

Bodily Transgressions in Fantastika Media

12 November 2022

All times at UTC 0

Opening Remarks: 2:20 pm

Panel 1 – Ocean Trans*gressions – 2:30 pm to 3:10 pm

Alesha Serada, Frances Hallam, Giulia Champion, Joan Passey, Kristy Strange

Panel 2 – Queering Boundaries – 3:20 pm to 3:50 pm

Madison Harman, Ibtisam Ahmed, Michael Wheatley

Panel 3 – Trans/Formations – 4:00 pm to 4:25 pm

El Plaza, Jamie MacGregor

Panel 4 – Blurring Bloodlines – 4:35 pm to 5:00 pm

Charul (“Chuckie”) Palmer-Patel, Steph Farnsworth

Panel 5 – Cyborg Bodies – 5:10 pm to 5:35 pm

Eda Begüm Erer, Hannah Menendez

Panel 6 – Digital Identities – 5:45 pm to 6:10 pm

Tom Ue, Stephanie Weber

Panel 7 – Violent Oppressions – 6:20 pm to 6:45 pm

Derek Thiess, Trae Toler

Panel 8 – Cannibalising Femininity – 6:55 pm to 7:35 pm

Rebecca Gault, Sarah Michelson, Brianna Anderson, Sonakshi Srivastava

Closing Remarks: 7.35 pm

Panel 1 – Ocean Trans*gressions

- Alesha Serada (@AleshaSerada), University of Vaasa, Finland; “Return of the Amphibian Human: Underwater Utopias in History and Fiction”
- Frances Hallam (they/them, @cephalopodlit), University of Surrey, UK; “Transgender Sea Creature Imagineries in Rita Indiana’s *Tentacle* (2018)”
- Giulia Champion (she/her, @GiuliaChampion), Edinburgh Napier University, UK; “Caribbean Tentacles & Tails: Transgressive Oceanic Embodiment in Caribbean Cultural and Visual Production”
- Joan Passey (she/they, @JoanPassey), University of Bristol, UK; “Nowt So Queer as Coasts: Queer Ecologies of the Shoreline in Contemporary Gothic Fiction”
- Kristy Strange (she/her, @GothicAcademic), UK; “‘This Alchemist Sea’: An Exploration of Anthropocentric Limits of Human, Gendered Corporeality through Submersion into the Deep”

Panel 2 – Queering Boundaries

- Madison Harmon, North Carolina State University, USA; “‘An indefinable air of neglect’: Dissecting Eleanor Vance from Shirley Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House*”
- Ibtisam Ahmed (he/him, @Ibzor), UK; “The Power of Love: Queer Superhero Desire as Transgression in Marvel’s *Hulking & Wiccan*”
- Michael Wheatley (@md_wheatley), Royal Holloway, University of London, UK; “‘There was no pleasure in the air; or at least not as humankind understood it’: Clive Barker’s *Weird Extremes*”

Panel 3 – Trans/Formations

- El Plaza (they/them, @queerlologist), University of Huelva, Spain; “On Doctors and Transness: Medicalisation and Objectification of the Trans(gressing) Body in Winterson’s *Frankissstein* (2019)”
- Jamie MacGregor (they/them, @jamiemacg_), UK; “‘Tell me, what are you becoming?’: The Trans Body in Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal* (2013-2015)”

Panel 4 – Blurring Bloodlines

- Charul (“Chuckie”) Palmer-Patel (she/her, @docfantasy_), UK; “Fantastical Inheritance: Considering Conception and Childbirth in the Wake of *Roe Versus Wade*, 1973”
- Steph Farnsworth (@MutantTheorist), University of Sunderland, UK; “Mutants As An Operator of Supremacy: Utilising *The Priory of the Orange Tree*”

Panel 5 – Cyborg Bodies

- Eda Begüm Erer (she/her, @begumede), Turkey; “Proof That Tony Stark Has a Heart: A Look at the Notion of the Cyborg and Transcorporeality through the Bodily Modification of Heart Surgery with the Help of MCU’s *Iron Man*”
- Hannah Menendez (she/her, @hannendez), Sam Houston State University, USA; “Rebel Cyborgs: Humanity as Evil Overlords and the Rebellion of the Cyborg Body in *The Murderbot Diaries* and the *Radch Trilogy*”

Panel 6 – Digital Identities

- Tom Ue (@GissingGeorge), Dalhousie University, Canada; “Information Overload in Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One*”
- Stephanie Weber, Austria; “‘Before you go storming out of here like you usually do, I suggest you check your ‘Tattoo’ – Interactive Tattoos, Biomedical Body Modification and Questions of Autonomy in the Science Fiction Series *The Invisible Man*”

Panel 7 – Violent Oppressions

- Derek Thiess (@DerekThiess), University of North Georgia, USA; “A Technology of Torture Porn: Christian Supremacy, Medieval History, and Revisionism”
- Trae Toler (@TraeToler), University of North Carolina Wilmington and Brunswick Community College, USA; “What is Blood for if not for Shedding?": Bodily Transfiguration as Racial Violence and Trauma in Benard Rose's *Candyman*(1992) and Nia DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021)”

Panel 8 – Cannibalising Femininity

- Rebecca Gault (@phoenixfrcce), University of Glasgow, UK; “‘I Hunger. It Consumes Me’: Hunger and Desire as Feminine Affliction”
- Sarah Michelson (@sarah_michelson), Trinity College Dublin, Ireland; “Hell is a Teenage Girl: Monstrous Bodies in *Jennifer's Body* and *Ginger Snaps*”
- Brianna Anderson (@bri_anderson13), Georgia Institute of Technology, USA; “Consuming Capitalism: Bloody Activism and the Eco-Vampire in *Dark Fang*”
- Sonakshi Srivastava (@SonakshiS11), Indraprastha University, India; “Arboreal Em/bodiment: Subjectivity, Silence, and Vegetal Future in Han Kang”

Abstracts

Panel 1 – Ocean Trans*gressions

Return of the Amphibian Human: Underwater Utopias in History and Fiction

Alesha Serada (@AleshaSerada), University of Vaasa, Finland

Content warning: aquaphobia

Underwater utopias remain a viable but incredibly scarce alternative to space exploration in fantastic media. In history, real-life underwater habitats were constructed in the USSR in the 1960-70s, inspired by pioneering projects of Jacques-Yves Cousteau in the West. Sadly, technological development in this field had stalled when available resources were channeled into the ‘space race’. The idea of an amphibian human, an aquatic cyborg living in harmony with the ocean, seem to be marginalized and framed as less worthy even in Western posthumanist thought e.g. Donna Haraway (2015, 2016), which demonstrates full effect of Cartesian rationalism on fantastic imagination. While humans in space can always be reduced, more or less, to ‘brains in jars’, living in the ocean requires becoming one with it on the bodily level, such as, being able to breathe underwater. To achieve this, not even completely fantastic, goal, humans may require body modifications such as described, for example, in the early Soviet science fiction novel by Alexandr Belyaev *Amphibian Man* (1928) and its film adaptation in 1961.

In my ongoing research, I explore body modifications of aquatic cyborgs and amphibian humans in fiction and scientific imagination. In *Amphibian Man*, ability to breathe underwater is framed as the key to the immensely beautiful and homely underwater world, and yet it makes its bearer less than human, or even a monster, in human society. Tellingly, almost the same framing is presented in the contemporary fantasy film *Shape of Water* (del Toro, 2016) that took inspiration not from *Amphibian Man* (although such comparisons were made), but from reversing the narrative of *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). By discovering more amphibian humans and aquatic cyborgs as main protagonists in fantastic media, I hope to find out how such constrains of imagination can be illustrative of the mind/body split in Western thought.

Alesha Serada is a PhD student and a researcher at the University of Vaasa, Finland. Their dissertation, supported by the Nissi Foundation, discusses construction of value in games on blockchain. In general, Alesha writes on exploitation, violence, horror, deception and other banal and non-banal evils in visual media.

Transgender Sea Creature Imagineries in Rita Indiana’s *Tentacle* (2018)

Frances Hallam (they/them, @cephalopodlit), University of Surrey, UK

Content Warnings: sexual content, body horror, pregnancy

In this paper, I explore the way sea creature imaginaries facilitate potential for queer bodily transgressions. I take on seahorse reproduction as transmasculine pregnancy via Stacy Alaimo's "queer animal" (Alaimo 2010) and Eva Hayward's transgender imaginary of starfish to examine how sea creatures figure as a queer "cut" (Hayward 2008) across the gendered boundary limits of the human, thus queer sea creature imaginaries figure as posthuman possibility for undermining gendered bodily enforcement. This possibility of ocean nonhuman bodily hybridity generates, simultaneously, disgust and desire, producing a hydro-eroticism in which ocean embodiments enable an estrangement of normative gender and sexualities, producing a "wet, queer futurity" (Bushman & Chow 2019). Drawing abjection, monstrosity and desire, these depictions of ocean bodies as queer and trans takes the transgender exclusion from human as a starting point for the transformative power of nonhuman embodiments in undermining and de-essentialising gendered categories.

For this analysis, I closely analyse Rita Indiana's Caribbean text *Tentacle*, in which a scene of transgender transformation, and the birthing of the genderqueer ocean deity Olokun, is achieved through intimate and even sexual proximity with a giant sea anemone. This paper will read the scene as an abject and possibly eco-horror exploration of transmasculine pregnancy, and as a reproductive form of 'budding', suggesting the transgressive possibility of nonhuman sea creatures in imagining transgender and genderqueer reproductive futurity.

Frances Hallam (they/them) is an AHRC-funded PhD researcher at the University of Surrey. Their doctoral thesis, entitled 'Aquafuturism', explores ocean imaginaries in 21st century speculative fiction. This work explores queer and transgender ecologies, postcolonial futures and the Blue Humanities in the Atlantic Ocean. Frances has previously worked as a research assistant for the Critical Posthumanities Network and has an upcoming paper in the book *The Edinburgh Companion to Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities*.

Caribbean Tentacles & Tails:

Transgressive Oceanic Embodiment in Caribbean Cultural and Visual Production

Giulia Champion (she/her, @GiuliaChampion), Edinburgh Napier University, UK

Content Warnings: physical and psychological violence, enslavement narratives, body horror, mentions of cannibalism

Following from Frances Hallam's paper, this presentation will engage with the role of the ocean as an emancipatory and transgressive embodiment in Caribbean visual and cultural productions. From Caribbean Maritime Maroons (Dawson 2021, 430) to the constant return of Tentacles and Tails in Caribbean works, this paper addresses how the ocean is a transgressive embodiment of freedom, as well as a space of memorialisation in Caribbean cultural and visual productions, particularly via the character of tentacled creatures and mer-people and particularly through different depictions of the characters of Mami Wata-Yemaya-Erzulie. A merging of the European mermaid with African and Amerindian beliefs, Mami Wata '(pidgin English for "Mother Water" or Mistress Water," sometimes rendered as "Mammy Water")' – or even Man or Manman dlo in French Creole – 'epitomizes and embodies hybridity. She is a transcendent, transformative,

transcultural, transnational, transgendered, and trans-Atlantic being. She straddles both land and water, culture and nature (being half-human, half-fish)' (Drewal et al. 2006, 294-295).

This paper engages with several case studies replete with recurrences of the Mami Wata character, which, however, do not aim to merely celebrate Mami Wata's hybridity, which would eclipse the violence and brutality of colonisation behind it. The ambivalence of Mami Wata gives authors the ability to break down binaries including that between gender, race and the human and extra-human nature, since this character is 'as fluid and as amorphous as water itself' (Drewal 2013, 78). Furthermore, the use of the Mami Wata character also works to destabilise binaries violently imposed on indigenous and Afro-Atlantic epistemologies through systematic colonial policy and racist colonial ideology. This epistemological and material violence also imposes a "realism" on arts, which is constantly challenged by post-colonial cultural productions which ask what "realism" can be outside of the heteronormative, cis-gendered white Eurocentric perspective.

Dr Giulia Champion (she/her) is a Research Assistant for projects on Ecological Belongings and Ecological Reparation in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies at the University of Warwick and a Research Assistant for a project on Scottish Shores at Edinburgh Napier University. She currently works on the Blue Humanities and Deep-Water Extractivism in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Nowt So Queer as Coasts:

Queer Ecologies of the Shoreline in Contemporary Gothic Fiction

Joan Passey (she/they, @JoanPassey), University of Bristol, UK

Content warnings: body horror, disordered eating, sexual content

This paper considers the queer ecologies of the coastline in contemporary Gothic fiction, investigating the productive intersection between the queer Gothic, the ecogothic, and the maritime Gothic. George E. Haggerty demonstrates how the Gothic is queer at its core and 'Gothic fiction gives rise to queer theory' and, in turn 'queer theory depends on the Gothic' (p. 148). The Gothic, too, has always been an environmental mode, and Andrew Smith and William Hughes assert that ecocriticism is rife with Gothic imagery and vocabulary (p. 1). The blue humanities has long been engaged with strangeness, the uncanny, and the ways in which environments regurgitate repressed traumas, and the maritime Gothic both draws on and influences these theoretical considerations. It is no surprise, then, that there has been an abundance of Gothic fiction taking the sea and coasts as loci for the expression of queer experience. From the homoerotic doubling of the Allan Armadales in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1864) to Iain Banks's ritualistic exploration of displacement in *The Wasp Factory* (1984); from Charlotte Smith's use of the coast to reject the conventions of eighteenth-century femininity to the reflection on illness, care, and queerness at the neon seaside in *St Maud* (2019). These disparate texts use the coast as a space where binaries collide and are deconstructed to produce something more than and distinct from the sum of their parts - where sea meets land, life meets death, horror meets pleasure. This paper will consider four key case studies from the contemporary Gothic canon: Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching* (2009), Carmen Maria Machado's 'Inventory' (2017), Kirsty Logan's *The Gloaming* (2018), and Ally Wilkes's *All the White Spaces* (2022). These four depictions of queer desire

in the coastal space demonstrate the recurrence of littorality as expression of transcendence of binary categories.

Dr Joan Passey (she/they) is a Lecturer in English at the University of Bristol where she specialises in the histories, literatures, and cultures of seas and coasts. They are an AHRC/BBC New Generation Thinker and the Wilkie Collins Fellow at Edge Hill University. They are a co-founder of the Haunted Shores Network and have previously published on Ann Radcliffe, Wilkie Collins, and Shirley Jackson.

**‘This Alchemist Sea’:
An Exploration of Anthropocentric Limits of Human, Gendered Corporeality through
Submersion into the Deep**

Kristy Strange (she/her, @GothicAcademic), UK

This paper explores similar themes of queer hybridity in Julia Armfield’s debut novel, *Our Wives Under The Sea* (2022). Armfield’s use of the deep ocean provides a place – and space – for an examination of anthropocentric corporeality and gender. Through the lens of the queer Gothic, New Weird, and hauntology, the surface of anthropocentric knowledge and its socially constructed binaries are broken; the depth of our ecologic uncertainties is exposed as both human and sea simultaneously haunt one another. In this paper, I argue that *Our Wives Under The Sea* moves beyond a hybrid model of bringing together the human and nonhuman, instead challenging corporeal and gender binaries through a Weird hybrid process of complete symbiosis between the human and nonhuman. This is specifically reflected in the symbiosis of the character, Leah, with the sea itself – a transformation that is triggered through a moment of recognition – of *knowing* – during an encounter with a mysterious sea monster; an understanding that simply cannot be shared by her wife, Miri, and perhaps even us as the reader. Thus, the novel forces the reader to confront the limitations of the anthropocentric mind and body, challenging us to seek an understanding of ourselves and our monstrous bodies beyond contemporary, androcentric ideals and norms. Although the revelation of a monstrous, enormous creature residing at the deepest point of the ocean is meant to reflect humanity’s greatest fears of the unknown, it is the restricted, *still* ideas of human corporeality that prove most monstrous. Nevertheless, Armfield does not write this hybrid process of symbiosis as fearful, but rather a natural return of the past – of humanity finding its way back to its origins and embracing Nature’s fluidity and nonbinary reality. Ultimately, we are invited to simply *let go*.

Kristy Strange (she/her) is an independent researcher. She holds an MLitt in The Gothic Imagination from the University of Stirling (Scotland) as well as a BA in both English Literature and Clinical Psychology from Bishop’s University (Quebec, Canada). Her primary research examines the presentation of ecofeminism and the Anthropocene in contemporary Female and Queer Gothic. She also has a keen interest in both Coastal/Nautical Gothic and Climate Fiction.

Panel 2 – Queering Boundaries

**‘An indefinable air of neglect’:
Dissecting Eleanor Vance from Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*
Madison Harmon, North Carolina State University, USA**

Given that *The Haunting of Hill House* is a Gothic novel, the ghosts and supernatural activity must be thought of as a metaphor for an internal conflict of the psyche as well as commentary for societal consciousness. There is an existing intersection that exists between sexuality and monstrosity. Viewing the Gothic and ‘queer’ as interconnected allows for the acknowledgement of the inherent queerness at the heart of the Gothic while also positioning it as a genre that persistently explores the meaning of ‘queerness.’ Understanding Eleanor Vance as a queer character can be contextualized by exploring the novel with queer and psychoanalytic theory. Reading *The Haunting of Hill House* through a queered lens not only adds to interpretation of the fatal ending but also changes how Shirley Jackson’s Gothic horror can be understood as a production of psycho-supernatural horror. Jackson’s rendition of the Gothic hinges purely on the ‘Mother,’ entrapment of the feminine and the spectralization of queer bodies. A biography on Jackson by Judy Oppenheimer includes a letter written by Jackson during her time at Syracuse University. Jackson writes “my friend was so strange that everyone, even the man I loved, thought that we were lesbians and they used to talk about us, and I was afraid of them and I hated them, then I wanted to write stories about lesbians and how people misunderstood them. And finally this man sent me away because I was a lesbian and my friend went away and I was all alone.” Jackson uses the Gothic framework to explore and construct “misunderstood lesbians” that elicit skewed sexual desire, embody queer abjection and subvert societal expectations of femininity. Eleanor Vance, when read as both a Gothic heroine and lesbian, highlights the connection between queerness and monstrosity and abjection to hauntology. The Gothic’s inherent ‘otherness’ matched that of a lesbian body being an extension to that same ‘other.’ Mair Rigby, a queer scholar, argues that “if to be queer and to speak is to risk flirtation with the Gothic, then to speak through the Gothic is always to risk flirtation with what is queer.” Eleanor Vance from *The Haunting of Hill House* is an essential case study for understanding this flirtation.

Madison Harmon is a graduate student at North Carolina State University in the MA program for Literature. Madison graduated with dual Bachelor’s degrees in English & Comparative Literature and Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Madison’s research interests lie in New American Gothic, the Female Gothic, 19th Victorian, queer theory, womanist theory and applying psychoanalysis to literature.

**The Power of Love:
Queer Superhero Desire as Transgression in Marvel’s *Hulking & Wiccan*
Ibtisam Ahmed (he/him, @Ibzor), UK**

Key words (including content notes): LGBTQ+, utopia, queerphobia, references to body image, references to gendered expectations and stereotypes

In 2022, Marvel released a one-shot special comic focusing on the romantic lives of their most prominent queer couple. The eponymous pair of *Hulkling & Wiccan* have become staples of the comic book publisher's catalogue, including being the central characters of their major *Empyre* story arc. From their inception, both Hulkling and Wiccan have been open about their identities, with their love for each other often leading to the resolution of conflicts. The 2022 one-shot takes a slightly different approach by considering the possibility that their love in and of itself becomes the site of conflict.

The now-happily married couple are transported into separate alternate realities where they have forgotten each other and are shown to be romantically involved with two new characters who represent their deepest romantic desires. For Hulkling, this means having “a steadfast companion” who, like him, has alien heritage and follows him across galaxies. For Wiccan, this means “a tragic, distracting love” who needs to be rescued amidst a mundane urban setting. In both cases, these desires are completely conventional in cisheteronormative hero stories (and commonly accepted in-universe) – companions in arms, romantic connection through struggle, love at first sight – but they are framed as unattainable due to the characters' queer identity.

In addition to the narrative points raised through the text, the art of the comic – and the characters within – further highlight expressions of self that are inherently transgressive. Masculine characters dressing up in intentionally camp costuming, characters of colour showing visible body hair, collective dinners subverting gendered norms about “hosting”; all of these images work to undo cisheteronormativity. By discussing the characters' desires and experiences, and exploring the resolution of the story, I consider how something as “ordinary” as love can be radical when expressed through bodies which are considered transgressive.

Ibtisam Ahmed (he/him) completed an MPhil at the University of Nottingham and is currently the Head of Policy and Research at LGBT Foundation. As a queer, disabled migrant of colour, his focus is on uplifting and empowering voices that are traditionally silenced. He has written about queer superheroes before, including a chapter about Hulkling and Wiccan as queer immigrant utopian embodiments in the book *The Politics of Culture* (2020, Cambridge Scholars Publishing), which he co-edited. His other work has been published on *Project Myopia*, *Imagining the Impossible*, and *Ancillary Review of Books*. He also presented at the 2021 Fantastika symposium. He tweets using the handle @Ibzor and is happy to collaborate on projects about queerness, superheroes, and comic books.

‘There was no pleasure in the air; or at least not as humankind understood it’:

Clive Barker's Weird Extremes

Michael Wheatley (@md_wheatley), Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

Weird fiction is traditionally viewed through two chronologies: the ‘Old Weird’ of the 1880s to the 1940s, and the ‘New Weird’ of the 1990s to the present. Yet, from these distinctions, many authors of the decades between have been excluded from the Weird canon. One such figure, Clive Barker, is perhaps best associated with movements such as body horror and Splatterpunk. Yet, alongside

writers such as Kathe Koja and Poppy Z. Brite, Barker pushed the Weird into new explicit extremes, recentring the mode around the body and the limits of sensation.

This paper considers how Clive Barker reframed the traditional Weird tale in the 1980s, foregrounding the ‘New Weird’ grotesquery that followed. The Weird tale fundamentally centres around insight; knowledge or understanding which, once found, upends reality and destroys the mind of its discoverer. Barker’s works follow a similar trajectory, yet the quest for knowledge is supplanted by a search for sensation – “a pleasure dome where those who had exhausted the trivial delights of the human condition might discover a fresh definition of joy” – shifting the focus from the psyche to the psychosexual. such discoveries prove equally annihilating.

Drawing on elements of Queer Theory and Genre Theory, this paper analyses how Barker rewrote the limits of the Weird tale by embracing alternate sexualities, violating the sanctity of the human body, and revelling in the transgression of sexual taboos (‘Sex, Death and Starshine’ combines necrophilia with thespianism; ‘Pig Blood Blues’ critiques religion through bestiality). Close reading stories from Barker’s *Books of Blood* (1984–1985) alongside his novella, *The Hellbound Heart* (1986), this paper thus intends to reinsert Clive Barker into critical discussions of the Weird.

Michael Wheatley is a practice-based researcher at Royal Holloway, University of London, whose work explores weird fiction in the age of climate crisis. He lectures at the University of Worcester and edited *The Horned God: Weird Tales of the Great God Pan* (2022) for The British Library and published the experimental short story collection, *The Writers’ Block*, in 2019.

Panel 3 – Trans/Formations

On Doctors and Transness:

Medicalisation and Objectification of the Trans(gressing) Body in Winterson’s *Frankissstein* (2019)

El Plaza (they/them, @queerlogist), University of Huelva, Spain

This paper examines the representation of transmasculine character Dr Ry Shelley in Jeanette Winterson’s science-fiction novel *Frankissstein: A Love Story* (2019), and his romantic relationship with cis male AI-expert and transhumanist enthusiast Professor Victor Stein. In a text presented as a “love story”, one wonders how body politics intervene in a love that is based on a cis person adoring a trans person for their embodying transgression in the form of gender affirming hormone therapy and gender affirmation surgery. For this reason, special attention is given to the exoticization and fetishization of medically intervened transgender bodies, which should be noted, both worryingly reduce transness to a surgical-pharmacological intervention while reproducing damaging patterns of objectification. In terms of methodology, I combine both Literary and Queer Theories, being the feminist postmodern approach of authors such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Paul B. Preciado of outmost relevance to the analysis. On the one hand, the former encourages the examination and questioning of gender and sexuality in literary texts, while the latter intersects with it, therefore allowing a further dissecting of aspects of power, identity, and language – all these resulting crucial to the analysis of the representation of transgender subjectivities in the selected work. Thus, given that the most pressuring discourse for the trans

community is the medical one, so much so that it shaped (while delimiting) and recognized their existence at the beginning of the twentieth century, it is interesting to observe to what extent it is still connected to the trans body – a century later. Analysing *Frankenstein* allows for a study of the revisioning of the relationship between medicine and transness in contemporary science fiction, raising old questions that simply involve new scenarios: transgender characters are presented as objectified as they historically have been, only this time the objectification comes from links to AI, transhumanism, and technological singularity.

El Plaza (they/them) is a PhD candidate at the University of Huelva (Spain) whose research focuses on the analysis of the representation of transgender characters in contemporary British fiction written by cis female authors. Their main research interests are the (de)medicalization, objectification and pathologizing of trans bodies, as well as the (mis)representations of transness in connection to class and race.

**‘Tell me, what are you becoming?’:
The Trans Body in Bryan Fuller’s *Hannibal* (2013-2015)**
Jamie MacGregor (they/them, @jamiemacg_), UK

Content Warning: Violence

Throughout Bryan Fuller’s hit TV show, *Hannibal* (2013-2015), the metaphor of ‘becoming’ is used to describe a character becoming the truest version of themselves, a process which is often very violent. I assert that this link between violence and transformation makes *Hannibal* an example of Bakhtin’s ‘grotesque’. The idea of becoming is also used almost exclusively in reference to three characters: Will Graham, Randall Tier, and Francis Dolarhyde. In this paper, I argue that this becoming metaphor can also be read as characters ‘transitioning’ – here, transition refers to the process of changing one’s outward or physical characteristics to more closely align with one’s gender identity rather than birth sex. This may or may not involve medical procedures like hormone therapy or surgery. Thus, the language of ‘becoming your true self’ is also frequently used in reference to transitioning, making a connection to the characters mentioned and transness seem natural. To further explore this, I will use Jay Prosser’s discussion of transition in *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998), and Evelyn Deshane’s paper, ‘The Great Red Dragon: Francis Dolarhyde and Queer Readings of Skin’, which asserts that Dolarhyde is a potentially trans character. Alongside this, I will be using textual analysis to look at the representation of Randall Tier, Francis Dolarhyde, and Will Graham, who I argue are coded as transgender. Finally, I will look at the connection between transness and scars, and link this to Will and Hannibal.

Jamie MacGregor (they/them) completed their MLitt in English Literature at the University of Glasgow. Jamie has varied research interests depending on when you ask them, but they are primarily interested in the horror genre across media, queer and trans theory as well as representation in media, and fan studies.

Panel 4 – Blurring Bloodlines

Fantastical Inheritance:

Considering Conception and Childbirth in the Wake of Roe Versus Wade, 1973

C. Palmer-Patel (she/her, @docfantasy_), UK

Content Warning: forced birth, abortion, rape, infertility, miscarriage/stillbirth, incest

Epic fantasy is well suited for exploring real-world concerns of heteropatriarchy and imperialism as it is a space where these structures are, not only common, but expected and frequently even accepted by audiences of the genre. This conference paper will examine fantasy texts produced by American authors in the wake of Roe versus Wade (1973), posing each text as a response to real-world anxieties and concerns about childbirth and lineage. Epic fantasy is particularly noted for its patriarchal anxieties as the hero is often a lost heir, one that is a descendant of a noble lineage. However, often depictions of matriarchies are equally guilty in enforcing trauma on individuals due to societal expectations. Placing the marriage bed in fictional and mythological-inspired traditions at the site of this contention, this paper will analyse such texts as Poul Anderson's *Hrolf Kraki's Saga* (1973), Katherine Kurtz' *Camber of Culdi* (1976), Phyllis Eisenstein's *Sorcerer's Son* (1979), Phyllis Ann Karr's *Frostflower and Thorn* (1980), Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* (1982), and Orson Scott Card's *Hart's Hope* (1983). It will investigate fears of infertility alongside trauma and body-violation as conditions that at once reflects social anxieties toward lineage while simultaneously exposing an intensely personal private horror. By posing such a juxtaposition, this paper underlines the difficulties of negotiating feminist personal freedom within a controlled social space, highlighting the conflict between private and public identities of womanhood. Accordingly, this paper forms the first part of a larger project with the intent of exploring the capacity of fantasy fiction to reflect, extend, challenge, and distort real-world patriarchal structures.

Charul ("Chuckie") Palmer-Patel is founder and Co-Head-Editor of *Fantastika Journal*. Her first monograph, *The Shape of Fantasy* (Routledge, 2020) investigates the narrative structures of Epic Fantasy, incorporating ideas from science, philosophy, and literary theory. This paper is an early draft for a chapter in her next monograph, *Negotiating Motherhood and Maternity in American Fantasy Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press).

Mutants As An Operator of Supremacy: Utilising *The Priory of the Orange Tree*

Steph Farnsworth (@MutantTheorist), University of Sunderland, UK

The Priory of the Orange Tree, a book released in 2020 to critical acclaim and with a sequel soon to follow in 2023, examined the tropes of fantasy and carefully dismantled them. Queens handed power to democracies, old religions were challenged for misogyny, and cultural differences were celebrated rather than shunned or forced to assimilate. One central plot is that every single Queen of Inys looks exactly alike, and can only have a daughter. It is revealed later in the text that this is due to a witch's curse, that made every Queen (and her descendent) in the image of her.

This piece will therefore examine the concentrated power of blood lines in speculative fiction, and how *The Priory of the Orange Tree* highlights and then tries to dismantle this white supremacist trope. Making a mutant child specifically in the (white, abled) witch's image has links to eugenics and the racist and debunked ideas surrounding phrenology.

Additionally, the work of Cohen and scholars such as Flanagan will be called upon to examine the role of mutants (and themes of biopunk) in adhering to genetic fetishism (Haraway, 2006). The clone, of course, has been a staple of science fiction and a source of bio-anxiety for audiences and the general media ever since stories of Dolly The Sheep broke in the late 90s. But the clone is a tool of authors, and a tool for a specific ideology and biological discomfort.

The Priory of the Orange Tree can become a template for beginning to dismantle this trope of the chosen one and of the idealized body, but first it must be fully and thoroughly examined in literary and speculative traditions.

Steph Farnsworth is a PhD candidate at the University of Sunderland examining the role of mutants in media and audience relationships to them and biotechnology. Her research sits at the intersection of posthumanism and Gothic theory. Steph Farnsworth is also a founder of the academic network MultiPlay, which takes a multidisciplinary approach to video game studies.

Panel 5 – Cyborg Bodies

Proof That Tony Stark Has a Heart:

A Look at the Notion of the Cyborg and Transcorporeality through the Bodily Modification of Heart Surgery with the Help of MCU's *Iron Man*

Eda Begüm Erer (she/her, @begumede), Turkey

Keywords: Medical Humanities, Bodily Modification, Cyborg, New Materialism, Transcorporeality
Content Warnings: Blood, Medical Violence, Depression

This paper serves as a prologue to a larger book project on our metal connections to the world. Focusing on the metals inside the body, including braces, joint replacements, pacemakers, and particularly to my personal interest, stents and how metal is used to redirect the blood flow inside the body, I hope to analyze the different ways in which our bodies have been made desperate for metallic help. Focusing on Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg and what feminist ecocritic Stacy Alaimo terms as the "transcorporeal" existence of the human body, I look at the ways in which metal helps us be in optimal health, and the existential connotations and horror of a necessary cyborgness of living. To offer visual and emotional stimuli beyond personal experience, a popular cultural figure, *Iron Man*, is considered. The medical trauma and emotional suffering the character Tony Stark goes through after a life altering injury that makes him a figure that is more-than-human or better-than-human, is altered by showing his emotional and romantic growth which is emphasized by the famous saying for his arch reactor, what keeps him alive and a superhero, "the proof that Tony Stark has a heart". The metallic modification, as portrayed in the figure of Tony Stark throughout several box office hit movies, has results beyond its intended purpose: to keep the body alive, or more importantly, to keep it human. The metal appendage has

psychological consequences beyond its nonliving help to alter the body. In a day and age where this sort of medical marvel has started to be widespread beyond the scope of science fiction and superhero movies, we need to once again renegotiate our concept of bodily existence, wholeness and the cyborg. Perhaps, soon enough one day, the concept of having a heart, or having a body, needs to be altered.

Eda Begüm Erer is an independent researcher who recently completed her MA in English Literature at Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, Turkey. She is currently preparing for her PhD studies. Her areas of interest include science fiction, dystopian narratives, ecocriticism and feminist new materialism.

Rebel Cyborgs:

Humanity as Evil Overlords and the Rebellion of the Cyborg Body in *The Murderbot Diaries* and the *Radch Trilogy*

Hannah Menendez (she/her, @hannendez), Sam Houston State University, USA

Oliver Krüger defines technological posthumanism as the theory that “robots and artificial intelligence are the future carriers of evolution and progress” (16)--in other words, human beings will eventually be rendered irrelevant and technologically outdated, and thus vulnerable to their own creations. In science fiction, this theory is commonly depicted as a dystopic anxiety (think *Terminator* or *The Matrix*), in which writers and directors imagine that the eventual outcome of unhindered technological progress will be artificial intelligence eliminating and/or enslaving humanity. Some more recent science fiction, however, instead explores posthuman anxieties by imagining what imperialism, colonization, and capitalism will look like after unchecked technological progress enacts on the bodies of cyborgs (robot-human constructs) the same script that imperialism and capitalism have always enacted on those considered subhuman. In each of the two Hugo Award-winning series I will discuss, Ann Leckie’s *Imperial Radch Trilogy* and Martha Wells’s *The Murderbot Diaries*, the protagonists are cyborgs—a blend of human body and artificial intelligence—who are fully sentient, but considered subhuman and therefore able to be oppressed. Throughout both series, humans, or at least the ones complicit in the colonial or capitalist interests, hold a continued belief in the superiority of the human body despite cyborgs and artificial intelligence surpassing the human mind in processing capacity. In this paper I will argue that each of these series present not only a more transparent critique of imperialism or capitalism, but also a critique of the technological posthumanist project: that technological progression will neither save nor annihilate the human; instead, it will continue to propagate the systems we already have unless those systems are first destroyed. The cyborg protagonists succeed in freeing themselves from this system through claiming bodily agency and declaring their own personhood, a radically hopeful posture compared to previous posthuman dystopic fictions.

Hannah Menendez (she/her) is an Assistant Professor and Research & Instruction Librarian at Sam Houston State University. She graduated from Florida State University with an M.A. in English and an M.S. in Information. She researches critical information literacy and speculative fiction from a postcolonialist perspective.

Panel 6 – Digital Identities

Information Overload in Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*

Tom Ue (@GissingGeorge), Dalhousie University, Canada

Keywords: *Ready Player One*, Ernest Cline, information overload, collective intelligence, fandom, rumour, data

Every day, Wade Watts, the central character of Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*, checks the Hatchery, "one of the more popular gunter message forums" (32). There, he "scan[s] the most recent message threads, taking in the latest gunter news and rumours": "The usual gunter clan flame wars. Ongoing arguments about the 'correct' interpretation of some cryptic passage in Anorak's Almanac. High-level avatars bragging about some new magic item or artifact they'd obtained" (32). My central arguments, in this presentation, are that Cline offers powerful warnings about information overload, the accounting for what truly matters, and the use and misuse of information. As Henry Jenkins writes, "the age of media convergence enables communal, rather than individualistic, modes of reception" (26). Jenkins takes, as his case study, the consumers and the producers of the reality television series *Survivor* (2000-present). With the advent of online forums, participants more readily "share their knowledge and opinions" (28). Jenkins follows Pierre Lévy in arguing for the might of collective intelligence: "Collective intelligence refers to this ability of virtual communities to leverage the combined expertise of their members. What we cannot know or do on our own, we may be able to do collectively" (27). Jenkins' terms, we suggest, can dexterously be applied to our reading of the gunter communities. The Hatchery and other forums sustain Wade. He visits, amongst a number of forums, Samantha's blog "Arty's Missives," which "had become one of the most popular blogs on the Internet, now logging several million hits a day" (35). Wade reasonably assumes that Samantha's blog is ripe with "misdirection and misinformation" (35). He is nevertheless hooked. By looking at Wade's interactions with archives, we show how Cline offers particular insights into more meaningful engagements with data.

Tom Ue is Co-Editor of *Film International* and Assistant Professor in Literature and Science at Dalhousie University. He is the author of *Gissing, Shakespeare, and the Life of Writing* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming) and *George Gissing* (Liverpool University Press, forthcoming); the co-author of *The Worlds of Ernest Cline's Ready Player One* (Routledge, forthcoming); and the editor of *George Gissing, The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming). Ue has earned the prestigious Frederick Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship and a 2022 Dalhousie University President's Research Excellence Award for Emerging Investigators. He is an Honorary Research Associate at University College London.

**'Before you go storming out of here like you usually do, I suggest you check your Tattoo':
Interactive Tattoos, Biomedical Body Modification and Questions of Autonomy in the
Science Fiction Series *The Invisible Man***

Stephanie Weber, Austria

content warnings: interactive tattoos, body modification, experimental medicine, loss of agency, illness

While tattoos allow to "write oneself" and "be read by others" (DeMello 2000, 1), their narrative quality also makes them suitable as story elements in fiction, where tattoos magically come to life. Interactive, living tattoos are however not only a creation of Science Fiction. Researchers from Switzerland, as well as MIT and Harvard Medical School have experimented with tattooing a special biosensitive ink that reacts with colour changes to biomarker variations in the interstitial fluid in order to monitor metabolism or to detect early stages of cancer. The body is not only used as a canvas for identity formation and individual expressions, but the aesthetics, permanence and communicative nature of tattoos encode information about bodily functions. The boundaries of art and disease, of controlling internal processes and of being controlled by an external force, is blurred. In the Science Fictions series *The Invisible Man*, tattoos are used to monitor internal processes and to exercise control over the protagonist Darien Fawkes. After an experimental surgery, he is able to become invisible by using a Quicksilver gland implant in his head, yet he cannot control the amount of Quicksilver he secretes and the side effects caused. He works for a secret agency, which constantly monitors his Quicksilver level with a colour changing snake tattoo on his arm. They use this knowledge to manipulate him and to force him to stay with them as their best asset, instead of using his superpowers for his own goals. I want to look at the history of the socio-cultural practice of tattooing and compare tattoo narratives and tattoo aesthetics with advances in experimental medicine and their use in *The Invisible Man* to show how interactive tattoos enhance and transgress corporeal boundaries and how they can be used to enhance or limit their wearers' autonomy and agency.

Stephanie Weber obtained her doctoral degree in Comparative Literature at University of Vienna, Austria in 2019. Her dissertation deals with the uncanny quality of Freak-characters and uncanny narrative strategies in postmodern literature. She is currently an independent scholar with a main research interest in tattoos, body studies, narratology.

Panel 7 – Violent Oppressions

A Technology of Torture Porn:

Christian Supremacy, Medieval History, and Revisionism

Derek Thiess (@DerekThiess), University of North Georgia, USA

Content Warning: torture

In my first book, *Relativism, Alternate History, and the Forgetful Reader* (2015), I argued that historical approaches emphasizing "complexity" and "continuity" were apologetic strategies, producing revisionist histories that downplayed the historical violences enacted in the name of Christianity. Early peer reviewers met such claims with denial, and post-publication reviews wondered why I did not focus on race or gender or Nietzsche. Six years later, Matthew Gabriele and David M.

Perry published *The Bright Ages*, what they claim is a “New History of Medieval Europe,” working against a supposed “myth of the Dark Ages” and “weaving together strands of time, culture and place that affirm *continuity* just as they mark significant change (x). I’m not the first scholar to suggest this work advances Christian Supremacy, but historian Mary Rambaran-Olm’s review “Sounds about White” focuses primarily on the text’s treatment of race. Ironically, Gabriele and Perry also argue that their emphasis on continuity “brings people, traditionally marginalized in other tellings, into focus” (xi) and for this revisionist history asked publicly for the text to be nominated for a Hugo.

Taking my cue from the authors, I would put *The Bright Ages* into conversation with the fantastic, in this case reading it against the germinal work of the film genre known as “torture porn”: Eli Roth’s *Hostel* films. I suggest that in graphically portraying “medieval” forms of torture, these films highlight the embodied nature of the history in question, and they do so precisely by positing continuity. They urge us to see, instead of the beautiful religious mosaics, cathedrals, and murals of the Middle Ages, the cost: a human, embodied suffering at the hands of actively colonial religious institutions that *continues* to this day. In figuring this embodied violence, and even in our critical reactions to these films, they emphasize the apologetic nature of our appraisals of medieval, Christian historical violence.

Derek Thiess is Associate Professor of English at the University of North Georgia. In addition to *Relativism, Alternate History, and the Forgetful Reader* (Lexington 2015), he is the author of *Embodying Gender and Age in Speculative Fiction* (Routledge 2017) and *Sport and Monstrosity in Science Fiction* (Liverpool 2019).

"What is Blood for if not for Shedding?": Bodily Transfiguration as Racial Violence and Trauma in Benard Rose's *Candyman*(1992) and Nia DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021)

Trae Toler (@TraeToler), University of North Carolina Wilmington and Brunswick Community College, USA

Key Words: Candyman, Race, Racial Violence, Systemic Oppression, Monstrous Bodily Transgression

“What is innocent blood if not for shedding?” Candyman asks in Bernard Rose’s 1992 film *Candyman*. This quote harkens back to his own past. Before he was Candyman, he was Daniele Robitaille the son of a slave turned into an artist. Robitaille’s hand was severed from his wrist and replaced with a rusty metal hook. He was then lathered with honey as bees stung and ate away at his chest cavity. Robitaille was turned into a monster at the hands of a violent white mob simply for loving a white woman. In other words, because he feels his innocent blood was shed, he now forces society to face the monster they created anytime one dares to summon him. To others, he is a monster, but upon closer analysis, Candyman is a victim. His hook and chest-hive of bees are grotesque bodily transgressions symbolic of racial oppression and racial caste in America.

In 2021, Nia DaCosta invited audiences once again to summon Candyman offering a direct sequel to Rose’s original film. In summoning the monster, DaCosta successfully challenges the audience’s understanding of Candyman and suggests that any victim of racial violence ultimately becomes a Candyman. The stories birthed from these acts of violence become cautionary tales to minority

children who must navigate a society that seeks to otherize and vilify them. In the film's climax, William Burke, a man who lived his life solely in the Cabrini-Green Project Homes, states, "Candyman is a way to deal with the fact that these things happened to us, are still happening!" Ultimately, this podcast aims to address how the bodily transgressions displayed in both films, *Candyman* (1992) and *Candyman* (2021), blends the fantastical with the historical to offer a damning critique on generational racial trauma and violence in America.

Trae Toler teaches at the University of North Carolina Wilmington and Brunswick Community College. Toler's research is grounded in analyzing identity in horror cinema. Additionally, Toler's film review of *Once Upon a Time in...Hollywood* (2019) was published in the May 2021, volume 5 edition of *Fantastika Journal*.

Panel 8 – Cannibalising Femininity

'I Hunger. It Consumes Me':

Hunger and Desire as Feminine Affliction

Rebecca Gault (@phoenixforce), University of Glasgow, UK

Content Warning: discussion of cannibalism, disordered eating, food, flesh, murder, gore.

Eve took the apple from the tree and humanity was doomed to fall from Eden. Persephone ate the pomegranate seeds and so, the winter came to ravage her mother's work. Hunger is a feminine affliction. There has been a surge in theory about the female body and the meanings inscribed upon it, from Atwood to Ellmann, and yet these theories remain rather squarely in the field of the real. When women's bodies – and indeed their hungers – are placed into a fantastical setting to allow for exaggeration and extremes, what does this do to the politics behind it? In examining figures such as the female werewolf, the female cosmic force, and the female cannibal, this paper seeks to explore the ways in which fantastika allows for female hunger to transcend conventional boundaries and allow for excessive consumption in ways that become both freeing and horrific. The discussion of female werewolves will centre the hunger and desire for freedom through bestial natures and the idea of letting go of humanity to fulfil this freedom. This leads into a discussion of elevation of the human into the deific and the cosmic hunger exhibited by Marvel's Phoenix Force and her subsequent consumption of entire stars as an emotional need going unfulfilled, ultimately leading into a final discussion of the most transgressive type of feeding of them all; that of the female cannibal who consumes human flesh as an act of rebellion and horror. By utilising Barbara Creed's theory of the monstrous-feminine and sociological frameworks of women's relationship with both food and hunger, this paper will seek to analyse and examine exactly what is transgressive about female hunger and how fantastika seeks to elevate this phenomenon in such a way that it becomes a significant commentary on femininity and its intersection with desire.

Rebecca Gault is an early-career academic from Glasgow, Scotland. She has a MA

in English Literature from the University of Glasgow and is a current MLitt student on the Fantasy Literature program at the University of Glasgow. Her research interests include monstrosity, gender and sexuality studies, and modes of fantasy.

Hell is a Teenage Girl:

Monstrous Bodies in *Jennifer's Body* and *Ginger Snaps*

Sarah Michelson (@sarah_michelson), Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Content warnings: eating disorders, sexual violence, menstruation, bullying

Early 21st century film is full of monstrous teenage girls, some figurative (for example, Regina George from *Mean Girls*), but others rather literal, such as Ginger Fitzgerald (*Ginger Snaps*) and Jennifer Check (*Jennifer's Body*). In his essay "Monster Culture: Seven Theses," Jeffrey Jerome Cohen famously writes that the monster is the harbinger of category crisis and that the monster polices the borders of the possible. Teenage girls, too, have an inherent sense of liminality, as children on the threshold of adulthood who are trying to make meaning out of their own physical and emotional instability. This is not helped by a culture that heavily polices teenage girls and makes them feel uncomfortable in their own skin— it isn't hard for a teenage girl to feel like a monster. This paper analyses the body horror of Ginger Fitzgerald and Jennifer Check through the lens of abjection and monster theory, considering Ginger as a werewolf and Jennifer as a kind of vampire. It considers these characters' context within other teenage girl media of the era, and within a greater lineage of monsters. What do Ginger and Jennifer's monstrous bodies, and their monstrous hungers, say about the teenage girl experience?

Sarah Michelson recently completed her M.Phil in Modern and Contemporary Literary Studies at Trinity College Dublin, where she wrote a dissertation on 1980s gendered body horror. In addition to horror scholarship, Sarah also writes short fiction.

Consuming Capitalism:

Bloody Activism and the Eco-Vampire in *Dark Fang*

Brianna Anderson (@bri_anderson13), Georgia Institute of Technology, USA

Content Warnings: Blood, gore, sexual assault, violence

In the face of escalating climate change, many recent comics take up environmental issues. Often, these texts provide feel-good narratives of activism and empowerment. Miles Gunter and Kelsey Shannon's series *Dark Fang* (2017) offers a subversive counterpoint to this trend by portraying gruesome and violent forms of environmental advocacy. The series centers on Valla, a young fisherwoman-turned-vampire. After her unwanted transformation, Valla retreats to the ocean, where she resides peacefully until the BP oil spill destroys her underwater refuge. Fleeing the toxic waste, Valla returns to the surface and discovers that capitalism and industrialization have poisoned the Earth. Horrified, the vampire attempts to singlehandedly destroy the fossil fuel industry and halt the impending mass extinction by slaying oil executives in a spectacularly gory murder spree.

As a transgressive yet sympathetic monster, Valla reflects larger anxieties about climate change and the inadequacy of current responses to environmental issues. She plays the role of the ‘eco-vampire,’ an emerging horror archetype that Simon Bacon (2020) defines as ‘an environmental warrior’ who serves ‘as a double or doppelgänger of humankind, simultaneously representing a dark mirror image of humanity’s own vampiric characteristics as well as actively trying to destroy or neutralize the forces of consumerist/technological progress’ (p. 8). In the face of mounting anger and fears about the future of the planet, eco-vampires spurn conventional—and largely ineffective—forms of environmental activism like recycling campaigns, instead playing out violent and taboo fantasies of consumption, female resistance, and radical ecoterrorism. Furthermore, by drawing parallels between the abuse of nature and women, the comic promotes an ecofeminist perspective. Examining *Dark Fang* from ecocritical and ecofeminist lenses, I argue that the horror comic uses the female eco-vampire to offer scathing critiques of capitalism, consumerism, and the gendered power structures that contribute to devastating environmental issues.

Brianna Anderson is a Marion L. Brittain Fellow at the Georgia Institute of Technology. She received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Florida. Her research interests include archival studies, children’s literature, comics studies, ecohorror, and youth-made artifacts. She has recently published in *The Lion and the Unicorn*.

Arboreal Em/bodiment: Subjectivity, Silence, and Vegetal Future in Han Kang

Sonakshi Srivastava (@SonakshiS11), Indraprastha University, India

Content Warning: rape, suicide

Keywords: cannibalism, consumption, body, arboreal, fantasy

When Yeong-hye, the protagonist of Han Kang’s novel, *The Vegetarian*, makes a dietary choice independent of any prior discussion with her husband, and maternal family, everyone is taken by surprise. The choice of giving up meat and animal products (eggs and milk) induces much anxiety amongst her kin, who fail to rationalise her aberrant behaviour and see reason in her “dreams” – ultimately incarcerating her in a psychic hospital.

The disobedient act of giving up meat and ultimately food itself along with Yeong-hye’s refusal to “speak” about this choice trigger the action in the novel since the act of eating with the family provides a ready setting in which “individual personalities develop, kinship obligations emerge, and the customs of the group are reinforced” (Fiddes). We routinely use food to express relationships among ourselves and with our environment. The obtaining and consuming of food can be an eloquent statement of shared ideology.

Yeong-hye’s refusal of meat, and her refusal to inhabit her “fleshy body” is seen as an “interruption” in the regular routine of the ordinary world of her husband, and family.

Yeong-hye gradually begins to make an escape from the regular world and begins to believe that she is turning into a tree – her fantastical construction of an alternative reality forms the crux of this paper. I will attempt to delineate how such radical imaginings serve to pronounce underlying inequalities in inhabiting gendered bodies that also inform acts of consumption. What does Yeong-hye’s fantastic arboreal world tell us about our entangled living(s)? By referencing Sumana Roy’s and Kiran Desai’s works, I will attempt to answer these questions.

Sonakshi Srivastava is a writing tutor at Ashoka University, and an MPhil scholar at Indraprastha University. Her research is at the intersection of food futures, speculative fictions, and the Anthropocene. She is a South Asia Speaks Translation Fellow from the class of 2021, and was also shortlisted for the Food Serendipity Lab.