, “Horror cannot survive without the anxieties created by the changing role of human knowledge and science in our society.”¹² In the past, these anxieties have been reflected in mad science narratives or stories of scientific experimentation gone awry. This trend can be traced as at least as far back as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which Colavito calls “the godfather to the overreaching mad scientist plot,” a Gothic novel whose focus on science, the role of the scientist, and matters of physical life and death set it apart from other Gothic works.¹³ These anxieties about science and scientists are also present in early ecohorror films like *Godzilla* (1954) and *Night of the Lepus* (1972), which look beyond mere scientific overreach to the specifically environmental consequences of such overreach. The monstrous bunnies of *Night of the Lepus*, for instance, are created as a result of scientific experimentation (and poor lab safety practices), and the problem is contained only through the removal of the bunnies and restoration of ecological balance.

Ecohorror in the Anthropocene—and ecohorror *of* the Anthropocene—is not solely concerned with scientific knowledge or overreach on a small scale, however. More and more, the problems and anxieties of ecohorror texts are the result of broader forces, represented not only as mad scientists, creatures, or animal attacks but also as far-reaching events or processes such as pollution, species extinction, or extreme weather. Many twenty-first-century ecohorror narratives involving animal attacks illustrate this by placing such attacks in the context of larger climate change–related issues. *Crawl* (2019), for instance, is ostensibly a movie about gigantic alligators attacking people, but these attacks are enabled by the larger event, a climate change–induced hurricane. This echoes Matt Hills’s argument that “a surprising range of horror films fail to present us with definite ‘monsters’ as entities,” and in many cases “a monstrous agency cannot be reduced to any given ‘entity.’”¹⁴ *Crawl*

and other twenty-first-century animal attack narratives do feature monsters, but those monsters are often only symptoms of a threat that exceeds their scale.¹⁵ The Anthropocene, after all, is not a clear monster or singular occurrence, and it is not limited to a single time or place. It occurs over a long period of time and everywhere on earth (although not everywhere equally).

With this shifting sense of scale—both in time and in place—ecohorror and the Anthropocene reveal a concern with the ways in which the planet is changing. Ursula K. Heise writes of the Anthropocene that “it focuses on the reality of a terraformed planet that the genre [speculative fiction in general] has long held out as a vision for the future of other planets, but which has already arrived.”¹⁶ Ecohorror in the Anthropocene presents a vision of that terraformed planet as frightening rather than promising and reflects both the horrors we face now and those we fear will occur in the future. Similarly, Nicole M. Merola has argued that “the Anthropocene is fundamentally estranging: what we thought we knew about the continuance of a habitable biosphere for currently evolved creatures has turned out to be a mirage.”¹⁷ Ecohorror reflects this estrangement and reveals the horror of *knowing* we live on a terraformed planet, one not terraformed for our benefit. Therefore, ecohorror may be the dominant mode in which we talk to ourselves about the global climate crisis and the real-life ecological horrors of our current Anthropocenic moment.

The examples of ecohorror provided thus far are straightforward instances of ecohorror as a genre, texts that share certain conventions, but ecohorror is both a genre and a mode, meaning it has identifiable characteristics of its own while also appearing within other genres.¹⁸ Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles have identified some of ecohorror’s central characteristics, noting that although ecohorror includes nature-strikes-back narratives (the type that may first come to mind), it also includes “texts in which humans do horrific things to the natural world, or in which horrific texts and tropes are used to promote ecological awareness, represent ecological crises, or blur human/non-human distinctions more broadly.”¹⁹ As such, ecohorror already incorporates a wide variety of texts, but considering it as a mode expands its reach. For instance, there are moments of ecohorror in the time-lapse footage of melting glaciers at the end of the documentary *Chasing Ice* (2012), in action blockbusters like *Geostorm* (2017), in the well-known opening of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), and in countless other horror films and Gothic narratives.

Thus, ecohorror functions as melodrama does for Linda Williams. While acknowledging the important history of melodrama-as-genre (e.g., the woman's film of the 1930s to 1950s) and its roots in the nineteenth-century sentimental novel, Williams stresses that melodrama is a mode that constitutes "the typical form of American popular narrative in literature, stage, film, and television," regardless of genre.²⁰ Williams emphasizes that melodrama emerges at times of ideological crisis, and ecohorror evinces this same pattern of emergence, appearing in clusters related to nuclear concerns in the 1950s, pollution and the environmental movement in the 1970s, and climate change and the concept of the Anthropocene now.

Just as in melodrama, emotion is crucial to ecohorror, and the most obvious emotional response provoked by ecohorror texts is fear. As such, ecohorror reflects (and sometimes reinforces) ecophobia, defined by Simon C. Estok as "an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism."²¹ Ecophobia has also played a significant role in conversations about the ecogothic, as noted by Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils, who emphasize intersections between the two "not only because ecophobic representations of nature will be infused, like the Gothic, with fear and dread but also because ecophobia is born out of the failure of humans to control their lives and their world. And control, or lack thereof, is central to the Gothic."²² In addition to this anxiety about control, Estok argues that uncertainty—and the threat represented by uncertainty—"is the life-blood of ecophobia."²³ In this way, ecophobia as an element of ecohorror and the ecogothic reinforces Noël Carroll's argument that horror is "founded upon the disturbance of cultural norms,"²⁴ fundamentally concerned with impurity and category confusion.

As with horror writ large, ecohorror's focus on fear (or ecophobia) often generates a troubling ambivalence. Despite many creators' and audience members' very real concerns about environmental issues and their desires to prevent the worst from happening, ecohorror runs the risk of reinforcing fearful responses to the nonhuman or—equally dangerous—leading to a feeling of hopelessness. Ecohorror, after all, is not primarily a call to action. Even the most pointed ecohorrific critique of environmental degradation is ultimately couched in mere entertainment.

It's worth considering, then, what role fear plays in ecohorror's influence. Estok argues in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* that ecophobic representa-

tions have serious impacts on the real world, even arguing they should be criminalized:

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Why are ecophobic representations of and actions toward nature not subject to the law? Why are they not under the category of hate speech and hate crimes? Having them so would seem a reasonable outcome of the expanding circle of moral concern that has already produced greater protections against sexism, racism, and speciesism.²⁵

But is all fear ecophobic? Estok argues that “representations of nature as an opponent that hurts, hinders, threatens, or kills us . . . are ecophobic.”²⁶ However, Rayson K. Alex and S. Susan Deborah map a significant distinction between ecophobia and eco-fear, arguing that “it is not always useful to understand the fearful relation between humans and their ecology as ecophobia.”²⁷ Focusing primarily on the role of eco-fear in traditional Indigenous communities, Alex and Deborah draw a line between the Indigenous reverential eco-fear exhibited there and the pathological ecophobia seen in modern, neoliberal cultures. As they illustrate, there is no reason to assume that all fear of nature in modern or Western culture is phobic. Some fears of the nonhuman world are justified, not irrational. If fear of the natural world is not necessarily phobic, then at least some instances of ecohorror might be productive—or at least not dangerous.

Greta Thunberg’s call for fear rather than hope provides another useful perspective. At the World Economic Forum in January 2019, the climate activist said, “Adults keep saying we owe it to the young people to give them hope. But I don’t want your hope, I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic, I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act, I want you to act as if you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house was on fire, because it is.”²⁸ This call for a negative affective response to climate change highlights the power of fear to create change. Fear is not simply a reflection of deep-seated hatred. Sometimes it is justified and necessary.

Further, ecohorror is not defined solely by human fear *of* nonhuman nature but is also frequently concerned with human fear *for* nonhuman nature. Jennifer Schell notes that ecogothic literature is often “dedicated to exploring the horrifying implications of various ecological events and natural disasters, some of which are anthropogenic and some of which are not,” and is “very critical of human beings and their destructive attitudes toward the natural

6 world,” tending “to regard environmental problems with a complicated mixture of anxiety, horror, terror, anger, sadness, nostalgia, and guilt.”²⁹ Reflecting what Keetley and Sivils describe as “a culture obsessed with and fearful of a natural world both monstrous and monstrously wronged,”³⁰ ecohorror also consistently explores the effects of humans’ actions on the natural world. Many 1950s films examine the consequences of nuclear testing on animals and the natural world (e.g., *Godzilla* [1954], *Them!* [1954], and *The Monster That Challenged the World* [1957]); 1970s ecohorror films take up pollution (*Frogs* [1972], for instance) and the depletion of the ozone layer (*Day of the Animals* [1977]); and twenty-first-century Syfy Channel and Asylum productions like *Mega Shark vs. Giant Octopus* (2009) and *Sharknado* (2013) anchor their monsters and happenings in anthropogenic climate change while other—more serious—films like *WALL-E* (2008) and *The Host* (2006) continue to address pollution. Because of their emphasis on the harm caused by humans, these films may frighten audiences with monstrous animals and dramatic weather events, but they also frequently prompt sympathy for the creatures, which can lead to guilt and anxiety about our responsibility toward the natural world and about the future. These films thus complicate audiences’ fear responses, moving ecohorror beyond ecophobia, but they are still not necessarily effective at prompting action.

Another approach to ecohorror evinces a cautious optimism that emphasizes our human connection to the nonhuman and all that we stand to lose during the Anthropocene. This approach also builds upon Stacy Alaimo’s concept of trans-corporeality, “the literal contact zone between human corporeality and more-than-human nature . . . in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world.”³¹ Trans-corporeality can be frightening; as Alaimo argues, “the sense of being permeable to harmful substances” that is inherent in trans-corporeality “may provoke denial, delusions of transcendence, or the desire for a magical fix.”³² These denials and delusions appear regularly in horror when we imagine that the natural world—animals, weather, pollutants, and so on—can be separated from us, can be conquered. But although some ecohorror indulges in this fantasy, allowing us to imagine “a magical fix,” much of the ecohorror considered here presents a more complex relationship between human and nonhuman and “may also foster a posthuman environmentalism of co-constituted creatures, entangled knowledges, and precautionary practices.”³³ As such, ecohorror has

the potential to help create relationships of care between human and non-human, even if these relationships are complicated by fear.

Ecohorror therefore reflects our anxieties about science and the nonhuman while revealing how much we value these things. We fear science and its attempts to control the natural world; we fear the natural world and the way it exceeds our control. We also value science as a way of understanding the world, however, and return to it repeatedly in these narratives; we value the natural world and fear its loss at least as much as we fear nonhuman nature itself. It's complicated.

These complex ideas about nature and science have a long history in horror, which has addressed nature and the environment since the beginning. *Where* horror occurs matters, and the settings of horror shape audience expectations as well as the genre's monsters. There is a reason, after all, why so many horror films begin with the protagonists leaving civilization and traveling to a new and unfamiliar location (a cabin in the woods, perhaps). Animals have also long played a significant role in horror—just think of Dr. Moreau's human-animal hybrids, the giant ants of *Them!*, or the monstrous shark of *Jaws*. And fears of an unfamiliar, uncontrolled space and the animal both easily reflect larger fears of death or the loss of self and humanity that frequently recur in horror.

Horror scholarship, however, has only recently begun to consistently and directly address such ecological elements. Historically, it has relied heavily on psychoanalytic theory and on gender studies, with other concerns treated as secondary (not just the environment but also race, class, etc.), but the growth of ecocriticism as a field has opened a space for horror scholars to engage with horror in ecocritical terms. Alongside the growing discourse about ecohorror, there is also an ongoing conversation about Gothic nature and the ecogothic.³⁴ Our contributors engage with both ecohorror and ecogothic conversations, and we make no attempt here to clearly outline or define a relationship between the two. Just as with horror and the Gothic more broadly, they overlap and speak to one another in complicated and ever-shifting ways.

An early contribution to ecohorror criticism is the ecohorror cluster published in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, edited by Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles (2014). The introduction to this cluster includes a definition of ecohorror that we, along with many contributors to this book, build upon. Rust and Soles argue that ecohorror

8 “assumes that environmental disruption is haunting humanity’s relationship to the non-human world” and “is present in a broad set of texts grappling with ecocritical matters.”³⁵ The essays in the *ISLE* cluster provide an early sense of the many possibilities ecohorror affords: contributors look at texts ranging from Edgar Allan Poe and Mira Grant, 1960s horror films and the postmodern horror film, and horror comics; they consider ecophobia and mechanophobia, trans-corporeality and material ecocriticism, apocalypse and anthropocentrism. We intentionally adopt a similarly wide-ranging approach in this collection.

In addition, there have been four full-length critical works on ecohorror to date, three of which deal solely with ecohorror about creatures and animals. The first, William Schoell’s *Creature Features: Nature Turned Nasty in the Movies* (2008), provides a clear (if somewhat limited) overview of creature-feature movies. Schoell’s book is more descriptive than critical, and his scope is somewhat limited by his focus on “behemoths (discovered in time-lost worlds or ancient societies and somehow unleashed upon modern civilization) or normal-sized animals such as birds and bears that behave in strange ways” and by his unwillingness to include monster movies that he judges boring or sadistic.³⁶ Lee Gambin’s *Massacred by Mother Nature: Exploring the Natural Horror Film* (2012) takes a more thoughtful approach. Gambin writes, “From the bugs and the bees and the dogs and the cats and the whales and the rats—Mother Nature is not happy, and she will slaughter the human population with the help of her friends, her loyal minions of feather, fur and fin.”³⁷ Gambin focuses solely on animal horror films (he does not include other types of ecohorror), and he sees the revenge-of-nature narrative as central; therefore, his focus is also somewhat limited. Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann’s *Monstrous Nature: Environment and Horror on the Big Screen* (2016) also focuses solely on film, but their book advances the critical conversation about ecohorror and considers a broader range of films (not just animal horror and creature features). Rather than narrowly focusing on a genre or subgenre, Murray and Heumann address “a monstrous nature that evolved either deliberately or by accident and incites fear in humanity as both character and audience,”³⁸ doing so across genre lines and including not just horror films but also documentary and other nonhorror drama films. Finally, Dominic Lennard’s *Brute Force: Animal Horror Movies* (2019) returns to the ground covered by Schoell and Gambin—focusing

specifically on animal horror and on film—while engaging more fully with contemporary scholarship about animal horror and placing these films in the context of evolutionary psychology.

Another significant contribution to the conversation about ecohorror can be found in Maurice Yacowar’s analysis of the “natural attack film.” Without using the term *ecohorror*, Yacowar defines the natural attack film as a narrative scenario that “pits a human community against a destructive form of nature.”³⁹ He considers the natural attack film a subgenre of the disaster film, calling it “the most common disaster type,”⁴⁰ and subdivides the natural attack film into three types: attacks by animals (normal, giant, or otherwise) on a human community, attacks by the elements (as in 1974’s *Earthquake*), and attacks by atomic mutants (including *Them!* and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*).⁴¹ As Yacowar writes, regardless of type or subgenre, “the natural disaster film dramatizes people’s helplessness against the forces of nature.”⁴² Oddly, Yacowar does not directly mention horror, even though many of his key examples—for example, *King Kong*, *Godzilla*, *Them!*, and *The Birds*—are widely acknowledged as canonical horror genre entries.

Where Schoell, Gambin, and Lennard focus narrowly on animal horror, we provide a more expansive view of ecohorror; where Murray and Heumann discuss monstrous nature across genres, we maintain a focus on horror (on its own and in conjunction with other genres) and consider not just nature as monstrous but also nature as sympathetic or as victim; where Yacowar sees these narratives as a subset of the disaster film, we cultivate an approach to ecohorror that emphasizes the *horror* over the disaster and seeks out narratives of more subtle natural horror. Finally, where all these critics attend specifically to film, we put film in conversation with other media, including television, novels, manga, short fiction, and poetry.

Several edited collections have also addressed ecohorror, often by focusing on specific subsets of the genre. Katarina Gregersdotter, Johan Höglund, and Nicklas Hällén’s *Animal Horror Cinema: Genre, History and Criticism* (2015), for instance, focuses on animal horror movies “that centre on the relation between ‘human’ and ‘animal’ as categories unrelated to their places in the ecosystem.”⁴³ Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga’s *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film* (2016) turns to another specific type of ecohorror, examining “the perennial and terrifying ability of vegetal life to swallow, engulf, overrun, and outlive humans.”⁴⁴ These collections

have made significant contributions to the discourse on ecohorror, even while focusing more narrowly on animal horror and plant horror.

Other collections have included chapters or sections devoted to ecohorror, indicating the growing attention to ecohorror within horror studies. For instance, *The Canadian Horror Film: Terror of the Souls*, edited by Gina Freitag and André Loiselle (2015), includes a section specifically addressing ecohorror and features the environment as a recurring theme throughout. Similarly, *Beasts of the Deep: Sea Creatures and Popular Culture* (2018), edited by Jon Hackett and Seán Harrington, addresses such topics as oceanic horror, the depths of the sea as sublime, fan response to sea creatures in horror fiction, *Jaws Unleashed*, and *Jurassic World*. The book's emphasis is not on ecohorror specifically, however, so it provides a set of interesting intersections with the genre rather than contributing consistently to ecohorror studies. Most recently, *The Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature* (2018), edited by Kevin Corstorphine and Laura R. Kremmel, includes two valuable chapters on ecohorror: Bernice M. Murphy provides a thorough outline of the uses of the animal in horror literature, filling a scholarly gap left by the attention to animal horror *cinema* in particular, and Elizabeth Parker presents seven theses on "why we fear the forest."⁴⁵

Our collection builds on the work done by previous scholars and takes advantage of an ecohorror-as-mode approach in order to analyze ecohorror tropes wherever they are found. The built-in flexibility and trans-historical dimension of mode-based analysis promotes fruitful cross-genre and cross-media analysis. Each contributor is attentive to matters of historical and generic specificity, yet our work as a group points to how productive ecohorror as a cross-generic and cross-media mode can be for seeing broad trends and developments in the ways our culture uses media to scare itself with ecological terrors.

The collection opens with a section dedicated to "Expanding Ecohorror." Here, contributors propose new types of ecohorror and seek out connections between ecohorror and other types of horror. In the collection's opening chapter, "Tentacular Ecohorror and the Agency of Trees in Algernon Blackwood's 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved' and Lorcan Finnegan's *Without Name*," Dawn Keetley argues for a new type of ecohorror, *tentacular ecohorror*, in which nonhuman nature "reaches out to grab and entangle the human." Building upon Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality, Keetley

argues that tentacular ecohorror stages a merging of the human and the vegetal that can be both terrifying and transformative.

Christy Tidwell's "Spiraling Inward and Outward: Junji Ito's *Uzumaki* and the Scope of Ecohorror" seeks to extend ecohorror's range, analyzing the intersections between three interrelated horror subgenres—ecohorror, body horror, and cosmic horror—to highlight the centrality of ecohorror to horror as a whole. Through an analysis of Junji Ito's *Uzumaki*, Tidwell argues that ecohorror cannot fully be separated from body horror or cosmic horror and, further, that *Uzumaki*'s combination of the three indicates the importance of shifting scales: from individual bodies to ecosystems, or from the life-span of a human to the life-span of the planet.

Rounding out the opening section is "'The Hand of Deadly Decay': The Rotting Corpse, America's Religious Tradition, and the Ethics of Green Burial in Poe's 'The Colloquy of Monos and Una,'" in which Ashley Kniss urges ecocritics to consider the corpse as a primary source of horror in the ecohorror genre. While Poe is not typically considered an ecohorror writer, his tale engages with the modern ethics of green burial, Kniss argues, reinforcing an ethic that values connections between the material body and the nonhuman world and "does not shy away from the physicality of death and the reality of rot."

Keri Stevenson's "The Death of Birdsong, the Birdsong of Death: Algernon Charles Swinburne and the Horror of Erosion" opens the collection's second section: "Haunted and Unhaunted Landscapes." Stevenson's chapter identifies erosion and the sea as sources of ecohorror, a fear heightened by climate change-related ocean-level rise. Stevenson traces erosion—and its companion figure, the relentlessly devouring sea—in works of Victorian poet Algernon Charles Swinburne. Her analysis stresses Swinburne's use of the disanthropic mode, depicting a world "completely and finally *without people*."⁴⁶

In "An Unhaunted Landscape: The Anti-Gothic Impulse in Ambrose Bierce's 'A Tough Tussle,'" Chelsea Davis notes the horror of a world not only without humans but without human *influence*. She argues that Bierce's story represents a subset of ecohorror that draws its fear from the lack of human presence and even human hauntings. Drawing a distinction between anti-Gothic works and anti-*horror* narratives, Davis argues that the American Civil War period gave rise to literary unhaunted landscapes because it

made us anxious about whether our species is significant enough to leave a lasting mark on the indifferent nonhuman world.

Bridgitte Barclay's "The Extinction-Haunted Salton Sea in *The Monster That Challenged the World*," however, examines a landscape that is dramatically haunted by human activity. Barclay contends that midcentury films featuring attacks by prehistoric creatures connect mid-twentieth-century understandings of prehistoric extinctions to concerns about atomic-caused human extinction. These fears of extinction appear both in the film's prehistoric mollusk and in the Salton Sea setting itself, the result of an apparently successful engineering feat that decades later is clearly a product of scientific hubris. In this film, Barclay argues, the Salton Sea's real-world environmental devastation is the source of ecohorror for twenty-first-century viewers—not the prehistoric creature itself.

The third section, "The Ecohorror of Intimacy," turns to the horror located in the home and/or family. Marisol Cortez opens this section with an examination of two Stephen King works—*It* and *Dreamcatcher*—that she identifies as key literary texts of the urban environmental Gothic. King's deployment of the bathroom in these two novels draws attention to infrastructural, technological, and historical ecophobia, pointing to the need for ecohorror studies to engage with these forms of ecophobia and asking readers to remember "what an ecophobic culture would prefer to forget."

Brittany R. Roberts turns to the relationship between human and nonhuman companions in "'This Bird Made an Art of Being Vile': Ontological Difference and Uncomfortable Intimacies in Stephen Gregory's *The Cormorant*." In *The Cormorant*, Gregory creates a complex, multispecies relationship marked by both companionship and fear. Roberts reads Gregory's novel as an exploration of ethical relationships between human and nonhuman animals that indicates the consequences of abandoning the responsibilities of such a relationship, "insinuat[ing] that true monstrosity is found not in the strange Others with whom we live but rather in humans who abandon their cross-species kin."

In their chapter, "*The Shape of Water* and Post-pastoral Ecohorror," Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann argue that Guillermo del Toro's *The Shape of Water* draws upon ecohorror conventions for multiple ends. Centrally, the film connects ecohorror conventions with a post-pastoral vision of nature that emphasizes a more positive relationship with the natural world. The film, they argue, creates this possibility through an emphasis on

domestic spaces and familial and romantic relationships that highlights relationships of interdependence rather than abuse or violence.

The final section of the book—“Being Prey, Being Food”—examines narratives of food and predation between human and nonhuman in ecohorror texts. Kristen Angierski’s chapter, “Superpig Blues: Agribusiness Ecohorror in Bong Joon-ho’s *Okja*,” uses the designation “anti-pastoral ecohorror” to describe a filmic world that uses sentimentality and satire to critique factory farming as itself a form of ecohorror. Although this combination of satire and ecohorror might seem to undermine the seriousness of its animal rights message, Angierski argues that this approach creates connections to the non-human world as well as to those who act on its behalf. “Even as the film encourages viewers to laugh at the silly personalities and inflexibilities of the ALF vegans,” she writes, “it is much harder to argue with them.”

In “*Zoo*: Television Ecohorror On and Off the Screen,” Sharon Sharp turns to representations of animals on television, analyzing the way the animal horror show *Zoo* critiques institutional practices of animal captivity and estranges meat-eating via its graphic representations both of the human fear of consumption and of the horrific process of animals becoming meat. At the same time, Sharp argues, the series’ critique is limited and focused on individual action, failing to address the industrial production of meat and engaging in practices of animal exploitation in early seasons. This relationship between critique and failure to critique indicates that an understanding of television ecohorror requires attention to human-animal relationships both on-screen and off.

Concluding this section and the collection, Carter Soles examines the interplay between animal horror and whiteness studies. His chapter, “Naturalizing White Supremacy in *The Shallows*,” exposes how the nonhuman of *The Shallows* isn’t only the shark but a more conceptual nonhuman that includes the film’s abject Mexicans. This conceptual boundary between white humanity and all other living beings arises from a white Euro-American culture that views itself as superior to all other cultures and species. *The Shallows* is part of a long tradition of killer white shark movies that project human fears of “loathsome” extreme whiteness onto sharks. Sadly, by misrepresenting sharks as ecohorror monsters, these movies contribute to negative material consequences for the white shark as a species.

As this collection illustrates, ecohorror appears in many forms and provides an opportunity to better understand not only our human relationship

to the natural world but also the effects of climate change. The book thus reinforces Christy Tidwell's description of ecohorror in the *Posthuman Glossary*:

Perhaps animals will attack us, perhaps we will lose our place at the top of the animacy hierarchy, or perhaps we will have to acknowledge our interconnectedness with other beings. In doing so, ecohorror risks reinforcing those fears and the categories they are built upon, but ecohorror also asks us to reconsider some of those fears and to imagine what might happen if we were not to insist so vehemently upon such divisions.⁴⁷

The content and title of this book—*Fear and Nature*—indicate that ecohorror is not defined only by fear *of* nature but also encompasses fear *for* nature. Ecohorror is not simply a venue for ecophobia.

Furthermore, these fears can direct us toward multiple outcomes, some prompted by fear for ourselves and some prompted by hope for a different future. Ryan Hediger writes, "Particularly in the age of the Anthropocene, as familiar and beloved places are affected by climate change and rendered foreign, we can make a virtue of necessity by engaging the strangeness as an opportunity to recast forms of living."⁴⁸ Ecohorror highlights the strangeness and horror of living in the Anthropocene and of engaging in less-than-positive ways with the nonhuman world. It therefore has the potential to reinforce our fears and estrange us further from the nonhuman world.

But it might also do the opposite. As Donna J. Haraway writes, the time in which we now live "is made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen—yet. We are at stake to each other."⁴⁹ Although, as Haraway argues, "both the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene lend themselves too readily to cynicism, defeatism, and self-certain and self-fulfilling predictions, like the 'game over, too late' discourse,"⁵⁰ this is not the only possible narrative or outcome. Future work in ecohorror must be wary of such cynicism and defeatism—both in ecocriticism itself and in the works analyzed. As several of our contributors have done, we must look for ways to tell stories—*within* ecohorror and *about* ecohorror—that do not foreclose the future or discourage activism. Ecohorror offers an opportunity to help us see the ways in which we are "at stake to each other" and then "to recast forms of living."

1. CBS News, “Smoke from Wildfires Increases Health Risks for Millions of Americans,” last modified June 25, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/2019-wildfire-season-smoke-from-wildfires-increases-health-risks-for-millions-of-americans/>.
2. Iliana Magra, “Europe Suffers Heat Wave of Dangerous, Record-High Temperatures,” *New York Times*, July 24, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/24/world/europe/record-temperatures-heatwave.html>.
3. Jessie Yeung, Swati Gupta, and Michael Guy, “India Has Just Five Years to Solve Its Water Crisis, Experts Fear. Otherwise Hundreds of Millions of Lives Will Be in Danger,” CNN, July 4, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/06/27/india/india-water-crisis-intl-hnk/index.html>; Jessie Yeung, Swati Gupta, and Sophia Saifi, “227 Dead After Monsoon Floods Devastate South Asia,” CNN, July 18, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/18/asia/monsoon-flood-south-asia-intl-hnk/index.html>.
4. Jenessa Dunscombe, “Greenland Ice Sheet Beats All-Time 1-Day Melt Record,” *Eos* 100, no. 2 (August 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1029/2019EO130349>.
5. Sandra Díaz et al., *Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, IPBES, last modified May 6, 2019, https://www.ipbes.net/sites/default/files/downloads/spm_unedited_advance_for_posting_htn.pdf.
6. Lisa Friedman, “U.S. Significantly Weakens Endangered Species Act,” *New York Times*, August 12, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/12/climate/endangered-species-act-changes.html>.
7. As a term, *Anthropocene* uses the language of stratigraphy to indicate the planet-changing ecological impact of the human species. For the Anthropocene to be adopted as the name of our geological epoch (following the Holocene), human actions must be measurable in the geological record. For this reason, it has not yet been officially approved by the International Commission on Stratigraphy, although a proposal is being developed. There is also debate about this term among humanists, some of whom argue that the term maintains an anthropocentric worldview and obscures differences between cultures, lifestyles, social classes, ethnic groups, etc. See, among others, Eileen Crist’s “On the Poverty of Our Nomenclature,” Andreas Malm’s *Fossil Capital*, Jason W. Moore’s *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, Kathryn Yusoff’s *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Richard Grusin’s collection *Anthropocene Feminism*, and Donna J. Haraway’s *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*.
8. John Clute, “Physics for Amnesia: Horror Motifs in SF,” *New York Review of Science Fiction* 21, no. 2, issue 242 (October 2008): 4.
9. Sarah Dillon, “The Horror of the Anthropocene,” *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-Century Writings* 6, no. 1 (2018): 7.
10. *Ibid.*, 5.
11. *Ibid.*, 8.
12. Jason Colavito, *Knowing Fear: Science, Knowledge and the Development of the Horror Genre* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 4.
13. *Ibid.*, 79.
14. Matt Hills, “An Event-Based Definition of Art-Horror,” in *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, ed. S. J. Schneider and D. Shaw (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2003), 145, 146.
15. Dawn Keetley’s analysis of *The Hapening* (2008) provides an example of the usefulness of Hills’s event-based horror for ecohorror. Keetley points out that the threat shown in the film—plants and their agency—has no clear explanation or agency behind it. Instead, in the film, “there is no discernible monster: it may indeed be the vegetation—the trees, bushes, grasses—

releasing toxins as the wind sweeps through them. But even this is not clear.” “Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror; or, Why Are Plants Horrifying?,” in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, ed. Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 23.

16. Ursula K. Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 219.

17. Nicole M. Merola, “‘What Do We Do but Keep Breathing as Best We Can This / Minute Atmosphere’: Juliana Spahr and Anthropocene Anxiety,” in *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, ed. Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 26.

18. We take genre to mean a contract between viewer and audience, any set of setting-specific, iconographic, and/or narrative conventions that congeal into recognizable forms for a certain period. Every genre—whether a film cycle, popular literary genre, or new subgenre of an existing genre—has a specific history and emerges at a particular time in response to contemporary cultural issues and concerns as well as to certain media-specific trends and industry conditions. Every genre also has a shelf life and a series of typical shifts it undergoes: from an initial formative period to a well-recognized classic one and finally to a self-reflexive or mannerist phase, which usually includes parodic approaches to genre conventions formerly taken seriously. In some genres, including many horror-related ones, this third phase translates into a camp phase.

19. Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles, “Ecohorror Special Cluster: ‘Living in Fear, Living in Dread, Pretty Soon We’ll All Be Dead,’” *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 21, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 509–10.

20. Linda Williams, “Melodrama Revisited,” in *Refiguring American Film Genres*,

ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 50.

21. Simon C. Estok, “Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia,” *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 208.

22. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils, “Introduction: Approaches to the Ecogothic,” in *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, ed. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils (New York: Routledge, 2018), 3. Jennifer Schell, however, separates the two terms, noting that although many ecogothic scholars seem to have been inspired by Estok’s concept of ecophobia, most reject it, using *ecogothic* as a way “to avoid the problematic conflation of fear and hatred inherent in Estok’s definition of ecophobia and to draw on the substantial, already existing archive of research on gothic literature” (Jennifer Schell, “Ecogothic Extinction Fiction: The Extermination of the Alaskan Mammoth,” in *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, ed. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils [New York: Routledge, 2018], 176).

23. Simon C. Estok, “Ecophobia, the Agony of Water, and Misogyny,” *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 476.

24. Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 214.

25. Simon C. Estok, *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 71.

26. Estok, “Theorizing,” 209. Estok notes in “Ecophobia” that “an aversion to imagined threats to our survival is not ecophobia” (475), but this is not stated so clearly in most of his other articles on ecophobia, and most scholars who take up the concept do not make this distinction.

27. Rayson K. Alex and S. Susan Deborah, “Ecophobia, Reverential Eco-fear, and Indigenous Worldviews,” *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 423.

28. Greta Thunberg, “Our House Is on Fire”: Greta Thunberg, 16, Urges Leaders to Act on Climate,” *The Guardian*, January 25, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/25/our-house-is-on-fire-greta-thunberg16-urges-leaders-to-act-on-climate>.
29. Schell, “Ecogothic Extinction Fiction,” 176.
30. Keetley and Sivils, “Introduction,” 11.
31. Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 2.
32. *Ibid.*, 146.
33. *Ibid.* See Christy Tidwell’s “Monstrous Natures Within: Posthuman and New Materialist Ecohorror in Mira Grant’s *Parasite*” for an examination of this possibility in parasite-focused horror fiction.
34. See Bernice M. Murphy’s *The Suburban Gothic in American Popular Culture* and *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture*, Tom Hillard’s “Deep into That Darkness Peering: An Essay on Gothic Nature,” Andrew Smith and William Hughes’s collection titled *EcoGothic*, Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivil’s *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, and Elizabeth Parker’s *The Forest and the EcoGothic: The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination*. The journal *Gothic Nature* also published its first issue in September 2019.
35. Rust and Soles, “Ecohorror Special Cluster,” 510.
36. William Schoell, *Creature Features: Nature Turned Nasty in the Movies* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 1.
37. Lee Gambin, *Massacred by Mother Nature: Exploring the Natural Horror Film* (Baltimore: Midnight Marquee, 2012), 18.
38. Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann, *Monstrous Nature: Environment and Horror on the Big Screen* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), xiv.
39. Maurice Yacowar, “The Bug in the Rug: Notes on the Disaster Genre,” in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 277.
40. *Ibid.*, 277.
41. An ecohorror critic might also parse *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* as a de-extinction narrative. See Bridgitte Barclay, chapter 6 in this volume, for more on de-extinction narratives.
42. Yacowar, “Bug in the Rug,” 278.
43. Katarina Gregersdotter, Johan Höglund, and Nicklas Hällén, eds., introduction to *Animal Horror Cinema: Genre, History and Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1–18.
44. 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. Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 5.
45. Elizabeth Parker, “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Woods? Deep Dark Forests and Literary Horror,” in *The Palgrave Handbook to Horror Literature*, ed. Kevin Corstorphine and Laura R. Kremmel (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 406.
46. Greg Garrard, “Worlds Without Us: Some Types of Disanthropy,” *SubStance* 41, no. 1, issue 127 (2012): 40. Emphasis in original.
47. Christy Tidwell, “Ecohorror,” in *Posthuman Glossary*, ed. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 117.
48. Ryan Hediger, “Uncanny Homesickness and War: Loss of Affect, Loss of Place, and Reworlding in *Redeployment*,” in *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*, ed. Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 157.
49. Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 55.
50. *Ibid.*, 56.

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