



# The Colonies' Curious Creepers:

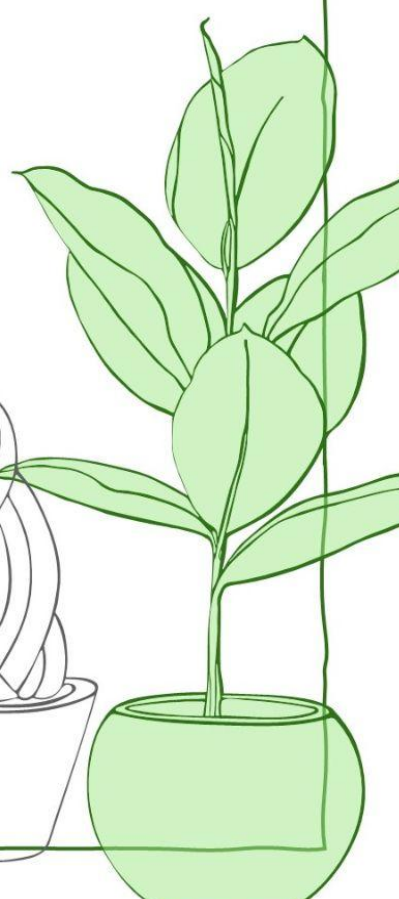
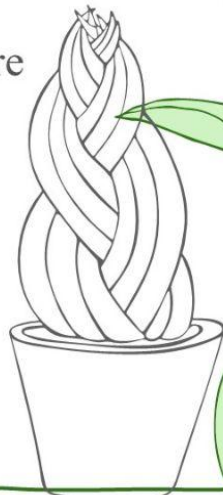
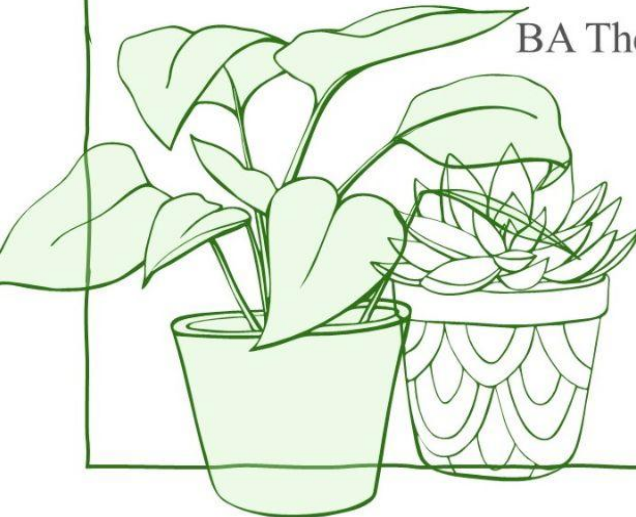
Animated Flora as an EcoGothic Transgression  
of the Colonial-Colonialist Dichotomy,  
1880-1920

Simon Schothans

s1057095

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Name of student: Simon Schothans

Student number: s1057095

### **Abstract**

Between imperial globalisation, scientific discoveries, and improved technologies, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century introduced the Western public to exciting plants from distant colonial lands. With them, however, came terrible tales of the vegetal monsters. This thesis argues that animated flora in Gothic short fiction between 1880 and 1920 is actually a displacement of the Western fear of a transgression of the colonial-colonialist dichotomy—meaning the loss of its believed superiority over the colonial world. This is done through the analysis of four short stories, namely Arthur Conan Doyle’s ‘The American’s Tale’ (1880), Lucy H. Hooper’s ‘Carnivorine’ (1889), H. G. Wells’ ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’ (1894), and Herman Cyril McNeile’s ‘The Green Death’ (1920). This thesis is grounded in the importance of coming to understand relevant systemic injustices linked to colonialism and our detrimental relationship to the environment, which it hopes to add to.

*Keywords:* Gothic, EcoGothic, literature, animated flora, Ecophobia, Cryptobotany

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## Introduction

### *Historical Context*

While people had been enthralled by plant life before, the Victorian era is often regarded as the period wherein the general public was most obsessed with them. The ubiquitousness of dangerous and exotic plants in their contemporary stories, such as fictionalised travel accounts, attest to this.<sup>1</sup> With imperial globalisation came the discovery of and access to new species of flora.<sup>2</sup> These exotic and unknown species of flora flocked to the Western world, exposing the public to a new world of flora. This was facilitated by the rapid expansion of the industrialised steel and glass industry, which allowed for the inexpensive and large-scale construction of hot-houses. The nineteenth century thus produced a singular environment for animated flora to blossom, particularly so when the popularity of exploration and Gothic tales are added to the equation.<sup>3</sup> However, some of the tales regarding animated flora had an ulterior motive, as well. While the imperial infrastructures of the time allowed for the mass transportation of rare and exotic flora, these journeys to find and bring them back were perilous and costly.<sup>4</sup> Daisy Butcher states that stories of dangerous jungles, including those of animated flora, were sometimes spread ‘to justify high prices and add value’ to the specimens that were fetched.<sup>5</sup>

After Charles Darwin published his *Insectivorous Plants* in 1875 and *The Power of Movement in Plants* in 1877, the evolutionary possibility of man-eating plants began to haunt the public imagination, inspiring a great number of authors to write about them.<sup>6</sup> In Gothic

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<sup>1</sup> Cheryl Blake Price, “Vegetable Monsters: Man-Eating Trees in *Fin-De-Siècle* Fiction,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 41, (2013): 311, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150312000411>.

<sup>2</sup> Daisy Butcher, “Introduction,” in *Evil Roots: Killer Tales of the Botanical Gothic*, ed. Daisy Butcher (London: The British Library, 2019), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Butcher, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>4</sup> Butcher, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>5</sup> Butcher, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>6</sup> Price, “Vegetable Monsters,” 312.  
Butcher, “Introduction,” 8.

fiction, these types of deadly flora flourished at the *fin-de-siècle*, to which three of the texts that are engaged with belong; Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The American's Tale' (1880), Lucy H. Hooper's 'Carnivorine' (1889), and H. G. Wells' 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid' (1894).<sup>7</sup> During those last few decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, writers created 'vegetable monsters that were not only deadly, but active predators as well' and began to explore '*fin de siècle* fears about evolutionary hybridity, aberrant nature, and colonial environments.'<sup>8</sup> At the end of the century, the public imagination of plants thus shifted from 'passive poisoners into active carnivores.'<sup>9</sup> Because it was written at the beginning of the interbellum period, the fourth and final primary text this thesis engages with lies outside of the Victorian era: Herman Cyril McNeile's 'The Green Death' (1920).<sup>10</sup> Around this time, 'the dawning of speculative fiction's pulp era' took place, revitalising tales of animated flora's popularity in 'a new monstrous plant craze.'<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the United Kingdom gained new territories in the Treaty of Versailles the year before, introducing a new wave of flora to the country.

### *Thesis Statement & Chapter Overview*

This thesis examines the role of animated flora in the aforementioned Gothic short stories. The first chapter will establish the theoretical framework and methodology whereupon this thesis is built. Chapter II will consider animated flora in its natural sense through the portrayal and human perception of, and human interaction with said animated flora. The third

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<sup>7</sup> Price, "Vegetable Monsters," 312.

Arthur Conan Doyle, "The American's Tale," in *Evil Roots: Killer Tales of the Botanical Gothic*, ed. Daisy Butcher (London: The British Library, 2019), 49-59.

Lucy H. Hooper, "Carnivorine," in *Evil Roots: Killer Tales of the Botanical Gothic*, ed. Daisy Butcher (London: The British Library, 2019), 61-75.

H. G. Wells, "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid," in *Evil Roots: Killer Tales of the Botanical Gothic*, ed. Daisy Butcher (London: The British Library, 2019), 89-100.

<sup>8</sup> Price, "Vegetable Monsters," 312.

<sup>9</sup> Price, "Vegetable Monsters," 311.

<sup>10</sup> Herman Cyril McNeile, "The Green Death," in *Evil Roots: Killer Tales of the Botanical Gothic*, ed. Daisy Butcher (London: The British Library, 2019), 199-236.

<sup>11</sup> T. S. Miller, "Lives of the Monster Plants: Revenge of the Vegetable in the Age of Animal Studies," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 23, no. 3 (January 2012): 467.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353018701\\_Lives\\_of\\_the\\_Monster\\_Plants\\_The\\_Revenge\\_of\\_the\\_Vegetable\\_in\\_the\\_Age\\_of\\_Animal\\_Studies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353018701_Lives_of_the_Monster_Plants_The_Revenge_of_the_Vegetable_in_the_Age_of_Animal_Studies).

chapter contextualises the tales of animated flora in the colonial world; particularly as part of a specifically colonial (or colonial-like) natural environment. Additionally, it looks at its relation to a colonialist perceived superiority over the colonial world. Lastly, Chapter IV will establish animated flora as EcoGothic, before combining the findings of the previous chapters to argue in favour of this thesis' main claim, which reads as follows; in the four tales in question, animated flora is an EcoGothic transgression of the colonial-colonialist dichotomy. In concrete terms, this entails that animated flora is a realisation—and therefore a displacement—of the colonialist fear of losing its believed superiority over the colonial world.

### *Relevance within Discipline*

The relevance of this thesis lies within the field of EcoGothic studies and postcolonialism. David Del Principe indicates that, to understand our relation to the natural world, we must first understand our ingrained biases and our ecophobic attitudes, which the EcoGothic gives voice to.<sup>12</sup> By researching topics like that of this thesis, we may come closer to understanding this detrimental relationship to the natural world and uncover 'the roots of the environmental holocaust we have caused.'<sup>13</sup> Hopefully, a new understanding of our fears regarding nature can lead us to a new, healthier relationships with the environment. Moreover, researching topics like that of this thesis in the context of postcolonialism will hopefully aid in coming to understand the ways in which systemic injustices linked to colonialism still plague societies in a decolonial age. Lastly, Price lamented the constraint of not being able to expand her research to include some of the texts this thesis will be working with.<sup>14</sup> This thesis expands on her work, filling the research gap she indicated.

<sup>12</sup> David Del Principe, "Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century," *Gothic Studies* 16, no. 1 (May 2014): 1. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/GS.16.1.1>.

<sup>13</sup> Simon C. Estok, "Theorising the EcoGothic," *Gothic Nature: New Directions in Ecohorror and the EcoGothic* 1, (September 2019): 40-41.

[https://gothicnaturejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Estok\\_34-53\\_Gothic-Nature-1\\_2019.pdf](https://gothicnaturejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Estok_34-53_Gothic-Nature-1_2019.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Price, "Vegetable Monsters," 325.

## Chapter I

### Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the methodology and theoretical framework of this thesis. The former is briefly discussed at the end of this chapter, whereas the latter takes up the remainder. The theoretical framework consists of several approaches that have been brought together. The EcoGothic, which is a relatively new field lodged between Ecocritical studies and Gothic studies, as well as a literary classification, is the most important of them for this thesis. The Gothic—an overarching classification to which the primary texts pertain—is an integral part of both, and is therefore introduced and discussed, as well. Additionally, this chapter engages with ecophobia, as it is a highly relevant Ecocritical concept that has greatly affected the EcoGothic. Building on this, the EcoGothic as an approach and as a literary classification are separately discussed afterward.

### *The Gothic*

The Gothic, in relation to literature, is a difficult to define classification of texts. Historically, the Gothic has been approached ‘by listing its qualities, then qualifying these lists’ only to conclude that the Gothic is ‘particularly difficult to set within boundaries.’<sup>15</sup> There might never be a single definition for the Gothic, as it is incredibly multifaceted and ‘ever-evolving’.<sup>16</sup> This does not mean that common elements between Gothic works have not been found; for instance through exploring the features that are relatively constant.<sup>17</sup> The following features of the Gothic have been limited to those relevant to this thesis. In most Gothic narratives a sinister, gloomy setting, often taking the shape of a natural environment,

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<sup>15</sup> Suzanne Rintoul, “Gothic Anxieties: Struggling with a Definition,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 17, no. 4 (July 2005): 701. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecf.2005.0006>.

<sup>16</sup> William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith, “Introduction,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, eds. William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2016), xxxviii.

<sup>17</sup> Jerrold E. Hogle, “Introduction: The Gothic in western culture,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.



such as an ancient forest, or an antiquated manmade structure, such as an old castle, monastery, or crypt, is prominent.<sup>18</sup> More often than not, the atmospheres of Gothic narratives are not only as gloomy as their settings, but claustrophobic and oppressive, too.<sup>19</sup> A distortion of the temporal space, wherein the past encroaches upon the present either literally (as in Frankenstein’s reanimation of the dead), paranormally (by means of ghosts), or symbolically (an aristocrat representing a past oppressive system in a time of democracy), features heavily throughout Gothic stories.<sup>20</sup> Hidden pasts, or knowledge hidden by the past, are often woven into this fabric.<sup>21</sup> Lastly, a Gothic story is likely to feature a representation of evil, based sometimes in morality or fear, for instance through demonisation or transgression.<sup>22</sup>

### *Ecophobia*

Ecophobia was proposed by Simon C. Estok as a term to initiate an extension of the discussion regarding moral considerations of nature stemming from the need to theorise ‘the contempt and fear we feel for the agency of the natural environment.’<sup>23</sup> He defines it as ‘an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world’ that is ubiquitous throughout literature and ‘emanates from anxieties about control.’<sup>24</sup> Del Principe emphasises this ‘fear’ aspect of

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<sup>18</sup>Chris Baldick, ed., “Gothic novel (Gothic romance),” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 154.

Dinah Birch and Katy Hooper, eds., “Gothic fiction,” in *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 291.

Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Silvis, “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic,” in *EcoGothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, eds. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Silvis (New York: Routledge, 2018), 6.

Hogle, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>19</sup>Baldick, “Gothic novel (Gothic romance),” 154.

Birch and Hooper, “Gothic fiction,” 290.

Hogle, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>20</sup>Birch and Hooper, “Gothic fiction,” 290-291.

Hogle, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>21</sup>Hogle, “Introduction,” 2-3.

<sup>22</sup>Andrew Smith, “Introduction,” in *Gothic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2013), 3.

<sup>23</sup>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): 207.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isp010>.

<sup>24</sup>Estok, “Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness,” 207-208.

Estok, “Theorising the EcoGothic,” 46.

ecophobia, adding that ecophobia can be broadly understood as ‘fears stemming from human’s precarious relationship with all that is nonhuman.’<sup>25</sup> Ecophobia ‘is about power and control’, manifesting itself, for instance, in our wish to control the natural environment, and is ‘thoroughly interwoven’ with issues like ‘racism, misogyny, homophobia,’ and ‘speciesism’.<sup>26</sup> It ‘loathes the unpredictable’ and, as it ‘emanates from anxieties about control’, may be found in ‘the perceived threat to human agency by nonhuman nature.’<sup>27</sup> To conduct meaningful research regarding ecophobia, the question of evil must be addressed.<sup>28</sup>

### *The EcoGothic*

The EcoGothic is mostly discussed in its meaning of ‘a theoretical lens as opposed to a genre classification.’<sup>29</sup> It relies heavily on ecophobia and its examination, as attested to by Estok’s claim that it cannot exist without ecophobia at all.<sup>30</sup> Before the construction of the EcoGothic, the connection between ecophobia and the Gothic had already been drawn by Hillard.<sup>31</sup> This connection was then solidified by the pioneers of the EcoGothic, such as Andrew Smith and William Hughes, who believed the Gothic to be ‘the form which is well placed to catch these anxieties.’<sup>32</sup> To indicate the use of the EcoGothic, Estok distilled the productive comments that the EcoGothic allows for into the following list:

Theorising about menace, the ecoGothic allows for understandings of how we imagine and persecute social and environmental Otherness; about how monstrosity is central to an environmental imagination that locates the human as the center of all things good and safe; about how the control-freak aspects of humanity point toward

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<sup>25</sup> Del Principe, “Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century,” 1.

<sup>26</sup> Estok, “Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness,” 208.

<sup>27</sup> Estok, “Theorising the EcoGothic,” 46.

<sup>28</sup> Estok, “Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness,” 208.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Parker, “‘Just a Piece of Wood’: Jan Švankmajer’s Otesánek and the EcoGothic,” in *Plant Horror: Approaches to the Monstrous Vegetal in Fiction and Film*, eds. Dawn Keetley and Angela Tenga (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 217.

<sup>30</sup> Estok, “Theorising the EcoGothic,” 39.

<sup>31</sup> Tom J. Hillard, “‘Deep Into That Darkness Peering’: An Essay on Gothic Nature,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16, no. 4 (Autumn 2009): 688, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isp090>.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Smith and William Hughes, “Introduction: defining the ecoGothic,” in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 5.

continued problems; about the entanglement of ontological and existential matters with environmental ethics; and about solutions.<sup>33</sup>

The EcoGothic realises the possibility to engage with our understandings of the natural environment by challenging nature from a nonanthropocentric position to uncover the role of the natural world ‘in the construction of monstrosity and fear,’ giving a voice to ‘ingrained biases and mounting ecophobia’.<sup>34</sup>

Besides it being a theoretical lens, the EcoGothic has also been understood as a classifying term—whether that be as a literary mode or literary genre. This thesis, however, concerns itself with whether something can be considered EcoGothic and what this means. It does not inquire whether this—in the case something is considered EcoGothic—can be specifically attributed to the EcoGothic as a genre or mode. Instead, the attribution of the term ‘EcoGothic’ to a textual element or concept in this thesis signifies its state of being EcoGothic, regardless of its being due to genre or mode. After all, something that bears an EcoGothic quality because of adhering to the EcoGothic mode is equally EcoGothic as something adhering to its genre conventions.

A text or textual element may be considered EcoGothic if it is relatively and relevantly congruent with the following features. According to Keetley and Silvis, the EcoGothic positions itself ‘at the intersection of environmental writing and the gothic,’ utilising ‘an implacable external “wilderness” to call attention to the crisis in practices of representation.’<sup>35</sup> Moreover, it has been established as ‘a repository of deep unease, fear, and even contempt as humans confront the natural world’.<sup>36</sup> The imagination of the natural world as a menacing threat, whose menace often includes the notion of a vengeful nature with

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<sup>33</sup> Estok, “Theorising the EcoGothic,” 34.

<sup>34</sup> Del Principe, “Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century,” 1.

<sup>35</sup> Keetley and Silvis, “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic,” 1-4.

<sup>36</sup> Keetley and Silvis, “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic,” 4.

agency, is central to an EcoGothic text.<sup>37</sup> An EcoGothic text additionally tends to express, reveal, or be dependent on ecophobia.<sup>38</sup> The presence of ecophobia alone, however, does not necessarily indicate that something is EcoGothic.<sup>39</sup> Generally, an EcoGothic text invokes the ‘Other as a disturbed and disturbing natural world [...] in which traditional boundaries between the human and the nonhuman become blurred in grotesque ways by human atrocities and amoral biological processes.’<sup>40</sup> As offspring of the Gothic, the EcoGothic can be better understood when contrasted to the former, as Keetley and Silvis illustrate in the following passage:

From the conventional image of the maiden in the ruined castle, imperiled by secrets that almost always turn out to be familial, by strangers that almost always turn out to be human, the ecogothic turns to the inevitability of humans intertwined with their natural environment—to humans surrounded, interpenetrated, and sometimes stalked by a nonhuman with an agentic force that challenges humans’ own vaunted ability to shape their world.<sup>41</sup>

The EcoGothic also expands upon the temporal aspect of the Gothic by extending its reach onto an evolutionary scale, allowing the present to be haunted by a past as far back as prehistory, where it meets ‘our prehuman (and nonhuman) origins.’<sup>42</sup> This commonly features in the EcoGothic, which often identifies and proclaims humanity’s estrangement from the natural world, and its reluctance to reconnect and ‘come to terms’ with its ‘nonhuman ancestry and the common, biological origin of all life.’<sup>43</sup> The EcoGothic thus expands upon the temporal dimension of the traditional Gothic by presenting time as relative to the history of the natural world as opposed to human history.

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<sup>37</sup> Estok, “Theorising the EcoGothic,” 41.

<sup>38</sup> Estok, “Theorising the EcoGothic,” 48.

<sup>39</sup> Estok, “Theorising the EcoGothic,” 48.

<sup>40</sup> Keetley and Silvis, “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic,” 11.

<sup>41</sup> Keetley and Silvis, “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic,” 7.

<sup>42</sup> Keetley and Silvis, “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic,” 5.

<sup>43</sup> Keetley and Silvis, “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic,” 5.

Del Principe, “Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century,” 2.

### *Methodology*

There are three layers within the methodology of this thesis. The first of these layers consists of literary research. By examining the existing research on relevant topics to this thesis—as discussed in this chapter—this thesis constructed a lens through which the primary texts were scrutinised. These texts were thereafter subjected to literary analysis, with a specific focus on the colonial versus non-colonial environment, the representation of attitudes towards the colonial world, and the portrayal of animated flora. The findings of this analysis, all related to animated flora, have been categorised into a chapter focussed on ecophobia, human interaction, and the ecological dimension (chapter II), and a chapter focussed on the colonial dimension of the natural environment (chapter III). Chapter IV establishes the relation between animated flora and the EcoGothic and brings the foundations laid by the previous chapters together to come to a concluding interpretation. The final layer of the methodology is woven into all of these chapters, consisting of close readings of the primary source texts to illustrate, defend, and reinforce the findings and/or interpretations of this thesis.

## Chapter II

### Portrayals of Animated Flora in Context

To identify a connection between animated flora and colonialist believed superiority, the portrayal of said animated flora must first be considered in its individual narrative and be contextualised in the grand scheme of its contemporary society. This chapter therefore targets the manner in which the animated flora is portrayed. By considering the phrasing utilised to convey the imagery and identity of animated flora, the attitude towards them will be discussed within the confines of their respective narratives and historical contexts, as well as in relation to ecophobia.

#### *Monstrousness & Animalisation*

The descriptions of animated flora in Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The American's Tale' ascribe a sense of monstrousness to them. The short story specifically mentions 'Dionœa [*sic*] Muscipula', the Latin name for what is commonly known as the Venus flytrap, to be its primary flora.<sup>44</sup> Immediately after it is brought up, the flytrap is described, or explained, in terms that evoke a sense of monstrousness—here denoting a Gothic demonisation of the unusual, or resemblance to popular imaginations of monsters, based in fear.<sup>45</sup>

You'll see a fly stand on that 'ere plant, and then you'll see the two sides of a leaf snap up together and catch it between them, and grind it up and mash it to bits, for all the world like some great sea squid with its beak; and hours after, if you open the leaf, you'll see the body lying half-digested, and in bits. Well, I've seen those fly-traps in Arizona with leaves eight and ten feet long, and thorns or teeth a foot or more; why, they could— [...].<sup>46</sup>

The phrasing of this description is akin to popular imaginations of monsters in fiction, capitalising on an existing fear by emphasising those elements most related to them. He

<sup>44</sup> Doyle, "The American's Tale," 52.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, "Introduction," 3.

<sup>46</sup> Doyle, "The American's Tale," 53.

draws a parallel between the flytrap's encapsulation of its prey and the beak of the 'great sea squid', which had already earned a fearsome reputation alongside other cephalopods through Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*.<sup>47</sup> This evokes the sense of the flytrap having a mouth with functioning jaws that 'snap' shut, and 'grind up' and 'mash' its prey to bits.<sup>48</sup> This is further reinforced by the presentation of trigger hairs as 'thorns or teeth', fading the line between flora and fauna, as well as the description of both their size and that of the flytrap itself as being abnormally large.<sup>49</sup> M. W. Chase et al states that 'exaggerating the traits of real-life carnivorous plants' is indicative of 'the deep horror we feel towards the idea of being devoured by a plant.'<sup>50</sup> The comparison between the plant and the great sea squid is then an effective utilisation of animalisation—a Gothic transgression of the boundaries between flora and fauna—that taps into this 'deeply unnerving' thought.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, this fear becomes real later in the narrative, where the flytrap is again animalised by having a 'thick, fleshy leaf', and the dead body of Alabama Joe is found 'torn and crushed into pulp by the great, jagged teeth of the man-eatin' plant.'<sup>52</sup> The flytrap is thus ascribed a sense of monstrosity, or even becomes a monster.

The *Drosera*—a genus of carnivorous plants better known as sundews—in 'Carnivorine', called Carnivorine, is animalised and therewith ascribed a quality of monstrosity in a similar fashion to 'The American's Tale'. Upon witnessing the sundew, the narrator already describes the *Drosera* as monstrous.

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<sup>47</sup> Doyle, "The American's Tale," 53.

John Dolan, "Depictions of the Deep: Illustrations in the Popular Press of Deep-Sea Animals from Jules Verne (1860's) to William Beebe (1930's) and beyond," *Art et sciences* 4, no. 2 (February 2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.21494/ISTE.OP.2020.0475>.

<sup>48</sup> Doyle, "The American's Tale," 53.

<sup>49</sup> Doyle, "The American's Tale," 53.

<sup>50</sup> Mark W. Chase et al, "Murderous plants: Victorian Gothic, Darwin and modern insights into vegetable carnivory," *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* 161, no. 4 (December 2009): 332, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1095-8339.2009.01014.x>.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, "Introduction," 3.

Chase et al, "Murderous Plants," 332.

<sup>52</sup> Doyle, "The American's Tale," 58-59.

[...] I discerned, in the centre of the room, a vast tub filled with masses of spongy moss, from which rose a strange plant—a hideous shapeless monster: a sort of vegetable hydra—or, rather, octopus—gigantic in size and repulsive in aspect and in colouring. So immense were its proportions, that it filled by itself the whole space of the conservatory. It consisted of a central bladder-shaped trunk or core, from which sprang countless branches—or, rather, arms—thick, leafless, of a livid green, and streaked with blotches of a dull crimson. Each arm terminated in an oval protuberance which had a resemblance to the human eye.<sup>53</sup>

Again, the plant in question—besides being called a monster explicitly—is compared to a cephalopod, as well as animalised by having elements described as were it an animal, or human. Its branches and protuberance, having been described as arms and the human eye respectively, attest to the latter. As mentioned prior, the animalisation of flora can be utilised to ascribe monstrousness to it—and here it does. The comparison between Carnivorine and the mythical hydra, and later a dragon, which are both considered monstrous by the text itself and monsters to a significant degree, reinforces the notion that the sundew is, indeed, monstrous.<sup>54</sup> Although, in the text, Julius Lambert claims that ‘for science, there is no such thing as a monster’, he admits that people view animals he compares Carnivorine to as monstrous—a detrimental blow to his claim.<sup>55</sup> When his laid-back attitude towards Carnivorine proves to be problematic by its consumption of Julius after gaining locomotion, the narrative implies that Julius was faulty in his considerations of the sundew, and that his statement regarding it not being monstrous is faulty, too. Thus, in addition to the imagery, Carnivorine was intended to be viewed as monstrous.

Animated flora in both H. G. Wells’ ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’ and H. C. McNeile’s ‘The Green Death’ is likewise expressed in terms of monstrousness. Like the tales of Doyle and Hooper, ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’ utilises animalisation in its comparisons and imagery to ascribe a sense of monstrousness to the orchid in question. The text describes it to look ‘like a spider shamming dead’, with aerial rootlets reminiscent of

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<sup>53</sup> Hooper, “Carnivorine,” 71.

<sup>54</sup> Hooper, “Carnivorine,” 71-72.

<sup>55</sup> Hooper, “Carnivorine,” 72.



tentacles, or even ‘like little white fingers poking out of the brown.’<sup>56</sup> The main animalisation of the orchid, however, is expressed in its likeness to jungle leeches, which are mentioned ubiquitously throughout the story. ‘The Green Death’ does not utilise animalisation, but echoes the proclivity of ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’ to express its animated flora in terms of smell; the main difference being that the smell in the latter tale is ‘insufferable’ through its ‘rich, intensely sweet scent’ while that of ‘The Green Death’ is ‘a rank, fetid smell.’<sup>57</sup> The terrible nature of the smell produced by the liana in ‘The Green Death’ is thus described in terms akin to disgust, which is often associated with monsters. The liana is additionally made monstrous by its manner of handling its victim, namely hanging. Because most everyone sees the hanging of the innocent as an atrocity, the act itself is monstrous, and therefore its committer, in this case the liana, also. Moreover, the deliberate subduing of and reaching out to catch their victims before consumption is distinctly predatory, and again reminiscent of the horror associated with being eaten by a plant.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, the animated flora in Wells’ and McNeile’s short stories also possess the quality of being monstrous.

#### *Activeness & Colonial Expansion*

The animated flora in ‘The American’s Tale’ and ‘Carnivorine’ differ from the later stories on the basis of their activeness or inherent ability to be active. The animated flora of ‘The American’s Tale’ sets itself apart from those of the other short stories through its relative passivity. While it consumes a man within the narrative, there is no evidence that the flytrap actively pursued or chose its prey. In fact, its victim had simply crawled into its ‘mouth’ of sorts, and had ‘lain down on it [...] and it had closed on him as you’ve seen your little hothouse ones do on a fly.’ Thus, if the plant can be considered to have caught its prey, it has

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<sup>56</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 94-97.

<sup>57</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 97-98.

McNeile, “The Green Death,” 211.

<sup>58</sup> Chase et al, “Murderous Plants,” 332

done so passively. Still, as opposed to the sundew in ‘Carnivorine’, which was artificially grown, it was found in its ‘monstrous’ form in nature. While it ends up being as active as the animated flora, this quality of activeness has to be induced, as it is not present congenitally. Therefore, the sundew, like the flytrap, differs from the animated flora of the later stories on the basis of their activeness or inherent ability to be active.

The latter conclusion is particularly relevant when chronologically examined within the animated floras’ respective contemporary colonialist contexts. In her paper on vegetable monsters, Cheryl Blake Price notes that ‘deadly plants had been transformed from passive poisoners into active carnivores’ at the *fin-de-siècle*, and that it is Doyle’s ‘The American’s Tale’ where ‘the literary process of transforming Victorian cultural myths about deadly plants from passive threats into active predators’ begins.<sup>59</sup> This change can be seen throughout the texts in question. While, as Price observes, the flytrap is ‘relatively benign and are only reactionary’, the sundew in ‘Carnivorine’, published nine years later in 1889, actively seeks out its prey; but only after being artificially made to be able to do so.<sup>60</sup> Still later, in 1894, ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’ attested that animated flora had become a congenitally active predator, able to subdue its victims and reach out to feed on them; something that would resurface in 1920, when ‘The Green Death’ was published. Interestingly, this change lines up with the territorial acquisitions of the anglophone world, particularly the United Kingdom. While the United Kingdom had quite a large empire around 1880 already, it would grow much larger in the subsequent decades. Thus, around 1880, when the least active animated flora rears its head in ‘The American’s Tale’, the British empire is relatively small in comparison to what it would become. When the possibility to make animated flora active arose in ‘Carnivorine’, the United Kingdom had just undergone a near decade of territorial acquisitions in Africa and South to South-East Asia. In 1894, when ‘The Flowering of the

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<sup>59</sup> Price, “Vegetable Monsters,” 311-315.

<sup>60</sup> Price, “Vegetable Monsters,” 315.

Strange Orchid' was published, the United Kingdom had again acquired new territories in Africa since the publication of 'Carnivorine'. Thus, as the empire expanded, so grew the activeness of the animated flora in fiction. This translates into the twentieth century, as well, for 'The Green Death' was published the year after the treaty of Versailles, wherein the United Kingdom and its dominions obtained many new territories in, for instance, Africa and the Pacific Ocean. Thus, as the general public was exposed to more and more exotic and foreign plant life due to colonial expansion, so grew the activeness of the animated flora, establishing a connection between the colonial world and animated flora.

### *Ecophobia & Human Interaction*

With the threat of active predatory flora comes a reaction that follows this change. Whereas the flytraps of 'The American's Tale' are, as stated, 'benign' and 'reactionary', those of later tales are not.<sup>61</sup> In those tales, people actively react to the animated flora and try to eradicate it, rather than conserve or isolate them. Passive animated flora is thus passively engaged with, and active flora actively, although the imagery utilised to describe them equally portrays them as monstrous. Animated flora that practises its natural instincts are to be eradicated upon posing a threat to those to whom they are alien.

The eradication of animated flora, as well as the ascribed monstrousness to them, arises from ecophobia. The monstrousness ascribed to the flora is built upon 'the deep horror we feel towards the idea of being devoured by a plant.'<sup>62</sup> This adheres to the definitions Estok and Del Principe give to ecophobia; 'an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world [...] that 'loathes the unpredictable' and 'emanates from anxieties about control' based in 'fears stemming from humans' precarious relationship with all that is nonhuman.'<sup>63</sup> The

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<sup>61</sup> Price, "Vegetable Monsters," 315.

<sup>62</sup> Chase et al, "Murderous plants," 332.

<sup>63</sup> Estok, "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness," 208.

Estok, "Theorising the EcoGothic," 40-41.

Del Principe, "Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century," 1.

animated flora, as an alien—and often active—element of a place not yet domesticated, is beyond the control of humanity, and therefore demonised and hated, or even eradicated. This is congruent with Keetley and Silvis' claim that 'nature poses a problem of control, inciting human efforts at dominance', even if eradication is a radical manifestation of this.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, it is in agreement with Estok's statement that 'the ecophobic loathes the unpredictable' and that 'the perceived threat to human agency by nonhuman nature [...] is at its core ecophobic.'<sup>65</sup> Animated flora, through its alienness, is unpredictable and has a nonhuman agency that, if it is active, is threatening to humankind. In light of this, it is completely understandable that the flytraps of 'The American's Tale' are not destroyed, for there is a sense of control regarding it being reactionary. There is no need to overcome the being, as Scott is perfectly capable of living among them because of his 'knowledge of the native ecosystems', making the animated flora known as opposed to alien.<sup>66</sup> Still, the flytraps are distinctly dangerous and cannot be fully domesticated, and therefore warrant the ascription of monstrousness to give voice to that fear.

Ecophobia as a drive for the eradication of animated flora is furthermore visible in the texts where animated flora is killed. In 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid', the housekeeper/cousin, who serves as a voice of reason in the tale, kills the orchid. The attempt at taming nature proves impossible and requires its destruction, to which even the orchid enthusiast Wedderburn is indifferent. The characters in 'The Green Death' are indifferent to the killing of animated flora, too. Its final paragraph portrays a romantic scene between Ruth and Bob, which only mentions the felling of the tree that held the liana as an indication of when they embraced one another. The removal and destruction of the tree and liana are not mentioned further, and is thus presented as a natural course of events not even worth mentioning. In 'Carnivorine', upon discovering that Julius Lambert has been killed by the

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<sup>64</sup> Keetley and Silvis, "Introduction: Approaches to the Ecogothic," 3.

<sup>65</sup> Estok, "Theorising the EcoGothic," 46.

<sup>66</sup> Price, "Vegetable Monsters," 315.

sundew and could not be saved, the narrator still enters the chamber to shoot the plant and to destroy all records of the experiments that created Carnivorine, stating that ‘it would not have been well to have suffered the race of the vegetable octopus to be extended and propagated by curious scientists in the future’ and that ‘humanity will only have cause to rejoice in the total destruction of Carnivorine.’<sup>67</sup> Here, the destruction of a part of nature that cannot be controlled is presented as a service to humanity, and the eradication of a newfound species as the morally right option to have dealt with the matter at hand.

### *Chapter Conclusion*

In conclusion, animated flora was perceived as something beyond human control, and therefore feared. This ecophobia manifested itself in the demonisation of animated flora, which was portrayed in Gothic terms of monstrosity and animalisation, the latter often having been used to ascribe the former quality. Human interaction with animated flora was often grounded in ecophobia, also, as the attitude towards and eradication of it depended on how alien, active, or controllable it was. These three qualities can be traced back to ecophobia, and were linked to the imperial expansion of the United Kingdom, for they grew in severity as the British sphere of influence expanded.

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<sup>67</sup> Hooper, “Carnivorine,” 75.

### Chapter III

#### Animated Flora, Colonial Nature, and Colonialism

Whereas the last chapter considered the portrayal of animated flora in its individual narrative and the context of its contemporary society, this chapter will explore the portrayal of the colonial natural environment. By examining the narratives' settings, animated floras, and engagements with and portrayals of Indigenous peoples, this chapter presents not only how the colonial natural environment comes to represent the colonial world, but also how a colonial-colonialist dichotomy arises from these portrayals of the colonial world. It is important to come to understand this dichotomy, as it reinforces harmful ideologies that are perpetuated by narratives like these.

#### *Colonial Origins*

All of the narratives in question, even those set primarily in a domestic space, emphasise a foreign location as the origin of the 'monstrous' animated flora. 'The American's tale' is unique in that most of its narrative takes place in this foreign setting. The origin of its animated flora, like the other stories, is distinctly foreign, as the narrator describes Arizona as sparsely populated and infrequently visited by 'all English or Americans as can put pen to paper', thereby creating a sense of distance between the illiterate, foreign settlement and the literate, 'civilised' world.<sup>68</sup> The orchid of Wells' 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid' likewise finds its origin on the outskirts of the Western empires, namely the Andaman Islands, and Seymour recognises the Liana of McNeile's the Green Death as native to the Upper Amazon.<sup>69</sup> 'Carnivorine' heavily implies that the Drosera's original habitat had been in South America, as it leaves the reader to presume that it had been among the 'collection of

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<sup>68</sup> Doyle, "The American's Tale," 52.

<sup>69</sup> Wells, "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid," 94.  
McNeile, "The Green Death," 235.

the curious insect-eating plants of South America' the mad botanist acquired in Rome.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, as all texts indicate the origins of the animated flora to be explicitly foreign, the animated flora carries a specifically foreign quality.

While one might argue that the animated flora is not congenitally monstrous in 'Carnivorine', and its monstrousness really originates from the laboratory in the Campagna region of Italy, this locale, too, can be considered colonial-like. Firstly, its remoteness mirrors the outskirts of the colonial environment from which the animated floras in the other tales originate. Like the sparsely populated Arizona, the Upper Amazon, and the Andaman Islands, the Campagna region 'lies outside the beaten track of tourists and travellers'.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, as will be explored in the paragraph hereafter, the dangers ascribed to the natural environment of the Campagna are reminiscent of those of colonial natural environments. The Campagna is, for instance, 'haunted by malaria'; something the housekeeper of 'The Flowering of the Strange Orchid' fears the orchid to have inherited from its colonial environment, establishing a link between the disease and the colonial natural environment.<sup>72</sup> While malaria did occur in the United Kingdom at the time, it suffered a heavy decline at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of 'land improvement techniques, antimalaria drugs, and improvements in standards of living'.<sup>73</sup> As these conditions are related to an industrialised civilisation, malaria would be associated more strongly with places that did not have access to these conditions, which colonial environments were *par excellence*, or indeed the remote, rural Campagna region. Although it is thus colonial-like, the Campagna will henceforth be considered as a colonial environment, as it holds the same properties save being an actual colony.

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<sup>70</sup> Hooper, "Carnivorine," 66.

<sup>71</sup> Hooper, "Carnivorine," 67.

<sup>72</sup> Hooper, "Carnivorine," 67.

Wells, "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid," 95.

<sup>73</sup> T. Chin, and P. D. Welsby, "Malaria in the UK: past, present, and future," *Postgraduate Medical Journal* 80, no. 949 (November 2004): 663, <https://doi.org/10.1136/pgmj.2004.021857>.

*The Colonial Natural Environment*

The narratives in question present the foreign, colonial settings as inherently hostile towards, and unfit for, Western people. Even in ‘The American’s Tale’, which out of all texts in question is the most optimistic towards the possibility of the colonial natural environment becoming habitable for Western settlers given they obtain the right knowledge, presents Flytrap Gulch as ‘a marshy, gloomy place, lonely enough during the day even’ where in ‘some parts of the marsh [...] a body thrown in would be gone by the morning’, equating the foreign quality of the gulch to concealment and death.<sup>74</sup> The description of the animated flora’s original habitat in ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’ also presents the wetland environment as a dangerous, foreign place. In the story, the discoverer of the orchid is found dead in a mangrove swamp; a biome referred to as ‘very unwholesome’ and ‘nasty’.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, the assumption of those present that its discoverer was killed and drained of his blood by ‘jungle-licees’ indicates the supposed ubiquitousness of dangerous fauna within these biomes, adding another layer of hostility to the colonial natural environment.<sup>76</sup> The hostility of colonial climes is furthermore prevalent when they are simulated in the Western world. In ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’, for instance, the temperature maintained in the hothouse to accommodate the exotic flora is experienced by the housekeeper to be ‘so hot it gave her the headache.’<sup>77</sup> Here, the warmth of the tropics—a relatively foreign quality to the British climate—physically impairs one of the characters. As nineteenth-century medicine understood bodies as ‘porous entities that were in constant interaction with the surrounding environment’, the impairment of housekeeper is a direct result of the colonial climate.<sup>78</sup> ‘The Green Death’, while it does not elaborate on the foreign setting save that the unspecified

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<sup>74</sup> Doyle, “The American’s Tale,” 55.

<sup>75</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 94.

<sup>76</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 94-95.

<sup>77</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 97.

<sup>78</sup> Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 18.



Indigenous people are terrified of it, claims that the animated flora is found in the ‘tropical undergrowth’, and therefore part of the regular flora of the region, making said region inherently dangerous and seemingly uninhabitable.<sup>79</sup> That is, uninhabitable for Western people, as the presence of Indigenous peoples in these climes in both ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’ and ‘The Green Death’ indicates the possibility of non-Western human habitation.

### *The Colonial-Colonialist Dichotomy*

When the representation of the colonial natural environment is put into the perspective of the Western world’s portrayal, a dichotomy that demonises the foreign, colonial world but lauds the Western, ‘civilised’ world becomes apparent. In ‘Carnivorine’, Rome is presented in contrast to the Campagna. It contains so many interesting matters that weeks pass before the narrator remembers to look for Julius, who lived in the Campagna; a ‘home of solitude and ruin’.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’ expresses the British environment in a tone quite different from that used to describe the aforementioned colonial natural environment to which the orchid is native. The narrator states, for instance, that the British environment in which the tale takes place has a ‘serene sky’ and ‘sunlit gardens’.<sup>81</sup> The Western environment is thus portrayed as much more favourable, or superior to the colonial environment. When comparing this, and the representation of Rome, to the demonised colonial natural environments discussed prior, the latter category of environment is clearly considered to be an Other; a distant place subordinate to the Western, ‘civilised’ world. The distinction between Britain and Rome, as domestic spaces, and the colonial natural environment, as dangerous ‘others’, ties into Price’s findings.<sup>82</sup> She claims that ‘the

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<sup>79</sup> McNeile, “The Green Death,” 232.

<sup>80</sup> Hooper, “Carnivorine,” 66-67.

<sup>81</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 93.

<sup>82</sup> Price, “Vegetable Monsters,” 313.

distinction between “domestic” and dangerous “othered” environments suggest that British ecophobia was largely reserved for specifically colonial environments’, which solidifies the connection between the environmental dimension and the colonial dimension of this distinction.<sup>83</sup> Thus, a dichotomy emerges in the Western imagination of the colonial world, fuelled by a colonialist believed superiority over the Other.

This dichotomy, rooted in a colonialist believed superiority, holds up when it is applied to the portrayal of the Othered environment’s inhabitants. Here, too, a clear distinction between the Western explorers and the Indigenous or local inhabitants arises, which mirrors the demonisation of the colonial and the hailing of the Western. McNeile, in ‘The Green Death’, paints a picture of the Indigenous population inhabiting the animated flora’s natural habitat as worshippers of the monstrous liana, who give the plant human sacrifices.<sup>84</sup> This demonising portrayal of the Indigenous inhabitants of the Upper Amazon as uncivilised people(s) who commit barbaric acts is overtly racist, particularly when connected to the phrase ‘my native bearers dragged me away in their terror’ later in the text.<sup>85</sup> Not only is the possessive ‘my’ an indicator of a hierarchical relation between the explorer and the Indigenous bearers, but the phrase also writes off the Indigenous inhabitants as being led by their emotions, which has historically been seen as irrational, and therefore inferior to the Western ideals of rationality and reason.<sup>86</sup> This dichotomy between the irrational, barbaric Indigenous and the rational, civilised Westerner is found in the other texts, too. In ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’, for instance, the ‘Andaman Islanders’ are said to be ‘horrible’ and ‘most disgusting wretches’.<sup>87</sup> Some of them are ascribed the quality of being ‘sufficiently civilised’ for being able to care for a collection of orchids until an ornithologist

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<sup>83</sup> Price, “Vegetable Monsters,” 313.

<sup>84</sup> McNeile, “The Green Death,” 232.

<sup>85</sup> McNeile, “The Green Death,” 235.

<sup>86</sup> W. Gerrod Parrott, “But Emotions Are Sometimes Irrational,” *Psychological Inquiry* 6, no. 3 (1995): 231-232, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1449437>.

<sup>87</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 94.

returned from the interior.<sup>88</sup> This emphasises their supposed role as loyal servants to a Western explorer and simultaneously implies that most Indigenous inhabitants cannot keep their local flora alive, and are thus ‘uncivilised’ in contrast to those who can.<sup>89</sup> The belief in the inferiority of non-Western peoples is solidified by the glorified killing of a ‘Malay’, which the text deems adventurous.<sup>90</sup> Thus the dichotomy between the portrayal of the believed ‘inferior’, ‘barbaric’ Indigenous inhabitants and the ‘civilised’ Western explorers reinforces the existence of the dichotomy between the demonised colonial world and the ‘civilised’ Western world.

### *The Colonial Representation Unit*

The qualities used to press the demonising supposed inferiority and barbarism of Indigenous inhabitants correlate with the qualities ascribed to the colonial natural environment, because the narratives treat them as a singular unit. ‘The Green Death’ indicates that death by strangulation is ‘an un-English method of killing a man.’<sup>91</sup> England, as the civilised central locale of the tale, is differentiated from foreign lands by this statement. By stating that the method of death is ‘un-English’, it conveys the quality of being ‘uncivilised’, as well.<sup>92</sup> Because the narrative further expresses nearly everyone’s assumption that the killer is human, the ‘un-English’ act of strangulation is connected to, among others, the supposedly ‘uncivilised’ Indigenous inhabitants of the colonies.<sup>93</sup> In the narrative, the animated flora is ascribed the same quality, using ‘a gas that suffocates’ and placing a ‘tendrils [...] round its [a small animal’s] neck.’<sup>94</sup> Thus, the animated flora, as part of the natural environment, is expressed in terms that are also applied to the Indigenous inhabitants. ‘The Flowering of the

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<sup>88</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 95.

<sup>89</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 95.

<sup>90</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 92.

<sup>91</sup> McNeile, “The Green Death,” 226.

<sup>92</sup> McNeile, “The Green Death,” 226.

<sup>93</sup> McNeile, “The Green Death,” 226.

<sup>94</sup> McNeile, “The Green Death,” 233-235.

Strange Orchid' entertains similar connections between the Indigenous inhabitants and the animated flora of the colonies. As stated prior, the Andaman Islanders are described as 'disgusting'; yet so is the animated flora.<sup>95</sup> The colonial natural environment in question in its entirety is likewise referred to as 'a nasty swamp'.<sup>96</sup> This establishes a bridge between the Indigenous inhabitants and the colonial environment. This is reinforced when the aerial rootlets of the animated flora are described to look 'like little white fingers poking out of the brown', as it opens up the existence of human elements as part of the colonial natural environment.<sup>97</sup> These connections between Indigenous inhabitants and the colonial natural environment thus indicate that the narratives treat the Indigenous inhabitants as part of their native environment, and are therefore seen and treated as a singular unit; the colonial natural environment.

Because Indigenous inhabitants and animated flora are both expressed as part of their natural environment, the colonial natural environment is the key representation of the colonial world. It has been established that Indigenous inhabitants, animated flora, and the colonial natural environment are treated as a singular unit. While the former two share connections, the colonial natural environment most strongly resembles both, encompassing, for instance, the monstrosity of the animated flora and the ascribed 'uncivilised' quality of the Indigenous inhabitants. If either the Indigenous inhabitants or the animated flora were to be considered the dominant representation of the colonial world, they would not fully encompass each other's aspects. Thus, the colonial natural environment is the key representation of the colonial world.

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<sup>95</sup> Wells, "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid," 95.

<sup>96</sup> Wells, "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid," 94.

<sup>97</sup> Wells, "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid," 95.

*Chapter Conclusion*

In conclusion, animated floras and their locations of origin are emphasised to be foreign, colonial natural environments. These colonial natural environments are contrasted to the Western world, uncovering a dichotomy between the ‘civilised’ Western world and the ‘uncivilised’ colonial world, which holds when placed into the context of supposedly ‘civilised’ Westerners and ‘barbaric’ Indigenous people(s). This dichotomy heralds the colonialist belief that the colonial world is inferior to the Western world. Additionally, the Indigenous peoples, together with the animated flora, are seen and treated as a singular unit by the narratives in question; namely as part of the colonial natural environment, which becomes the key representation of the colonial world.

## Chapter IV

### Animated Flora as a Displacement

The previous chapters extensively discussed animated floras, their natural environments, and the narratives wherein they occur in terms of colonialism, ecophobia, and the natural world. This chapter adds an EcoGothic dimension to the equation, which it combines with the findings of the previous chapters. By exploring animated flora in the context of the Gothic, animated flora is argued to be the EcoGothic agentive force of the colonial world. Moreover, this chapter positions the anxieties of the Western world regarding animated flora as connected to those regarding the colonial world, and constructs them into one overarching fear; the loss of its believed superiority over the colonial world. Animated flora is then argued to be an EcoGothic transgression of the colonial-colonialist dichotomy; or, in other words, a displacement of the colonialist fear of losing its believed superiority over the colonial world.

#### *The Colonial Agentive Force*

Animated flora, as a being with a monstrous identity, requires a colonial natural environment to function in a monstrous manner, which makes the colonial natural environment an essential aspect of its agency. The requirements for the liana of ‘The Green Death’ to become active are listed in a riddle, part of which states that ‘when ‘tis hot, shun this spot’ and ‘when ‘tis rain, come again.’<sup>98</sup> Later in the tale, this proves to mean that the liana attacks, or becomes an active predator, when it is warm, and retreats or becomes passive when it rains. Its origin in the Upper Amazon is tropic, and relatively warm all year when compared to the United Kingdom. Thus, when the weather is akin to that of the colonial lands of its origin, the liana begins to behave in a monstrous manner. Although perspiration, which stops the liana from being active, is plentiful in the Upper Amazon, too, it is likewise a prominent weather

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<sup>98</sup> McNeile, “The Green Death,” 207.

type in the United Kingdom, which makes it an aspect that is not specifically part of the colonial climate. Similarly, in ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’, the orchid stops functioning, and even perishes, when it is exposed to the British climate.<sup>99</sup> The only times the orchid acts in a monstrous manner is in its colonial environment, where it killed Batten, or when its colonial environment is simulated in Winter-Wedderburn’s hot-house.<sup>100</sup> Because the animated flora in these stories draw most of their agency from the colonial natural environment wherein they find themselves, and lose the agency when their natural environment can no longer be considered specifically colonial, it is clear that the colonial natural environment is an essential aspect of the agency of the animated flora. This is significant, because it indicates that the colonial dimension is imperative to the behaviour of animated flora.

Animated flora, as part of the colonial natural environment, is the agentic force of the colonial world. It was previously established that the colonial natural environment—as a unit—is the key representative of the colonial world. As part of this unit, animated flora represents the colonial world by proxy, because it has the most agency out of all aspects of said unit, as it is prevalent and active in all of the stories. This sets it apart from the other aspects within the unit, such as the Indigenous peoples, whose agency is severely limited. Still, animated flora only has this agency in connection to the colonial natural environment, meaning that it cannot be detached from the unit and function as it would have on its own. Thus, as it is part of and inseparably connected to the colonial natural environment, but has more agency than the other aspects of this unit, animated flora should be seen as an agentic force of the colonial natural environment that represents the colonial world.

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<sup>99</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 99-100.

<sup>100</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 94-98.

*The (Eco)Gothic Natural*

The portrayal of the colonial natural environment is expressed in distinctly Gothic terms of gloom, temporality, and claustrophobia. In ‘The American’s Tale’, the colonial natural environment, or Flytrap Gulch, is described as ‘a marshy, gloomy place’ where a ‘body thrown in would be gone by the morning.’<sup>101</sup> While straying from the ‘gloomy old castle’ trope of the traditional Gothic, it does adhere to the common *primaeva* forest setting, and strongly echoes the sinister, gloomy atmosphere of the convention.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, the gulch, as a narrow passage, should be considered as a reimagined Gothic location, as the enveloping ancient rock walls of a gulch mirror the narrow passages of old castles, evoking a similar sense of claustrophobia and entrapment.<sup>103</sup> ‘The Flowering of the Strange Orchid’ presents its colonial natural environment as a claustrophobic space, too, by presenting it as a mangrove swamp; a biome lacking open ground and often having a dense canopy.<sup>104</sup> This biome, as well as the biome of ‘The American’s Tale’, are additionally Gothic encroachments of the past upon the present, for the ancient natural environment, temporally, far exceeds the colonialist human presence in the region, to whom the untamed wilderness would have evoked precivilised, or prehistorical imaginations.<sup>105</sup> The house of Julius Lambert in ‘Carnivorine’ likewise uses the natural environment as a Gothic element. Hooper reimagines the traditional Gothic ruined structure by emphasising the presence of nature as being part of the ruined structure, which is portrayed as ‘embowed in a mass of vegetation, vines, and bushes, as well as trees’.<sup>106</sup> She describes that ‘one of the pillars supporting the doorway had been broken

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<sup>101</sup> Doyle, “The American’s Tale,” 55.

<sup>102</sup> Baldick, “Gothic Novel (Gothic Romance),” 154.

Birch and Hooper, “Gothic fiction,” 291.

Keetley and Silvis, “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic,” 6.

Hogle, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>103</sup> Baldick, “Gothic Novel (Gothic Romance),” 154.

<sup>104</sup> Wells, “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” 94.

<sup>105</sup> Birch and Hooper, “Gothic fiction,” 290-291.

Hogle, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>106</sup> Hooper, “Carnivorine,” 67.



away and its place was supplied by the trunk of a cypress', quite literally positioning nature as part of the ruined structure.<sup>107</sup> The colonial natural environment is thus portrayed as a Gothicised space within these narratives.

At its core, animated flora is a quintessentially EcoGothic element. As Andrew Smith indicated, a Gothic story commonly features a representation of evil, sometimes based in fear, through, for instance, demonisation.<sup>108</sup> Animated flora closely adheres to this statement. Narratives depict it as evil, it emerges from ecophobia, and it is demonised through the ascription of monstrosity. Because it is an extension of the Gothicised colonial natural environment, animated flora should also be considered Gothic in its inheritance of those qualities pertaining to said environment, save those which are solely applicable to it being a setting. Moreover, animated flora is Gothic in its alienness, for the origin and capabilities of animated flora, as an unknown element of an ancient natural world, are completely hidden from the knowledge of the Western world.<sup>109</sup> What makes animated flora specifically EcoGothic, however, boils down to the following. Simon C. Estok notes that 'the imagining of nature as a menacing threat is central to ecoGothic texts.'<sup>110</sup> Animated flora, in all of the texts, certainly is a menacing threat, and thus a central element of EcoGothic texts. Keetley and Silvis add that the EcoGothic has also been seen as 'a repository of deep unease, fear, and even contempt as humans confront the natural world', which connects to animated flora as discussed in the previous chapters, where it evokes ecophobia and unease in those who confront it.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, Keetley and Silvis state that the EcoGothic invokes the 'Other as a disturbed and disturbing natural world, one in which traditional boundaries between the human and the nonhuman become blurred [...] by [...] amoral biological processes.'<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Hooper, "Carnivorine," 68.

<sup>108</sup> Smith, "Introduction," 3.

<sup>109</sup> Hogle, "Introduction," 2-3.

<sup>110</sup> Estok, "Theorising the EcoGothic," 41.

<sup>111</sup> Keetley and Silvis, "Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic," 4.

<sup>112</sup> Keetley and Silvis, "Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic," 11.

Animated flora, as a monstrous creature and part of the natural world, is described as disturbing, blurs the line between the human and the floral by gaining typically non-floral qualities, such as animation, and occasionally originates in amoral biological processes. The latter is most obvious in ‘Carnivorine’, where Julius Lambert, a crazed botanist, tries to transform a *Drosera* back into its common ancestor with mankind. This ties in with the EcoGothic expansion upon the traditional Gothic in the temporal dimension. The EcoGothic does not merely treat time in relation to human history, but in relation to natural history, as well.<sup>113</sup> Time is therefore evolutionary in the EcoGothic, which positions animated flora as a Gothic encroachment of the evolutionary past upon the present.<sup>114</sup> There, animated flora presents humankind with the EcoGothic terror that accompanies its ‘reluctance to come to terms with their nonhuman ancestry and the common, biological origin of all life.’<sup>115</sup> Animated flora thus fits the prescribed features of the EcoGothic perfectly, to the point where it should be considered EcoGothic *par excellence*.

### *Phobic Translation*

The ecophobia-based components behind the hostile interactions between mankind and animated flora apply to the Western imagination of the colonial world. The hostile interactions between mankind and animated flora can be linked to anxieties regarding how alien, active, and controllable the animated flora is, all of which are grounded in ecophobia; a fear that, for instance, manifests itself in the eradication of animated flora. These three ecophobia-based components—alienness, activeness, and ability to be controlled—are, however, also applicable to the colonialist imagination of the colonial world. In the eyes of the Western world, the colonial world consisted of unknown, uncontrollable, and

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<sup>113</sup> Keetley and Silvis, “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic,” 5.

<sup>114</sup> Birch and Hooper, “Gothic fiction,” 290-291.

Hogle, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>115</sup> Del Principe, “Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century,” 2.

undomesticated lands. In ‘The American’s Tale’, for instance, the narrator’s interlocutor states that the colonial environment is only known to those who settled there.<sup>116</sup> He proceeds to describe the colonial natural environment in terms of how undomesticated, wild, and divergent it is from the Western world, heralding the presence of ‘[g]rass as hung over a chap’s head as he rode through it, and trees so thick that you couldn’t catch a glimpse of the blue sky for leagues and leagues, and orchids like umbrellas!’<sup>117</sup> The colonial natural environment is thus expressed through the lens of the three aforementioned ecophobia-based components. This is consonant with Keetley and Silvis’ notion that injustices, in this case the demonisation of the colonial world, may ‘play out upon a natural world that is likewise victimised.’<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, when this is considered in the context of animated flora, which represents the colonial world by proxy, it makes sense that they consist of the same basal elements. They are, after all, treated as a single unit. Thus, the ecophobia-based components behind the hostile interactions between mankind and animated flora also apply to the Western imagination of the colonial world.

The Western world does not only fear the three ecophobia-based components in the context of ecophobia, but as detached, individual anxieties, too. As stated prior, ecophobia, a fear in essence, may cause the eradication of the animated flora or an otherwise active reaction. The three ecophobia-based components are also responsible for this reaction towards the animated flora. If the eradication of the animated flora or an otherwise active reaction is caused by fear, and the three ecophobia-based components cause this reaction, then the three components are fears themselves. Moreover, the fear of losing control is already shown to be present on its own. This is consonant with, and reinforced by, Estok’s statement that ‘controlling nature’ is not ‘*ipso facto* ecophobic’.<sup>119</sup> Although tales of animated

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<sup>116</sup> Doyle, “The American’s Tale,” 51-52.

<sup>117</sup> Doyle, “The American’s Tale,” 52.

<sup>118</sup> Keetley and Silvis, “Introduction: Approaches to the EcoGothic,” 11.

<sup>119</sup> Estok, “Theorising the EcoGothic,” 48.

flora are often grounded in ecophobia, and there is a strong relation between it and the fear of losing control, the latter thus exists on its own, as well. Therefore, this thesis argues that the remaining two components should also be considered as fears of the Western world; the fear of the alien and the active component, which in this case can be rephrased as the fear of the unknown and the fear of a threat to the status quo. The latter is due to the fact that the activeness of animated flora equates to how much it threatens to disturb the normal way of life, which is best illustrated through an example. The flytraps in ‘The American’s Tale’ score low on the ‘activeness’ scale, because they are merely reactionary. This means that they do not disturb the normal way of life much, as simply not touching them is enough to offset the threat they pose. The liana in ‘The Green Death’, however, was very active, sneaking into the house to catch its prey. It thus possesses the ability to threaten and disturb the normal way of life with an unexpected attack. Therefore, fear of activeness is henceforth referred to as the fear of a threat to the status quo, existing both in relation to and detached from ecophobia, just like the fear of the alien and the fear of losing control.

### *The Displacement*

The Western world fears the transgression of the colonial-colonialist dichotomy. Firstly, if the Western world would be exposed to a scenario wherein the colonial-colonialist dichotomy is transgressed, its believed superiority would be severely threatened. The result of this would be that the Western world is opened up to the possibility of being put on equal grounds with the colonial world, which therefore moves out of its control. Thus, the Western world would be exposed to its fear of losing control. This would likewise occur when it is faced with the threat of losing its perceived superior position *to* the colonial world, which would put the latter—and its unknown qualities—in control. Such a transgression of the dichotomy would expose the Western world to its fear of losing control, its fear of the alien, and its fear of a

threat to the status quo. Thus, the Western world would logically fear a transgression of the colonial-colonialist dichotomy, because this event would expose it to its anxieties regarding the colonial world.

Animated flora is a displacement of the Western world's fear of a transgression of the colonial-colonialist dichotomy. As the EcoGothic agentive force of the colonial natural environment, animated flora embodies the fears that are part of the colonial world as an unknown, uncontrollable, and undomesticated space. In addition to the ecophobia it incites, it thus contains the Western anxieties that make up its fear of losing its perceived superiority, or the transgression of its colonial-colonialist dichotomy, too. These anxieties referred to are the Western world's fear of losing control, fear of the alien, and fear of a threat to the status quo. Animated flora eliminates the Western world's believed superiority by—in Darwinian terms—making the people of the Western world evolutionarily inferior to the 'fittest' predator, the animated flora, which positions itself at the top of the food chain. Therefore, as an EcoGothic representative of the colonial world by proxy, animated flora embodies the breaking of the dichotomy, transgressing the status quo. Given that tales of animated flora are known to explore anxieties about colonial environments, and animated flora itself is known to represent fears regarding foreign environments, the interpretation of animated flora as an EcoGothic transgression of the colonial-colonialist dichotomy is consonant with and strongly positioned in the existing theoretical framework.<sup>120</sup> Animated flora is thus a displacement of the Western world's fear of a transgression of the colonial-colonialist dichotomy, for it is an EcoGothic realisation of said transgression. Animated flora realises this transgression by placing the Western world's people into an evolutionarily inferior position to itself—the EcoGothic agentive force that represents the colonial world by proxy.

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<sup>120</sup> Price, "Vegetable Monsters," 312-313.

*Chapter Conclusion*

This chapter explored animated flora as quintessentially EcoGothic. Additionally, it examined the three ecophobia-based components behind hostile interactions with animated flora—those being how much of a threat, alien, and controllable the animated flora is—and applied them to the colonial world. This uncovered that the three supposed ecophobia-based components could be constructed into individual anxieties separate from ecophobia. These anxieties of the Western world provided a foundation for the notion that the Western world fears a transgression of the dichotomy between itself and the colonial world. Animated flora is a displacement of this fear, as it is an EcoGothic realisation of this transgression that places the people of the Western world into an evolutionarily inferior position—the EcoGothic agentive force representing the colonial world.

## **Conclusion**

Animated flora has historically been utilised as an EcoGothic agent that, in its unique position between the Western understandings of the natural and the sentient (such as fauna), instils several fears of once. This thesis finds that these fears include ecophobia, the fear of losing control, the fear of the alien, and the fear of a threat to the status quo, all of which are interrelated to a certain degree. Interestingly, animated floras were nigh exclusively presented as products of the colonial world, inviting an investigation between them. Through analysis of the colonial and ecological dimensions of these Gothic tales of animated flora, this thesis established that:

1. the Western imagination and perspective of the colonial world presents a colonial-colonialist dichotomy wherein the Western world believes itself to be superior to the colonial world.
2. the colonial natural environment serves as an overarching element, of which animated flora is the agentive force, that represents the colonial world.
3. the fears that animated flora instils apply to the Western imagination of the colonial world, as well.

These findings were then compared and connected to one, which uncovered that:

1. the Western world feared a transgression of its colonial-colonialist dichotomy, because it realised all of its anxieties regarding the colonial world.
2. animated flora, as the EcoGothic agentive force of the instrument representing the colonial world, embodied all of these anxieties at once.

Based on these findings, this thesis proposes that animated flora is a displacement of the Western world's fear of a transgression of the colonial-colonialist dichotomy, because animated flora is an EcoGothic realisation of said transgression. Animated flora is an

EcoGothic realisation of this transgression, because it represents the colonial world by being the agentive force of the colonial natural environment that represents the colonial world, and because it places the Western world's people into an evolutionarily inferior position to itself. By doing this, animated flora thus places the Western world in a position inferior to the colonial world.

In addition to the general relevance of this thesis as established in the introduction, this thesis proposes that animated flora may play a role in emphasising and elaborating upon a colonial discourse regarding the consideration of nonhuman representations of the colonial past. Further research may examine similar representations of animated flora in different time periods, or from a non-Western perspective/range of texts. Lastly, page restraints have limited this thesis' to only consider four texts of the time period in question. Further research may test the findings of this thesis on a broader range of texts.



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