ANTHROPOCENE GOTHIC:

THE MONSTROUS ANTHROPOCENE OF GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S *CRIMSON PEAK, THE SHAPE OF WATER,* AND *PACIFIC RIM*

by

Shannon Payne

B.A., Dalhousie University, 2017

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(English)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

April 2019

The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the thesis entitled:

Anthropocene Gothic: The Monstrous Anthropocene of Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak, The Shape of Water*, and *Pacific Rim*

---

submitted by Shannon Payne in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

in English

Examining Committee:

Suzy Anger, English and Science and Technology Studies

Supervisor

Vin Nardizzi, English and Science and Technology Studies

Supervisory Committee Member

Abstract

The anthropocene, the current geological epoch of anthropogenic climate change, presents a problem for fictional representation. Indeed, scholars have identified problems with representations of the anthropocene in both realistic fiction and climate fiction (cli-fi). The former fails to capture the surreal changes to the weather and the landscape, while the latter focuses on the future at the expense of the past and present. Cli-fi in particular has followed a mode of climate change discourse known as "catastrophizing." This discourse evokes responses to climate change that replicate the historical power structures that caused it in the first place while putting the Global South at greater risk of suffering the consequences of climate change than the Global North. Is there a way to represent the anthropocene in fiction without replicating this discourse? In this thesis, I argue that the Gothic offers a language with which to access the historical and social complexity of the anthropocene. In order to make this argument, I perform a close reading of three Guillermo del Toro films—*Crimson Peak, The Shape of Water,* and *Pacific Rim*. These films, when taken together, form a trilogy of what I am calling "anthropocene gothic." Del Toro's anthropocene gothic uses monsters to represent the fraught relationship between past, present, future; blur the distinction between human and other-than-human; and break down the boundaries between self and other. Rather than focusing on large-scale disaster, these films focus on complex historical and social relationships that fueled and continue to fuel the progress of anthropogenic climate change. The anthropocene stories that these films tell are stories of violence and exploitation, as well as of kinship and transformation. These stories resist simplistic catastrophe narratives by embracing complications and the potential for a hopeful future.

Lay Summary

Most contemporary fictional representations of the anthropocene—the current geological epoch of anthropogenic climate change—fall into a sub-genre of science fiction known as climate fiction (or "cli-fi"). Cli-fi stories often fail to represent the historical and social roots of anthropogenic climate change, instead choosing to focus on charismatic depictions of castrophe. In this thesis, I argue that the Gothic (and, in particular, monster fiction) is far better suited to dealing with the complexities of the anthropocene. In order to make this argument, I analyze three films by director Guillermo del Toro. These films—*Crimson Peak, The Shape of Water*, and *Pacific Rim*—when read as a trilogy of what I am calling "anthropocene gothic," exemplify what the Gothic has to offer to the fiction of the anthropocene: a language with which to understand the complex historical and social relationships present at the end of the world.

Preface

This thesis is original and independent work by the author, Shannon Payne.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge all those who have made this thesis possible.

First and foremost, I am very grateful to both my supervisor, Dr. Suzy Anger, and my first reader, Dr. Vin Nardizzi, for their guidance, their enthusiasm, their time, and their detailed feedback throughout this process. I would not have had the confidence to pursue this project without their encouragement, and their support over the past two years has been invaluable.

I would also like to thank the UBC English graduate department faculty, staff, and students for their resources and their kindness.

I am particularly grateful to Rebecca Sheppard for support, friendship, and making me feel at home both at UBC and in Vancouver; to Alyssa Sy de Jesus for writing sessions, comedy shows, and D&D games that have enriched my scholarship and brightened my days; and to Jessica Erickson for movie nights, insightful conversations, and collaborations that I could not have done without.

This thesis would not have been possible without the advice and understanding of my voice of reason, Hannah Ascough. Furthermore, I owe a great deal to the unwavering support and keen insights of Sallie Lau, Wajiha Mehdi, Kyrie Vermette, Kejia Wang, and Mollie Holmberg, who have all at this point certainly heard enough about monsters to last a lifetime. I am also grateful to the Green College community (especially the early-morning breakfast folks) for their interest in this project and their inspiration.

Finally, I thank the UBC Department of English and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for their funding which supported my Master's studies and the writing of this thesis.

Introduction

"We live in a time of monsters." (Cohen vii)

"Since childhood, I've been faithful to monsters." ("Guillermo del Toro wins best")

In the year 2000, Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer coined the term "anthropocene" to describe the current geological epoch of anthropogenic climate change; the word quickly became a controversial category (Lewis 171) used to organize discourse regarding the complex series of issues related to anthropogenic climate change. Scholars like Amitav Ghosh, Donna Haraway, and Anna Tsing have identified fundamental problems with a certain type of anthropocene discourse that geographers Anja Kanngieser and Angela Last call "catastrophizing." Catastrophizing discourse incites panic about the threat anthropogenic climate change poses to the Global North. This panic leads to what Christian Parenti calls a "politics of the armed lifeboat": if a ship (in this case, the world) is sinking, then those on the lifeboat (the Global North) must keep those in the water (the Global South) out, lest those in the water sink the boat and drown everyone (11). As Ghosh points out in *The Great Derangement*, these politics reinforce hierarchies of power, putting those least responsible for climate change (the inhabitants of the Global South) at the largest risk of suffering the ramifications (144).

I do not, in the following pages, contribute to the numerous ongoing debates about the term itself and what it does or does not capture about the current geological era (hence my use of the lower-case "a" in "anthropocene" rather than the firmer upper-case "A"). Instead, I examine fiction concerned with the anthropocene. Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow calls the growing sub-genre of science fiction that engages with climate change "climate fiction" (cli-fi, for short). Cli-fi, according to Tuhus-Dubrow, "has gravitated toward catastrophes and end times" (Tuhus-Dubrow 61)—in other words, catastrophizing. It is easy to see why this is the case: catastrophes

are sexy. However, while it is attention-grabbing, this tone reinforces catastrophizing discourse. The catastrophizing in cli-fi novels is, if anything, heightened in cinema. In their book *Ecology and Popular Film*, Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann detail the shortcomings of what they call "eco-disaster" (4) cinema. Murray and Heumann argue that eco-disaster cinema engages in all the shortcomings of cli-fi and furthermore "the environmental message is all but lost" in hyperbolic apocalyptic visuals (4). But catastrophizing is not the only option available for writing about the anthropocene, and the affinity between anthropocene discourse and fiction need not move one way—fiction can talk back with a voice of its own. The question is: what does that voice sound like?

Director Guillermo del Toro is known for his monster stories. Film scholars like Keith McDonald and Roger Clark have been quick to note his unusual practice of drawing inspiration everywhere from literature to old Hollywood to B-movies (196). Indeed, most of the scholarship on his work focuses on del Toro's complex intertextual cinematic references, his ability to bridge high and low culture, and the relationship between his movies and fairy tales (Davies). No work currently exists on del Toro and the anthropocene. This may be because del Toro's films are not overtly environmental. His monster stories, however, offer an alternative to the catastrophizing found in cli-fi. I am calling this alternative "anthropocene gothic."

What is the anthropocene gothic? That is the question I hope to answer throughout this study. The difficulty in answering it begins with the term "Gothic" itself. According to Anne Williams, "the attempt to define Gothic […] challenges almost everything we thought we knew about genre as a critical concept" (15). The Gothic is not a stable category, and there is still a great deal of debate concerning what makes a work Gothic. However, there are certain features that many scholars consider central to the genre. Williams argues "Gothic is so pervasively

organized around anxieties about boundaries (and boundary transgressions) that the border between self and other might indeed characterize the 'essential situation'" (16). These boundary transgressions are often embodied in the Gothic by monsters. Paul Youngquist argues "not only do they [monstrosities] jam cultural machinery that produces the norm of the proper body, but they challenge its performative authority" (xv), and Kelly Hurley writes "the abhuman subject is a not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, becoming other" (3-4). The embodied indeterminacy and hybridity of monsters makes them capable of upsetting the boundaries between the saved and the drowned as imagined in a politics of the armed lifeboat. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes in *Monster Theory,* "The monster is […] an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" ("Monster Culture" 4); to understand a time, one must examine its monsters. Anthropocene gothic uses the transgressive potential of the Gothic to engage with fears of the end of days: stories about the monsters at the end of the world. So, to answer the question "what is the anthropocene gothic," we must ask the question: what are the monsters of the anthropocene?

In this study, I define the "anthropocene gothic" through a close reading of *Crimson Peak, The Shape of Water,* and *Pacific Rim*. I analyze these films in chronological order based on when they are set (1901, 1962, and 2025, respectively) in order to track the development of del Toro's engagement with anthropogenic climate change as the result of an accumulation of historical and contemporary forces. I will argue that, when arranged chronologically, these three films form a trilogy that exemplifies the transformative potential of the anthropocene gothic.

In Chapter One, I focus on the 2015 film *Crimson Peak* to begin my analysis of anthropocene gothic with the roots of the anthropocene in exploitative industrial capitalism. In

Crimson Peak, a film in the style of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gothic novels, del Toro uses multiple gothic archetypes to access this complex history. He merges the exploitative industrialist with the vampiric aristocrat, the factory floor with Bluebeard's "bloody chamber," and the haunted house with the "capitalist ruin" (*The Mushroom*), to dramatize the entwined histories of violence toward nature and toward people (particularly women) that fueled industrialization. Ultimately, I argue that this film uses the language of haunting to show that wealth built on exploitation and violence is fundamentally unstable.

In Chapter Two, I examine the 2017 film *The Shape of Water*, a retro-futuristic Gothic romance based on *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). *The Shape of Water* is set during the Cold War and deals with the role the Great Acceleration (a period during the mid-twentieth century characterized by a rapid increase in population and energy consumption and coinciding with Cold War nuclear testing [McNeill 4]) plays in the history of the anthropocene. In this film, del Toro uses Gothic science (particularly vivisection) to examine the horrors of how institutions and individuals achieve "progress" through violent exploitation of the marginalized. I argue that the Gothic romance at the heart of *The Shape of Water* breaks down the narrative of progress into one of monstrous transformation that unsettles both the notion of progress and the idea of the human.

In the final chapter, I argue that the 2013 film *Pacific Rim*, deliberately echoes the tone and style of catastrophizing cli-fi films, but radically reimagines how to engage with the anthropocene. Del Toro reimagines the apocalypse as a series of catastrophic monster attacks that escalate in scale and accelerate in frequency throughout the film, much like anthropogenic climate change is accompanied by an escalating series of severe weather events. These monstrous embodiments of the violent history of the anthropocene can only be stopped through

the use of a technology known as the "Drift" which allows humans to hybridize with machines, with each other, and with the invading monsters. These human-hybrid monsters break down the boundaries between individuals and, in doing so, position collaboration rather than boundary-building or resource-hoarding as essential to living during the anthropocene.

All three of these films have, if not wholly happy, at the very least hopeful endings—an important detail to consider when attempting to unsettle "the general Western media narrative […] of threat and crisis" (Kanngieser). And, like the Gothic as a genre, that is what these films are: unsettling. These films are not meant to be taken as templates for all anthropocene storytelling, but rather as examples that demonstrate the effectiveness of the Gothic in dealing with the concerns of the anthropocene. *Crimson Peak, The Shape of Water,* and *Pacific Rim* talk back to cli-fi and catastrophizing; demand a re-examination of the entwined roles of past, present, and future in the literature of anthropocene; and face the monstrous realties of the end of the world. In *Monster Theory*, Cohen writes "the monster is a *problem* for cultural studies, a code or a pattern or a presence or an absence that unsettles what has been constructed to be received as natural, as human" ("Preface" ix, emphasis original). Del Toro embraces the monstrous and, in doing so, highlights the monstrous nature of humanity itself. In del Toro's anthropocene gothic, it is only by listening to the ghosts of the past, embracing the monstrous other, and hybridizing with each other, with machines, and even with monsters, that humans can face the threat of extinction. In order to face the monsters of the anthropocene, we must become monsters. If the anthropocene gothic asks the question "who are the monsters at the end of the world?" then del Toro answers, "we are."

Chapter 1. "In These Rotting Walls": Time, Remembering, and the Ghosts of the Industrial Revolution

"Ghosts are real. This much I know." (Crimson Peak)

What kind of story is the anthropocene? This question drives the numerous debates as to where to place the "golden spike" to mark its start—the beginning, after all, sets the tone for the rest of the tale. Crutzen and Stoermer argue the anthropocene began in "the latter part of the 18th century" (17) and so "coincides with James Watt's invention of the steam engine in 1784" (17-8), an invention that was one of the driving forces behind the Industrial Revolution. Other scholars have argued (and rightly so) for a golden spike that highlights the role of the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, global trade (Luciano; Lewis), or the Great Acceleration (Ahuja; Lewis). In *Anthropocene Reading,* Tobias Menely and Jesse Oak Taylor encapsulate this debate when they write, "the Anthropocene is not an easy story to tell" (4). Once the "golden spike" is found, will the right story simply fall into place? Or is there more to it? In "Past's futures, future's pasts," Jennifer Wenzel argues, "The Anthropocene demands new ways of thinking about time that make strange our understanding of pasts, presents, and futures" (502). This argument suggests it is not only the beginning—the "golden spike"—that presents a problem for the story of the anthropocene, it is the middle and the yet-to-come ending as well. Past, present, and future are tangled together, unable to be told as a linear narrative. The Gothic offers a language with which to access this tangled temporality: the language of haunting.

The anthropocene is a ghost story and *Crimson Peak* takes full advantage of that reality. Set in 1901, this film is about the violence of industrialization and the inherently unstable nature of the world built on that violence. This setting should not be taken as an argument in favour of the Industrial Revolution as the "golden spike." Rather, focusing this film on the aftermath of the

Industrial Revolution allows del Toro to engage with the haunting of that specific moment in anthropocene history—a haunting that affects those living directly in the aftermath, and the world today. Del Toro uses haunting to show that the unstable anthropocene world is one built on both exploited land and the bodies of exploited people and that the impacts of anthropogenic climate change cannot be properly dealt with without attention to the systemic violence that drove its progress.

1.1 The Anthropocene and the Industrial Revolution

Crimson Peak is set in England just after the Industrial Revolution, which spanned from approximately the late eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century and marked the transition to the factory system of production. Industrialization in England was achieved through exploitation of the most vulnerable members of society.[1] Wealthy industrialists and complacent aristocrats (both of which I will discuss in later sections) grew wealthier on the backs of workers labouring in largely un- or under-regulated factories for long hours in horrific conditions that led to the spread of disease and to death (Harrison 11). Menely and Taylor write of the 1784 anthropocene start-date, "this specificity coalesced a disparate set of causes and consequences into a widely recognizable act of technological innovation. In this version, the Anthropocene appears as a story of the unintended outcomes of human ingenuity, a Promethean tale" (3). However, the exploitative factory system that fueled industrialization means this story is not only a Promethean tale of the unintended consequences of technological innovation, but also a story of exploitation and violence. The idea that Capitalism is violent is not a new one—Karl Marx writes in *Capital* about "the stoical peace of mind with which the political economist regards […] the grossest acts of violence to persons, as soon as they are necessary to lay the foundations

[1] For detailed discussion of the exploitative labour practices that fueled industrialization see *Industry and Empire* by E. J. Hobsbawm and *A History of Factory Legislation* by Amy Harrison and B. Leigh Hutchins.

of the capitalistic mode of production" (751). That it is violent toward nature is, perhaps, just as obvious. Indeed, one need look no further than Jason W. Moore's argument for "Capitalocene" to replace "anthropocene" as the name of the epoch of anthropogenic climate change: "capitalism and its driving relations have indeed directed horrific violence towards human and extra-human life" (597). *Crimson Peak* takes this violence of industrialization and literalizes it into a story of murder and haunting. Indeed, violence literally funds the Sharpes' industrial project; Thomas and Lucille Sharpe murder women, steal their fortunes, and use that money to build a machine to extract red clay from the ground on which their estate is built. *Crimson Peak* uses the Industrial Revolution to tell a story not about technological innovation and unintended consequences, but about the destabilizing impact violent exploitation has on wealth gained through that violence.

1.2. "The House is Sinking"

The unstable wealth in *Crimson Peak* takes on the form of a haunted house. Haunted houses have been a central feature of the Gothic since its beginnings and Allerdale Hall—known as "Crimson Peak" due to the red clay in the ground that seeps up through the snow and stains the hillside red—certainly deserves the distinction of a central feature, having given the film its name. Allerdale Hall is the ancestral home of the Sharpes, though by the start of the film only Thomas and his sister, Lucille, remain. Their family fortune is gone—squandered by their father—and they can no longer afford to maintain the massive estate. The house itself is unmistakably reminiscent of many of its Gothic predecessors—Otranto, Udolpho, Thornfield, Wuthering Heights—simply by virtue of its imposing architecture and mysterious interior.[2]

[2] It is particularly reminiscent of Poe's decaying House of Usher from "The Fall of the House of Usher," not least because one of Allerdale Hall's secrets is the incestuous relationship between Thomas and Lucille—like the implied relationship between Roderick and Madeline Usher. Like the House of Usher, Allerdale Hall is falling to ruin both in terms of the physical structure of the house and in terms of the family line.

Undeniably the most noticeable aspect of the house is its decay. In the first shot of the interior of the house, as the camera pans up to capture a gaping hole in the ceiling high above the entranceway through which rain and snow pour in, Thomas says: "we try to maintain the house as best we can, but with the cold and the rain, it's impossible to stop the damp and erosion. And with the mines right below, well, the wood is rotting and the house is sinking" (*Crimson Peak*). He punctuates his sentence by pressing his foot into the floorboards. Scarlet clay, thick and red as blood, oozes up from between the cracks. The clay, a clear visual reminder that the house is sinking into the land, is omnipresent in the film. The water in clay-filled pipes runs red, cracked walls bleed scarlet in the background, and every shot of the entrance hall—the heart of the house—shows snow, rain, or dead leaves drifting in through the hole in the ceiling. The first and most obvious question is: what is causing the decay? Is it simply "the cold and the rain" as Thomas seems to think? If that is indeed the case, then why is the depot just down the road from Allerdale Hall, at which Edith and Thomas stay the night to escape a snowstorm, not crumbling away just the same? Why is the house falling apart? Why is it teeming with scarlet ghosts? To answer these questions, we must examine the house in the context of the Industrial Revolution. In *Women's Ghost Literature in Nineteenth-Century Britain,* Melissa Edmundson Makala writes,

> [T]he physical place of haunting is intimately tied to financial concerns: spectral trouble is the direct result of monetary trouble. Misdirected inheritances, missing wills, lack of money, stolen money, squandered money and miserliness all summon restless spirits. In ghost stories by women, these 'uncomfortable houses', as they were popularly called at the time, are troubled because of an injustice or social inequality that persists in leaving the past inhabitants continually seeking help from current owners of properties. (97)

Makala identifies injustice related to money as the central concern of the nineteenth century haunted house, and Allerdale Hall fits into this tradition of economic hauntings in multiple ways: the house is decaying because of "squandered money" (Makala 97), is being rebuilt by "stolen money" (Makala 97), and is home to "restless spirits" (Makala 97) who have been killed for their inheritances. The house's decay is intimately linked to the family's finances both practically (they cannot afford to maintain the estate) and metaphorically (their wealth is unstable because it is stolen). These links firmly tie Allerdale Hall to the economic concerns of early industrial capitalism.

1.3. "A Parasite with a Title": Thomas Sharpe as an Aristocratic Vampire

This economic model of haunting invites a closer examination of Thomas Sharpe. Thomas is a conflation of two separate Victorian gothic archetypes: the careless aristocrat and the cruel industrialist. As an aristocrat with a squandered fortune, he is able to use his position to raise capital as an industrialist and squander the fortunes (and lives) of others. When Edith calls baronets in general and Thomas Sharpe in specific "A parasite with a title" (*Crimson Peak*), she does not yet know how right she is. Late in the film, Edith discovers that Thomas has had three previous wives, all of whom have been poisoned after signing over their fortunes to the Sharpes. Thomas and Lucille use up the resources of the land and the multiple women Thomas has married, indiscriminately. They have taken three fortunes from Thomas's previous wives before the film even begins, so clearly they are continuing to squander resources, like parasites using up one host then moving on to the next. In fact, throughout the film, both Thomas and Lucille resemble nothing so much as vampires. In one early scene Thomas even wears circular black glasses, a visual link to Gary Oldman's portrayal of the titular character in Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Vampires are parasitic creatures that

feed on the blood of their victims until the victim is drained and the vampire moves on to the next host. But Thomas in particular is not linked to just any type of literary vampire. Rather, with his dark hair and brooding demeanor, Thomas follows the tradition of Byronic heroes that encompasses characters like Charlotte Brontë's Mr. Rochester, Emily Brontë's Heathcliff and, most significantly, John Polidori's Lord Ruthven. Lord Ruthven, the literary figure who predates *Dracula,* is both the origin for the aristocratic gothic vampire archetype and a thinly veiled allusion to Lord Byron. Thomas' links to Byronic heroes and his links to vampirism are, therefore, one and the same as both threads converge on Lord Byron himself. These links that tie Thomas to the specific type of aristocratic vampire inspired by Lord Byron, when paired with dialogue calling baronets "parasites," suggests then that it is aristocrats who are vampiric. Del Toro evokes this tradition of vampire fiction in order to imply that Thomas and his sister treat life as disposable and, by extension, that aristocrats treat the poor as disposable.

This disregard for life takes different albeit related forms in Thomas and Lucille. Lucille, who is actually murdering all the women, says of the dead women, they had "[n]o living relatives. No one ever looked for them. Mercy killings, really" (*Crimson Peak*). To Lucille, they are weak, vulnerable, alone and, therefore, exploitable; their deaths are a "mercy" because, to Lucille, their lives are meaningless. In *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialisms and the New Logics of Life,* Amanda Jo Goldstein writes about the violence inherent in creating a hierarchy of life in which some things (for example, humans) are considered "more alive" than others (for example, animals): "when medical science judges specific forms of life to be less alive, it helps to render their deaths less reprehensible" (146). Lucille establishes such a hierarchy when she and Edith examine butterflies fluttering their wings helplessly on the ground beneath a tree.

Lucille says, “It’s a savage world of things dying or eating each other beneath our feet” (*Crimson Peak*), and when Edith protests, the following exchange occurs:

> [Lucille] “Beautiful things are fragile. At home, we have only black moths. Formidable creatures, to be sure, but they lack beauty. They thrive on the dark and the cold.”
>
> [Edith] “What do they feed on?”
>
> [Lucille] “Butterflies, I’m afraid.” (*Crimson Peak*)

I am sure the hole in Lucille’s logic here is obvious: if butterflies do not live at Allerdale Hall, and moths feed on butterflies, what do the moths eat? Lucille’s mistake here is illustrative of her thinking. To her, the most alive things at Allerdale Hall are the predatory moths, not their butterfly prey. To her, the butterflies exist to be eaten and are not, therefore, alive in their own right. In this scene, Edith and Lucille are dressed like the butterfly and the moth, respectively. Lucille and Thomas, the moths, see Edith, the butterfly, as existing only to be consumed in order for them to survive. Lucille seems to think that, because she can kill the women in order to survive, it is only natural for her to do so. The food chain that puts moths above butterflies also puts her, the aristocratic vampire, above Edith, her prey.

Hobsbawm’s analysis of English aristocrats during the industrial revolution offers some insight into Thomas’ particular form of aristocratic vampirism:

> [T]hose classes whose lives were least transformed [by the Industrial Revolution] were also, normally, those which benefited most obviously in material terms […] Nobody is more complacent than a well-off or successful man who is also at ease in a world which seems to have been constructed precisely with persons like him in mind. The British aristocracy and gentry were thus very little affected by industrialization, except for the better. (Hobsbawm 58)

Thomas and Lucille embody the complacency of the aristocracy and their indifference to the suffering caused by industrialization because they are benefiting from it. Early in the film, Thomas reveals this complacency when he says to Edith, "I've always closed my eyes to things that made me uncomfortable. It makes everything easier" (*Crimson Peak*). Thomas is unwilling to "get [his] hands dirty" (*Crimson Peak*) and kill the women himself. Instead, he allows Lucille to dispatch first their mother, then each of his brides, and is happy to benefit from this violence while simultaneously pretending it is not happening. Thomas seduces these women, uses their money to fund his mining enterprise, and hides their bodies in his clay pits, but he acts as though he is not involved in Lucille's murders. His mine is literally built on top of their bodies; his machine is made of exploitation. Though he may attempt to distinguish his behaviour from Lucille's, and the film teases the possibility of redemption, Thomas' death at the hands of his fellow "vampire" whom he cannot control ultimately shows that he is no less culpable for the evil he allows to fester while he does nothing.

1.4. "That Infernal Machine": Thomas Sharpe as Industrial Exploiter

As I mentioned earlier, Thomas Sharpe is not only an aristocrat, but he is also an industrialist. Throughout the film, he tries to procure funding for a machine that will extract red clay from the ground at Crimson Peak. As a result of this mining, and whatever previous methods were used to extract clay, the house is slowly falling into its own foundations, collapsing into the mines below. Thomas says early in the film that the Sharpe mines have been operating since 1796, the height of the Industrial Revolution, over a hundred years before the main action of the film. In these hundred years the mining has caused parts of the house to collapse entirely, the foundations to be rendered unstable, and the family wealth to be stripped away to nothing. Thomas himself admits "excessive mining in the last 20 years has caused most

of our old deposits to collapse" (*Crimson Peak*). Despite this admission, Thomas still thinks he can regain his family's wealth by extracting the clay more efficiently through use of a machine of his own design. This machine is built using Edith's money early in the film. It stands mere steps from the threshold of the Allerdale Hall, surrounded by ruins (presumably wings of the house that have decayed completely) and digs clay out from directly underneath the house's foundations. When Edith does finally venture into these foundations she finds not so much a mine, but a factory where the parts of the machine that are invisible from the surface drag clay up from ground, tearing open the foundations. Ironically, the red clay Thomas is mining is meant to be used to "produce the strongest bricks and tiles" (*Crimson Peak*). The house itself is made of these red-clay bricks—the scarlet tint is visible in several of the exterior shots of the house—and yet it is still falling apart because of the unstable foundations. The house is collapsing as Thomas tries to build bricks. This irony is linked to his role as both aristocrat and industrialist—he is trying to maintain his aristocratic title with which he can exploit the wealth of industrialization by also engaging in the new factory system of exploitation.

From the start of the film, Thomas is incapable of seeing that the house's collapse is a direct result of his mining operation. As he tells Edith, he believes it is "impossible to stop the damp and erosion" (*Crimson Peak*); it never occurs to him to stop mining beneath its foundations despite the collapse of the old clay deposits. The story of the machine destabilizing the house and the story of the murdered women at first appear to be separate entities in the narrative. However, the detail that Thomas owns a clay mine, as opposed to the more natural choice of a coal mine given the setting, links the vampiric aristocratic story of murder to the exploitative industrial story through the Biblical association between clay and the body. This image is persistent throughout the King James Bible. *Genesis* 3:19 reads: "thou return unto the ground; for out of it

wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,"; *Isaiah* 64:8 reads: "we are the clay"; and *Job* 10:9 reads: "thou hast made me as the clay." The land around Allerdale Hall seems to bleed red, the clay pit looks like an enormous open wound, and dead bodies are buried in the clay. Indeed, in the final scene, the clay in the snow mixes with Edith and Lucille's blood, until it is impossible to tell what is clay and what is blood. Red clay is not only a metaphor for bleeding land, but it is also the literal blood of the exploited women. In his essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses," Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that "anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history" (201). In *Crimson Peak* the artificial boundaries between natural and human history break down as blood and red clay become indistinguishable. The violent deaths of the women in *Crimson Peak* become inextricably linked to the over-mining of the land: deaths fund the violent exploitation of the land, which makes the house sink further, which in turn begets further violent deaths. Thomas Sharpe embodies the idea that environmental and infrastructure decay is impossible to stop as long as the capitalist system (a descendant of the industrial factory system) churns on, digging the metaphorical foundations out from under the present. And what he is left with is what Anna Tsing refers to as "the capitalist ruin."

1.5. "The House Breathes": Allerdale Hall as a Capitalist Ruin

In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Tsing discusses not only the decay caused by capitalist exploitation (like the destabilization discussed above) but also the way that decay gives rise to new forms of life. She writes,

> Global landscapes today are strewn with […] ruin. Still, these places can be lively despite announcements of their death; abandoned asset fields sometimes yield new multispecies

> and multicultural life. In a global state of precarity, we don't have choices other than looking for life in this ruin. (6)

This analysis of contemporary capitalist decay offers a way to look at Allerdale Hall as itself a site of capitalist (or, at least, industrial) decay. The industrial decay of Allerdale Hall is what happens when industrial violence is married to the central Gothic feature of the haunted house. The house sinks into over-mined, exploited land, its foundations rendered unstable by that exploitation. But the house is not dead. Allerdale Hall is both itself alive and teaming with life. Even as it sinks, it rots. Lucille says, "All that lives in this house are shadows and creaks and groans" (*Crimson Peak*), as though that dismisses the possibility of life. Shadows, creaks, and groans, however, are all signs of liveliness, hints that the house is more than a dead thing on dead land. The flies that crawl across every open surface are alive, as are the moths that flutter on crumbling walls. Even the very walls of the house are alive with the rot that is causing it to decay, and Thomas tells Edith, "When it [the east wind] picks up, the chimneys form a vacuum, and with the windows all shuttered up the house—Well, the house breathes" (*Crimson Peak*). Just as Anna Tsing says that new forms of life spring forth in places of decay, the house is coming alive in the decay; it is a monstrous new form of life to be sure, but life nonetheless.

In a chapter of *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* titled "Haunted Geologies," Nils Bubandt writes about Lusi, a mud volcano in Java, as a case study of the complex entwinements of the anthropocene. Bubandt writes,

> Like Fukushima, Bhopal, Chernobyl, and other contemporary disasters where the forces of nature and human politics act to exacerbate each other, Lusi is the name for a monstrous geography haunted by the natural as well as the unnatural. […] On the mudflats of East Java, the realms of geology, politics, industry, divination, lawsuits,

> spiritual revenge, and corruption are inextricably entangled in each other. Indeed, the inability to separate one from the other—nature from politics, geothermal activity from industrial activity, human corruption from spiritual revenge—is a constituent part of the volcano's necropolitics. (124)

A similar inseparability is key to the necropolitics of *Crimson Peak*. Bubandt defines "necropolitics of the Anthropocene" (124) as the state in which "humans, animals, plants, fungi, and bacteria now live and die under conditions that may have been critically shaped by human activity but that are also outside of human control" (124). As I mentioned earlier, the history of the house, the mines, the land, the murdered women, are all hopelessly entangled in the chaos of the house's monstrous new life. Not only is the physical separation of the house and the land beginning to dissolve as the house sinks into the mines; so too is the house increasingly unable to delineate the human-versus-nature space as its walls rot and allow in the elements and insect life. The more the house decays, the more the decay itself is the most lively thing inside it.

1.6. "Ghosts are Real"

When a vampire bites someone and drains their blood, they die—but they do not remain dead. A vampire's victims awake to a new form of life as vampires themselves. Thomas Sharpe's victims do not follow this precise trajectory, but nor do they remain buried in the clay pits beneath the house where he hides their bodies. The state of the ghosts in *Crimson Peak* matches the state of the corresponding bodies: scarlet with clay, some with caved-in skulls, one with a cleaver in her head. As the bodies decay, the ghosts decay too. Because of this affinity between body and ghost, Thomas and Lucille's attempt to hide the bodies by burying them in the red clay is the very thing that makes them return with such bloody aspects; the past cannot be buried, because the very act of trying to hide it shows in scarlet its entwinement with the present.

The ghosts drag themselves up from the pits like the clay oozing through the floorboards or pouring out through the pipes.

In the introduction to *The Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, Elaine Gan, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, and Nils Bubandt write, “the winds of the Anthropocene carry ghosts” (G1). These ghosts, they go on to explain, are the remnants of dead ecosystems, species, and landscapes—“the traces of more-than human histories through which ecologies are made and unmade” (G1). These ghosts represent the importance of memory in the labour of understanding the anthropocene. Gan et. al. argue that attention to ghosts “will allow us to stand up to the constant barrage of messages asking us to forget—that is, to allow a few private owners and public officials with their eyes focused on short-term gains to pretend that environmental devastation does not exist” (G1). Because of this strong link between ghosts and memory, the Gothic offers a way to represent the layered and fragmented history of environmental devastation, as well as a way to reassemble that history. As Cohen writes, in *Monster Theory*,

> The monster commands, "Remember me": restore my fragmented body, piece me back together, allow the past its eternal return. The monster haunts; it does not simply bring past and present together, but destroys the boundary that demanded their twinned foreclosure. (“Preface” ix-x)

Cohen’s reference to the “fragmented body” of the monster that must be reassembled speaks to another important gothic resonance in *Crimson Peak*, and that is the fairy tale “Bluebeard.” *Crimson Peak* is a Bluebeard Tale, a fairy tale type named after the Charles Perrault story. These tales share certain elements such as a woman marrying a mysterious husband and a forbidden room revealed to be full of the bodies of murdered women (Pyrhönen 3). As Heta Pyrhönen argues in her book *The Bluebeard Gothic*, this family of fairy tales already bears a strong

connection to early gothic fiction, particularly to *Jane Eyre* (5), which is an acknowledged source of inspiration for *Crimson Peak* (Salvesen 146). Furthermore, del Toro's relationship to fairy tales has been well established since his 2006 film *El laberinto del fauno* (*Pan's Labyrinth*, in English).

Like these tales, *Crimson Peak* tells the story of the final woman in a string of murdered brides who attempts to piece together the history (and sometimes literally the bodies) of the women who came before her and who, in doing so, is able to escape. Throughout the film, Edith discovers objects left behind by the women who came before her: suitcases piled in the basement, photographs, a wheelchair, and even one woman's dog. All of these pieces come together when Edith finds Pamela Upton's wax cylinder recordings and listens to the voices of the dead. The past—represented not only by the ghosts, but by the objects the women left behind—tell the story of Edith's future. It is not until she can assemble the fragments—like the woman in the Brothers Grimm's Bluebeard Tale, "Fitcher's Bird," sewing disarticulated bodies back together—that she can truly come to terms with what will happen to her if she stays. Anne Williams argues that, in Bluebeard tales, the house is an agent of patriarchal control:

> A house makes secrets in merely being itself, for its function is to enclose spaces. And the larger, older, and more complex the structure becomes, the more likely it is to have secret or forgotten rooms. Moreover, given the premises and history of patriarchy, such rooms contain the most appropriate possible secret—the bloody bodies of murdered wives that represent the 'truth' around which the patriarchy is organized. (44)

The forbidden room in *Crimson Peak* is the clay pits below the house. Thomas tells Edith "never ever go below this level" (*Crimson Peak*) and, when she inevitably does, she finds not only the clay pits that hold the bodies of the murdered women, but also their belongings in suitcases, piled

by the pipes churning out blood-red clay. By aligning *Crimson Peak* with the tradition of Bluebeard tales the factory floor of the clay pits also becomes the "bloody chamber" (the room of dismembered bodies) that holds the secrets of the house and its master, and the room that represents patriarchal control.

This entwinement of industrial and gendered violence can be understood through the ecofeminist work of Carolyn Merchant. In *Science and Nature: Past, Present, and Future*, Merchant argues that the violence of Capitalism is gendered: "Historically, nature and the female have been conflated, and cultural ideology has legitimated the domination of both" (50). While *Crimson Peak* does not replicate this conflation, it does dramatize the entwined nature of industrial capitalism's violence against nature and violence against women. Just as the clay mine being used to bury bodies breaks down the distinction between natural and human history, the factory floor's conflation with the "bloody chamber" breaks down the separation of industrial and gendered violence. In the clay pits beneath Allerdale Hall these histories collide, and just as the protagonist in a Bluebeard tale cannot escape destruction without first understanding the suffering of those who came before her, the anthropocene story cannot be told without attention to its complex origins in violence and exploitation.

1.7. "From out of Time"

Cohen writes, "The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" ("Monster Culture" 4). *Crimson Peak* is set in 1901 and was made in 2015, so what "time" do these ghosts embody? The aftermath of the Industrial Revolution? Or the edge of the climate-change apocalypse? In a footnote to this earlier statement, Cohen clarifies what he means by "a time, a feeling, and a place":

> Literally, here, Zeitgeist: Time Ghost, the bodiless spirit that uncannily incorporates a "place" that is a series of places, the crossroads that is a point in a movement toward an uncertain elsewhere. Bury the Zeitgeist by the crossroads: it is confused as it awakens, it is not going anywhere, it intersects everyplace; all roads lead back to the monster. ("Monster Culture" 21n1)

The zeitgeist (commonly translated as "the spirit of the age" but literally translating as "time ghost") here means the aggregate of all the things that have existed in a place throughout time. If the zeitgeist of a certain place multiplies across time, and its monsters aggregate, then monsters haunt the land ("Monster Culture" 21n1). The spirit of the age, which here means the monsters that emerge at a particular time and place, does not disappear with the creation of new monsters. So, if monsters accumulate over time, never truly disappearing in the wake of new monsters, the ghosts of *Crimson Peak* are monsters that embody both Edith's 1901 and del Toro's 2015. Del Toro's 2001 film *El espinazo del diablo* (*The Devil's Backbone*, in English) begins, "What is a ghost? A tragedy condemned to repeat itself time and again? An instant of pain, perhaps. Something dead which still seems to be alive. An emotion suspended in time. Like a blurred photograph. Like an insect trapped in amber" (*The Devil's Backbone*). Ghosts in both this definition and in *Crimson Peak*—which is aesthetically similar to *The Devil's Backbone*—trouble linear time; they "repeat," they are "suspended;" "an instant" captured forever.

The first ghost in *Crimson Peak*, the ghost of Edith's mother, appears to her before she leaves America to offer what Edith calls "A warning from out of time" (*Crimson Peak*): "When the time comes, beware of Crimson Peak" (*Crimson Peak*). It is not a coincidence that, in the moments before we see the ghost for the first time, her shadow falls over the clock in the hallway, obscuring the time on it. This ghost embodies not only past and present, but future as

well. In a similar way, through the wax cylinder recordings made by Pamela Upton, Edith hears the voices of the past predicting her own future. “The poison is in the tea,” Pamela’s voice rasps from out of time and begins to cough at the same time Edith coughs blood into her handkerchief. Like Edith’s mother’s ghost, Pamela’s recording offers Edith “a warning from out of time” (*Crimson Peak*), a chance to understand what is happening now, and what will have happened, from the images of the past that will not be suppressed. In “The Catachronism of Climate Change,” Srinivas Aravamudan writes

> [C]atachronism re-characterizes the past and the present in terms of a future proclaimed as determinate but that is of course not yet fully realized. To that extent, catachronism cannot function without the operational assumptions of a theological grasp of time, whereby anticipation, belief, and application on the present are integrated as inexorably leading to a known and inevitable outcome. (8)

In other words, the anthropocene requires the present to be imagined retroactively from an imagined future. From this vantage point, the present is the past, and all times before and after collide in the same physical space. Thomas says of Allerdale Hall, “the house is hundreds of years old. I’d venture many souls have come and gone” (*Crimson Peak*). And, indeed, there are many ghosts at Crimson Peak. Many have died at Allerdale Hall but, contrary to what Thomas thinks, they have not gone. Rather, those trapped in the rotting house linger, like impressions on silver plates or sound recorded on wax cylinders. Ghosts are not “just a metaphor for the past”—ghosts are the past, still lingering out of time.

At the beginning of the film, Edith expresses anxiety about the frivolousness of ghost stories, anxiety many scholars concerned with the seriousness of anthropogenic climate change may share. Indeed, the Gothic still seems to fall into the category of what Ghosh calls “generic

outhouses" (24)—genres not able to be taken seriously. At first, Edith defends the seriousness of her story by denouncing its ghosts. She says "it's not [a ghost story]. It's more a story with a ghost in it. The ghost is just a metaphor, for the past" (*Crimson Peak*). But as she arrives at Allerdale Hall she is confronted with ghosts more material than metaphor, though certainly they are comprised of both. Denying the ghosts of the anthropocene can only result in those ghosts surprising us as they crawl up through the floorboards, refusing to remain buried.

1.8. Conclusion: "They Never Go Away"

> Ghosts are real. This much I know. There are things that tie them to a place, very much like they do us. Some remain tethered to a patch of land, a time and date, the spilling of blood, a terrible crime. But there are others – others that hold on to an emotion, a drive, loss, revenge… or love. Those – They never go away. (*Crimson Peak*)

When Edith suggests that she and Thomas leave Allerdale Hall, Thomas replies "[the house] is a privilege we [the Sharpes] were born into, and one we can never relinquish" (*Crimson Peak*). This speech is reminiscent of Carl Sagan's famous "Pale Blue Dot" speech, recorded in a book of the same name: "The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. […] Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand" (16). Cli-fi print media and films that offer only a vision of Earth's complete destruction or escape amongst the stars fail to capture the reality of the anthropocene. The current epoch is more than a wasteland devoid of life; rather, it is a house rotting into its foundations, teaming with the unquiet dead upon whose bodies this crumbling estate has been built, coming alive in the decay. When learning to live in the anthropocene, we must remember we live in a haunted house, and the walls are rotting. The gendered violence of industrial exploitation and murder haunt Allerdale Hall, the violence to the land and to women

are tightly entwined in the clay-covered ghosts. I began this section with the final speech in *Crimson Peak*, a speech that ends with a promise: “they never go away” (*Crimson Peak*). The cycle of murdered brides has finished, the machine has stopped, but the history cannot be undone, the house cannot be relinquished, the ghosts cannot be banished. In the next chapter, I will examine a story of the complex entanglements that emerge when living with these un-banishable monsters “in these rotting walls” (*Crimson Peak*).

Chapter 2. "It's Not Even Human": Fairy Tales, Vivisection, and the Monsters of the Nuclear Age

"Oh God, it's not even human."

"If we do nothing, neither are we." (The Shape of Water)

Early in the 2017 film *The Shape of Water*, Elisa Esposito pulls a page off her calendar; on the back is the phrase "time is but a river flowing from our past" (*The Shape of Water*). The time of the anthropocene flows on from its murky beginnings into what is known as the "Great Acceleration." Menely and Taylor in *Anthropocene Reading* describe "the recommendation made to the International Geological Congress in August 2016, […] that the Great Acceleration replace the Industrial Revolution as the most compelling lower boundary for the Anthropocene" (6). This recommendation came about due to the "clear layer of radiocarbon in the rock strata" (Menely 6) left there by the first nuclear bomb test in 1945. However, like the previous chapter about the Industrial Revolution, it is not relevant to my argument whether the Great Acceleration is the definitive start of the anthropocene (geologically speaking, the difference between the eighteenth century and the mid-twentieth century is negligible at best anyway), since del Toro is not attempting to capture the entire anthropocene in a single story. All that need be true is that the rapid increase in population, energy consumption, motor vehicle ownership, plastic manufacturing, and Cold War nuclear testing of the Great Acceleration (McNeill 4) are significant factors in the flow of the anthropocene narrative through the twentieth century. The anthropocene has a strange temporality that, in *Crimson Peak,* is shown as a haunting. *The Shape of Water* imagines this strange temporality as a river, flowing from the past and carrying with it the horrors of nineteenth century scientific experimentation, and ideas about what makes a monster. In this chapter I argue that del Toro uses the Gothic to show that the "progress" of the

Great Acceleration is uncomfortably companionate with violence, and to break down this narrative of progress into one of transformation in which strange kinship emerges in places neither intended nor imagined by those in power.

2.1. The Space Race and the Fairy Tale of the Future

In an interview about *The Shape of Water*, del Toro spoke about why he set *The Shape of Water* in 1962:

> [19]'62 is once upon a time in America, the fairy tale time in America. Kennedy's in the white house, the Space Race is on, after the war there's an economic boom, everybody has jet fin cars, automatic kitchens, tv in every room, suburban houses—it's great if you're a WASP. If you're a minority, it's not great at all. ("Why is…")

In this comment, del Toro is referring to the way this era is viewed retrospectively rather than the fraught political time it actually was. *The Shape of Water* exists in a strange sort of temporality that Wenzel calls "past's future": "visions of the future imagined in the past, how people in the past imagined the future would be. Past's futures are entanglements of anticipation and retrospection: they are anticipatory visions in the past, viewed retrospectively in the present" (503). *The Shape of Water*, set in 1962, 55 years prior to the year in which it was made, is an exercise in "past's future," imagining how the people of 1962 envisioned the future, and how that vision bears on their present. Furthermore, Wenzel argues that the "past's future" of the anthropocene demands a reworking of the understanding of the "changes yet-to-come" (503) of actions already done. Even as the characters in *The Shape of Water* are imagining a future that is never to come, they are surrounded by the groundwork of "changes yet-to-come" in the form of nuclear ambitions. The present colours the view of the past so, when imagined retroactively, the 1960s emerge as not a time of apocalyptic world-ending, but of technological progress. For

example, the Cuban Missile Crisis took place in 1962, the year the film is set in, and is never mentioned, but the Space Race is central to the plot.

The Space Race is the name given to the race between the United States of America and the Soviet Union to perfect "human spaceflight technology" and land a man on the moon (Conway 4). In the film, the American government has captured an amphibian creature in order to study his respiratory system—a system which allows him to pressurize his chest cavity and breathe both in the water and on land—in the hopes that this system holds the secrets to creating a breathing apparatus to "put a man into space" (*The Shape of Water*). [3] In "Land, Wood, Water, and Space," Jessica M. Hayden et. al. argue that the rationale for the Space Race involved both national security concerns (as I will deal with in Chapter Three when I discuss climate "catastrophizing" discourse and national security rhetoric) and the propagandic purpose of positioning the United States as "a leader to free nations around the globe […] that […] shared modern scientific knowledge with the world" (Hayden 1196). Donald W. Cox, in the 1962 book titled *The Space Race,* writes in a chapter titled "Who's Ahead in the Space Race?" about the USA's "many propaganda defeats in space" (105) at the hands of the USSR, underscoring the importance of the Space Race to the military conflict of the Cold War despite then-President Kennedy's insistence "on the need to keep the civilian and military aspects of space separated" (103). Cox writes about the Space Race as an effort "in swaying the uncommitted peoples of the world to our [the USA's] side of the Iron Curtain" (105), and this swaying was to happen by means of showing the world whose technology is the most "advanced" (106). Cox shows an intense concern for the future memory of the 1960s when he writes "only future historians will

[3] The amphibian man has no name in the film, so I will be referring to him as "the creature" in line with scholarship on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* referring to Victor Frankenstein's creation as "the creature" rather than "the monster," and while there are inherent problems in using a gendered pronoun to refer to the creature, I will use the pronoun "him" because that is how the creature is gendered by all of the characters in the film.

be able to assess adequately the damage that has been wrought to our nation as a result of our running second in the space race" (107). Furthermore, he quotes Arthur Clarke (a science fiction novelist Cox refers to as a "space philosopher") on the impact of USA and USSR space exploration television coverage: "it may well determine *whether Russian or English is the main language of the future*" (qtd. in Cox 111, emphasis original). This contemporary source shows that the Space Race was intimately tied to Cold War propaganda and the conflict over determining the nature of the future. The idealized future promised by the Space Race, though, is only accessible to those at the top of multiple structures of power.

2.2. Power and Violence

In the same interview in which he calls '62 "once upon a time in America," del Toro also remarks, "the conditions in '62 are not only identical to [the] conditions now—Cold War, casual racism, sexism, misogyny—everything, it was very active back then that is active now" ("Why is…"). Del Toro points out that the nostalgia for the 60s belongs to a certain demographic of people (the WASP) for whom this era was a fairy tale time when imagined retroactively. It is for the WASPs that the future is being built and it is they who will benefit. Indeed, the race toward the future—represented in the film by technological "progress"—preoccupies the film's primary antagonist, Strickland, who is a WASP. He and his family exemplify this ideal version of the American nuclear family: white, middle-aged, middle-class, with a wife who stays at home, and two children—a boy and a girl. In fact, they are the real-life version of a fictional happy family that Giles, Elisa's neighbour, is attempting to replicate in a Jello advertisement he's painting for the first half of the film.[4] Early in the film, Strickland's young son mentions burying a time

[4] This advertisement is painted in a style reminiscent of the artist Norman Rockwell who is known as "the quintessential painter of American life. His images reflect the history of America as told through the eyes of this idealistic and patriotic artist who sought to show America at its best" (Johnson 23).

capsule at school and asks, “Do you think we’ll all have jetpacks in the future?” (*The Shape of Water*). Strickland answers, “Believe it, son. This is America” (*The Shape of Water*), promising the future to his son who has inherited and will continue to inherit his father’s privilege. This future relates to personal technology—jetpacks—which can be bought and owned. Just as the family in the Jello advertisement is portrayed as happy because they represent a tacit promise that buying Jello will help them to achieve the ideal life, Strickland’s happiness is predicated on consumption. In a moment of what should be familial bliss, Strickland frowns and says out loud “I need a new car” (*The Shape of Water*). Despite having achieved the ideal state for middle America in the 1960s, he still needs more, just like Giles’ art is never enough for the advertising company: “The family needs to be happier” (*The Shape of Water*), as the man who hired Giles says. Later, when Strickland is buying his new car the salesman says,

> [Salesman] “This here is the future. And you strike me as a man who is headed there.”
>
> [Strickland] “Where?”
>
> [Salesman] “Why, the future. You’re the man of the future. You belong in this car.”
>
> (*The Shape of Water*)

Strickland is literally being sold the technological future—a future related to the fairy tale of technological progress, to capitalism, and to the ideal nuclear family—and he buys it. The film cuts to Strickland driving the car down the highway, ostensibly driving toward the future he, with his Space Race ambitions, is trying to build. This future, however, is not so bright and stable as Strickland thinks. The present built on the exploitative past is an unstable present—and the film soon shows the exploitation that enables Strickland’s idyllic suburban life.

As I argued in the previous chapter when discussing Lucille Sharpe and the butterflies at Allerdale Hall, it is easier to justify exploiting those that one does not consider fully alive. *The*

Shape of Water takes up this argument and shows how dehumanization is used to justify domination and exploitation. Strickland represents multiple forms of violent domination. He is overtly sadistic, seemingly torturing the creature simply because he can. He is a sexual predator who assaults his wife and Elisa. He is a colonizer, having violently suppressed the indigenous people in South America who tried to stop him from drilling for oil and from taking the creature. He is a racist, treating Zelda and her husband as beneath his notice. He is ableist, treating Elisa's muteness as a sign of submissiveness. In every scene, he attempts to show his power over whoever is nearby with behaviour that ranges from microaggressions to physical violence. Locating these multiple forms of power in a single individual does not go so far as to conflate them; Strickland has different relationships to each character, just as the multiple histories of power and violence that go into these relationships are unique and complex. Furthermore, I do not suggest these forms of violence are equal or comparable, but rather that the film shows the ways in which multiple forms of violence are supported by similar societal structures (gendered, racialized, and economic, among others) that put Strickland—the archetypal WASP—in power over every other character. While various forms of violence are referenced in the film, the focus is on two: slow violence toward the environment, and vivisection.

2.3. "An intricate, beautiful thing": Making Monsters

In the film, rhetoric of domination is couched in purifying and moralizing terms. Strickland describes the creature first as dirty—"I dragged it—filthy thing—out of the river muck in South America, all the way here" (*The Shape of Water*)—then as unholy—"Ugly as sin" (*The Shape of Water*). The religious overtones of Strickland's cruelty toward the creature come to the fore in the scene during which he explains to Elisa and Zelda how he feels about the creature:

> [Strickland] "The thing we keep in there [the lab] is an affront. […] You may think that thing looks human. Stands on two legs, right? But, we're created in the Lord's image. You don't think that's what the Lord looks like, do you?"
>
> [Zelda] "I wouldn't know, sir, what the Lord looks like."
>
> [Strickland] "Well, it's human, Zelda. He looks like a human, like me. Or even you. Maybe a little more like me, I guess." (*The Shape of Water*)

Strickland shifts from differentiating those in the room (humans) from the creature (non-humans) to differentiating himself (a white man) from Zelda (a black woman) using the same terms—i.e., who looks more like his mental image of the Christian God. This shift exemplifies the way the film defines monstrosity: anything outside what Youngquist refers to as "proper embodiment." This "proper embodiment"—looking like the white American depiction of the Christian God—defines the human. In this logic, all others are inhuman. The other is thus constructed as monstrous. Strickland calls the creature an "affront" (*The Shape of Water*), which Zelda defines as "something offensive" (*The Shape of Water*). The "properly bodied" characters—Strickland and his assistant, as well as the man who works at the advertising company and the man who runs the pie shop Elisa and Giles frequent—attempt to police the people they find offensive through moralizing. Strickland's assistant and the advertising executive police the language of others by saying things like, "no need to blaspheme" (*The Shape of Water*). Strickland says, "the world is sinful" (*The Shape of Water*) when referring to Elisa's disability, implying that he sees her (and, potentially, also his own sexual desire for her) as impure. The man running the pie shop ejects first a black family, and then Giles (a gay man) from his establishment with the statement "this is a family restaurant" (*The Shape of Water*).

These attempts to purify or correct monstrosities also mirror the scientific rhetoric of domination over nature that Carolyn Merchant identifies in *The Death of Nature.* Merchant argues that Francis Bacon's writings on nature and science calcified the idea that nature should be controlled and violently investigated by humans. Merchant writes that, to Bacon "Nature existed in three states—at liberty, in error, or in bondage […] The second state was necessary to explain […] monstrosities […] The third instance was […] constraint of nature in the laboratory, dissection by hand and mind, and the penetration of hidden secrets" (*Death of* 170-1). This mode of thinking—the background of the modern experimental method—suggests that monstrosities (like the creature) are an error of nature "that could not have been caused by God" (*Death of* 170), and that in being controlled and dissected, these monstrosities and nature itself can (and should) be brought under human dominion.

2.4. Slow Violence

This exploitation is what anthropocene scholar Rob Nixon calls "slow violence." Slow violence is "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2). There is perhaps no better way to encapsulate slow violence then the persistent release of radioactive chemicals into the land and water for "time out of mind" (indeed, Nixon himself uses "radioactive aftermath of wars" [2] as an example of slow violence). Like the Industrial Revolution, the Cold War nuclear tests result not only in the poisoning of land, but in the poisoning of people. McNeill and Engelke write, "[T]he nuclear weapons programs of the Cold War probably killed a few hundred thousand people, at most a few million, slowly and indirectly, via fatal cancers caused by radioactivity releases" (167). While this destruction is global in scale, it is also important to note that specific marginalized communities have felt and

will feel the effects of this "indifference" more acutely than others. Just as the Industrial Revolution fell hardest on vulnerable populations with little to no political sway, so too did the Cold War: "toxic waste dumps and power plants, for example, were placed in poor minority communities much more often than in wealthier ones" (McNeil 193). While nuclear waste and nuclear weapons are never explicitly discussed in the film, they are omnipresent in the setting—a nuclear research facility—most notably in a scene when Elisa and Zelda are cleaning under an enormous missile in an empty bunker. It is not an accident that the main characters are janitors and that they are both also from marginalized populations; they are left to clean up after those reaching for the "progress" they are left out of.

Nuclear technology was harnessed not only for weapons manufacturing (military "power") but also for energy (electrical "power"). Indeed, as Kate Brown writes in *The Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, "Promoting nuclear power's benefits for science, medicine, and technology became the chief vehicle for purification of the image of the United States as a nation bent on reducing the globe to an irradiated ruin" (Brown G38). In this narrative, scientific "progress" is painted as an intrinsic good, as the opposite of the violence of nuclear weapons, just like the Space Race. However, science is profoundly ambivalent in *The Shape of Water*, and "progress" and "violence" are uncomfortably companionate. Even something as seemingly innocuous as Strickland's new car takes on a dark connotation if we recall that the Americans found the creature while they were drilling for oil. According to McNeill, "suburbanization, [was] the ultimate expression of American postwar prosperity" (186). In order to appear prosperous, Strickland moves to the suburbs, which increases his need for a car, which increases his need for oil, which leads to destructive oil drilling in the Amazon. Prosperity—particularly prosperity for middle-class white able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual men—is gained at the cost

of theft and exploitation. Just as Thomas Sharpe's estate is built on the bodies of murdered women using their stolen money, Strickland's suburban life is built on colonial violence using stolen oil.

2.5. "Vivisect this thing": Gothic Science

The implied slow violence is underscored by more immediate violence when Strickland—frustrated when scans of the creature's chest are not yielding enough information—says "we need to *vivisect* this thing" (*The Shape of Water*, emphasis added). Vivisection, like dissection, involves performing operations on animals for the purposes of scientific research. Unlike dissection, however, vivisection is performed on live subjects. Vivisection was relatively common during the Victorian Era and has been incredibly controversial from its beginnings. The introduction to an 1876 report from the royal commission on vivisection mentions, "the intense feeling of pain and disgust which prevails throughout the country wherever the horrid details of the practice of Vivisection are fully known" (Shaw 3). Vivisection is a central feature of many Gothic scientific novels of the nineteenth century, perhaps most famously *The Island of Dr. Moreau* by H.G. Wells, but why include it in this film set in 1962 when vivisection was no longer considered medically or scientifically useful? In the nineteenth century, vivisection came to represent for some the worst parts of the scientific worldview. Mason Harris writes that Frances Power Cobbe (a leading anti-vivisectionist) "is also hostile to science in general. She argues that the scientific method can be subversive to morality simply by giving objective study of fact precedence over feeling. Vivisection would be the worst-case instance of this problem" (100). This idea, that vivisection represents the lack of emotional understanding in science, is supported by the fact that many pro-vivisection arguments in the nineteenth century were predicated on the idea that animals are incapable of feeling pain and, therefore, torturing them in

the service of scientific progress is not wrong (Huxley 1). If this argument about pain was not used, the debate around vivisection often involved weighing the cruelty against what was "gained" in terms of scientific knowledge. Harris writes that vivisectionist Dr. Claude Bernard is "well suited to provide a focal point for ambivalence towards vivisection. In his single-minded research Bernard made a notoriously ruthless use of animals. On the other hand, his research had a revolutionizing effect on medical science" (Harris 102). Here we can see human well-being (advancement in medical science) set directly against the well-being of non-humans, as well as the experimental method being set against emotional response to the pain of non-humans. The "advancement" of medical science comes at the cost of deliberately disregarding the pain of others.

The refusal to understand or acknowledge the pain of non-humans is echoed in *The Shape of Water* when Strickland is torturing the creature with a device resembling a cattle-prod. The creature makes a distressed noise and Strickland says, "There you go again making that god-awful sound. Is that you crying, huh? Is that what it is? Are you hurting? Or maybe you're angry! […] I can't tell. I mean, are you begging? Because to me, it's just the worst fucking noise I ever heard" (*The Shape of Water*). Strickland deliberately fails to understand that the creature is clearly communicating distress, while simultaneously focusing on his own experience rather than the creature's. Nineteenth-century vivisection debates serve as a useful comparison point for *The Shape of Water* because of the way this debate set scientific advancement at odds with empathy for the other. Coral Lansbury notes in *The Old Brown Dog,* "antivivisectionist[s] argu[ed] that people who were forced to participate in acts of cruelty or who watch scenes of torture will lose all sense of compassion and pity" (151) and, indeed, Strickland's behaviour toward the creature supports this very argument. Furthermore, the science in *The Shape of Water* is institutionalised.

The scientists are not recluses or exiles like Dr. Moreau; they are government employees. This difference suggests that the film is not critiquing scientists who overreach beyond what is sanctioned by governing bodies; rather, the critique surrounds the government sanctioning violence in service of scientific progress deemed "neutral" while ignoring its inherent violence.

Like the factory in *Crimson Peak,* the lab in *The Shape of Water* becomes a Gothic space where past and future collide in the present. The violence of nineteenth-century vivisection haunts the Space Race visions of the future, irrevocably tying the idea of "progress" to the violence on which that progress is built. Mentioning the practice of vivisection reminds the audience of the limits of who this "progress" is for and who will benefit from it. "Progress" is not a benefit for everyone. The slow violence of radioactive aftermaths shows how marginalized people are exploited in service of "progress." Similarly, vivisection underscores the way that non-humans are exploited to benefit "progress" for those in power. In the cracks of these techno-scientific progress narratives and the rhetoric of domination that accompanies them, however, something uncontrollable flourishes.

2.6. Blind Spots

Blind spots are a motif in the film, the most significant one being the place in the government building where the security cameras do not reach: a pillar, surrounded by "no smoking" signs, where the staff smoke. This is the blind spot Elisa and Zelda exploit to smuggle the creature out. Similarly, Zelda and Elisa are themselves a "blind spot." They are cleaners, so the scientists and executives pay them very little attention; they also are women—Zelda is black and Elisa is mute. All of these factors place each of them at multiple intersections of marginalization. Not only are they not thought of as fully or properly embodied, they are barely thought of at all, and that is how they are able to free the creature. When the antagonists

(Strickland and his assistant, Fleming) are hypothesizing who smuggled the creature out, the speculation as to the culprits runs as follows:

> [Fleming] "a highly-trained group […] like special forces or so on and so forth,"
>
> [Strickland] "Red Army Special Forces?"
>
> [Fleming] "Conceivably. And they're highly trained. They were well-financed, an elite group. Highly efficient, ruthless, clockwork precision […] My conservative estimate is that this was a strike force of at least 10 men." (*The Shape of Water*)

In an ironic juxtaposition of dialogue and visuals, as the antagonists talk, Elisa and Zelda—the true culprits—are visible in the background, clocking into work, completely ignored. Even when interviewing Zelda and Elisa, Strickland does not take seriously the possibility that they were responsible for the escape. This scene also shows that the creature's subjectivity is a blind spot for Strickland. He is so concerned with who "took" the creature, and who would have the ability to violently remove him from the lab, that the possibility the creature left willingly does not even occur to him. The perfectly structured system with high security and heavy monitoring does not, and cannot, account for the subjectivity of those it attempts to control, from the workers tilting the security camera to facilitate the escape, to the creature leaving willingly. In this blind-spot of the subjectivity of "improper bodies" and non-human subjectivity, Strickland is unable to consider the possibility that kinship is forming in places he never intended.

2.7. "Neither are we": Humanity and Kin

A pivotal scene in *The Shape of Water* comes shortly after Elisa overhears Strickland's plan to vivisect the creature. She goes to Giles for help, and he initially resists. Elisa says of the creature "he's alone" (*The Shape of Water*) to which Giles replies: "So what if he's alone? We're all alone" (*The Shape of Water*). Giles' arc in the story shows the necessary shift in thinking that

results in the creature's rescue. In the first half of the film, Giles repeatedly turns away from helping other marginalized people largely because he feels helpless in the face of systemic violence and exploitation. When the television in his apartment shows police brutally supressing a civil rights protest he says "Oh, dear god! Change that awfulness. I do not wanna see that. I do not wanna see it" (*The Shape of Water*). He does not want to see things he does not know how to solve, because he feels alone and, therefore, powerless. He repeats this line of thinking when asked to help the creature:

> [Eliza] "I can either save him… or let him die."
>
> […]
>
> [Giles] "What are we? What are you and I? Do you know what we are? We're nothing! Nothing! We can do nothing! […] Oh, God, it's not even human."
>
> [Eliza] "If we do nothing, neither are we." (*The Shape of Water*)

Elisa takes personal responsibility for the creature and demands Giles do the same. Giles must use his artistic skills not to reinforce depictions of the idyllic WASP lifestyle, but to help the creature escape (through painting fake IDs and the design on the side of a fake laundry truck) and to understand the creature (for the rest of the film, Giles only draws the creature). His shift in understanding, his recognition that not having access to the WASP lifestyle does not mean he is alone, allows him to embrace monstrosity and transform his understanding of his own kinship ties within and beyond humanity.

Haraway writes in *Staying with the Trouble*, "we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations" (4). She argues for making "kin," which she defines as "something other/more than entities tied by ancestry or genealogy" (102-3) and goes on to write, "Kin is a wild category that all sorts of people do their best to domesticate" (2). The domestic

ideal of the nuclear family breaks down as the creature develops ties with the human characters yet remains emphatically undomesticated throughout the film. In fact, he is set immediately in opposition to the concept of domesticity when he eats one of Giles' cats (a domesticated animal). Furthermore, the creature begins to grow ill staying in Elisa's bathtub—he needs to leave the domestic space in order to survive. Despite this wildness, the creature is kin to the other characters. Elisa repeatedly tells Giles that she is "like him [the creature]" (*The Shape of Water*); not the same as him but "like" him. The repeated motif of Elisa's hand against the creature's (a visual allusion to the first shot of the creature in *Black Lagoon* which is a webbed hand reaching from the water) shows both their similarity and difference. This is especially prominent considering that Elisa and the creature communicate via sign language—with their hands. Elisa tells Giles "he [the creature] sees me for what I am, as I am" (*The Shape of Water*), just as she sees him not as a domesticated beast, but as kin.

Indeed, it is not these improperly bodied characters on their own, but their kinship with each other that results in the disruption of the Space Race progress narrative. Cohen writes,

> Given that the recorders of the history of the West have been mainly European and male, women (*She*) and nonwhites (*Them!*) have found themselves repeatedly transformed into monsters, whether to validate specific alignments of masculinity and whiteness, or simply to be pushed from its realm of thought. Feminine and cultural others are monstrous enough by themselves in patriarchal society, but when they threaten to mingle, the entire economy of desire comes under attack. ("Monster Culture" 15, emphasis original)

This mingling is what breaks down the institutional power and Strickland's domination. Not only Elisa's love for the creature, but Zelda and Giles's friendship with Elisa, results in a group of those seen as monsters threatening the entire structure that made them monsters in the first place.

When Giles asks the creature "have you always been alone?" (*The Shape of Water*), he echoes his earlier comment "so what if he's alone?" (*The Shape of Water*) but revises it. Instead of maintaining that everyone is alone, he says to the creature "maybe we're both just relics" (*The Shape of Water*). The word "relics" as used here evokes the image of a fragment of history separated from its proper context. However, by grouping himself and the creature together in their isolation, Giles ends that isolation. These moments of connection occur in the spaces the characters focused on technology and progress cannot see—in Elisa's connection with the creature when she is cleaning the lab, in Giles' moment of drawing the creature not for money but out of artistic appreciation.

To visually support the notion of power structures breaking down due to unseen faults, the film also repeatedly shows water moving into places designed to keep it out. Water stains the walls of Elisa's house, water pours through Elisa's floor when she floods the bathroom, and several key scenes take place at a sand company, a facility for storing sand to replenish beaches that have been washed away by storms. Just as water works its way through human barriers, the creature asserts his non-human subjectivity and proves himself impossible to confine not only in the violent laboratory space, but in the domestic space of Elisa's apartment. This non-domestic kinship opens the door for the main plot of the film: Gothic romance.

2.8. "They lived happily ever after?": Fairy Tales and Transformation

Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus in their article "What is a posthumanist reading?" write,

> There are what might be called "posthuman moments" in science fiction. They more or less deliberately threaten the integrity of a given ‘‘human essence’’ and are fetishistically

> indulged in, but all too often they are in the end closed off by the reaffirmation and reconfirmation of the human on a different plane. (Herbrechter 98)

This reading of science fiction films holds true in the 1954 film *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*, upon which *The Shape of Water* is based. *Black Lagoon*—which offers brief moments of empathy for the prehistoric creature found while looking for fossils in the Amazon (much like *The Shape of Water*'s search for fossil fuels in the same location)—in the end closes off the redemptive possibilities of human and monster entanglement with the monster's death. Del Toro has stated that his initial idea for *The Shape of Water* was as a love story between the woman and the creature from *Black Lagoon*, since his initial viewing of the film as a child left him dissatisfied ("Why is…"). In order to disrupt the closing-off of the human, del Toro once again abandons science fiction in favour of the Gothic, this time in the form of a gothic romance. Just as he drew on both Bluebeard Tales and their gothic descendants in *Crimson Peak*, del Toro draws on both Beauty and the Beast Tales and their gothic descendants in *The Shape of Water*.

Del Toro refers to the story as a "Beauty and the Beast" narrative, one with "a beast that didn't have to turn into a prince to have a love" ("Why is…"). Beauty and the Beast Tales are, of course, well suited to adaptations as gothic romances not only because they already include a monstrous romance, but because the stories are well-positioned to question the human/non-human distinction. Indeed, Caroline Webb and Helen Hopcroft argue that Angela Carter's Beauty and the Beast tale "The Tiger's Bride" exposes the potential of this type of tale to "undermine the conception of rationality that […] underlies human (male) conceptions of the hierarchical distinctions between male and female, human and animal" (316). These transgressive, unsettling potentials of the Beauty and the Beast Tale align it with gothic concerns, namely the concern with boundary transgression.

As *Crimson Peak* stages the transgression of the life/death boundary, so too does *The Shape of Water* transgress the human/inhuman distinction. Like Carter's tale and unlike less gothic iterations of Beauty and the Beast, the "beast" character in *The Shape of Water* does not transform at the end of the film. Elisa, however, does transform or, perhaps, she becomes what she always was. This ending unsettles the category of human and calls into question whether it ever applied to Elisa in the first place. Like Carter's story, *The Shape of Water* demonstrates "a willingness to accept the animal as himself and the privileging of the girl's own desire, itself an aspect of human animality—all within a social context that inhibits such revelations or considers them anarchic" (Webb 320). The Gothic romance breaks the science fiction pattern of reaffirming the human and instead breaks the category of human altogether. When the cuts on Elisa's neck from where her voicebox was removed turn to gills, Elisa becomes more like the creature, but still recognizably not the same. She does not become him, nor does he become her, but they become "like" each other, and so are themselves together. As Haraway puts it: "we become-with each other or not at all" (*Staying with* 4). The technological progress narrative is coopted by one of transformation in which the human is no longer central and may no longer exist at all.

2.9. Conclusion

> Unable to perceive the shape of You
>
> I find You all around me.
>
> Your presence fills my eyes with Your love
>
> It humbles my heart
>
> For you are everywhere. (*The Shape of Water*)

It is only fitting that *The Shape of Water* should end with a love poem, since it is first and foremost a Gothic romance. “Tragedy and delight, hand in hand” (*The Shape of Water*) is how Giles describes a fire at a chocolate factory early in the film, and that is the note of the conclusion. The tragedy of Elisa and the creature’s exit (or exile) from society, the delight of their survival outside the bounds of a structure that tried to destroy them, mingled together at the end in a moment of perhaps not happiness, but hope. Ultimately it is unclear what happens to Elisa and the creature; Giles, the narrator, does not know. Instead, there is only potential: the potential of their romance to move beyond the hierarchy of the human and non-human, beyond the idea of monstrosity and purification, into a future of transformation rather than “progress.” *The Shape of Water* is concerned with how, through loving monstrous others and our monstrous selves, we—like Elisa in the final scene—might find our gills. Hope for the anthropocene requires abandoning the notion of progress and embracing our ability to transform. While loving monstrosity drives the redemptive potential of *The Shape of Water*, in the next chapter I will examine how the 2015 film *Pacific Rim* explores the potential of becoming monsters at the end of the world.

Chapter 3. "I'll Go With You": Boundary-Building, Hybridity, and Becoming Monsters

"To fight monsters, we created monsters of our own." (Pacific Rim)

The 2013 film *Pacific Rim* is the least-studied of Guillermo del Toro's films and, indeed, the least liked by critics. It is a blockbuster action movie about the apocalypse in which humans who are co-piloting giant robots called Jaegers (German for "hunters") fight giant alien sea-monsters called Kaiju (Japanese for "monsters") in an ongoing war for the future of the planet. *Pacific Rim* focuses on the contemporary concerns of the anthropocene, namely anthropogenic climate change and the risks that it poses to the poor and to the Global South. The film presents a clear choice: continue to catastrophize and put up boundaries that reinforce the very structures of power that caused the anthropocene in the first place, or work to build a better world of connection and collaboration. Del Toro introduces the concept of "Drifting" (a mind-meld between the two or three pilots necessary to pilot the enormous Jaegers) in order to argue that it is only by hybridizing with each other, with machines, and even with the 2500-ton alien monsters, that the characters can face the threat of extinction. In Chapter One, I argued that *Crimson Peak* explored the value of listening to monsters and in Chapter Two that *The Shape of Water* showed the potential of loving monsters. But how does *Pacific Rim,* a story largely about fighting monsters, fit into this trilogy? In this chapter I argue that *Pacific Rim* is a radical reimagining of how we talk about human existence in the anthropocene, one that foregrounds monstrous hybridity as the mode of resisting both the apocalypse and the boundaries built by catastrophizing. In this apocalypse, it is not humanity or individualism that saves the day. Rather, it is the monstrousness of human hybridity that is capable of turning to "face the monsters at our door" (*Pacific Rim*).

3.1. Beyond Cli-fi

In *The Great Derangement,* Ghosh details what he calls "the peculiar forms of resistance that climate change presents to what is now regarded as serious fiction" (Ghosh 9). Ghosh notes that "serious fiction" (which he uses interchangeably with "realistic fiction") does not cope well with catastrophe or improbability. George Levine argues in *Darwin and the Novelists* that "Victorian gradualism, an idea that popped up in geology […] was the groundwork of nineteenth-century 'realism'" (5). Gradualism is the opposite of catastrophism—the belief that the Earth changes slowly. Catastrophism, not to be confused with "catastrophizing," holds that the Earth is unpredictable, and that improbable things (like extreme weather events) should be prepared for. Gradualism, as Levine argues, is baked into the realist novels of the nineteenth century and, as Ghosh argues, into "serious fiction" of today. It is this link that makes it so difficult, according to Ghosh, for serious fiction to grapple with the improbable extreme weather events of the anthropocene. So what is to be done? In *Novel Science,* Adelene Buckland notes that, while realism has been traditionally aligned with uniformitarianism (related to gradualism), "'catastrophism' […] has been allied […] most often with 'romance' as a byword for nonrealism" (20). If this is the case then imaginative fiction (or "romance" as it is called here) has been, at least since the nineteenth century, a space equipped to handle catastrophe. However, as I mentioned in the Introduction, the anthropocene discourse called "catastrophizing"—writing about the violence, chaos, and destruction that will result from anthropogenic climate change—has many problems, the most important of which Parenti calls "politics of the armed lifeboat." In *Tropic of Chaos,* Parenti writes that these politics include, "responding to climate change by arming, excluding, forgetting, repressing, policing, and killing" (11). He goes on to write, "one can imagine a green authoritarianism emerging in rich countries, while the climate crisis pushes

the Third World into chaos. […] This sort of "climate fascism," a politics based on exclusion, segregation, and repression, is horrific and bound to fail" (11). Parenti is pointing out that catastrophizing, far from mobilizing those in power to address the threat of climate change, is far more likely to result in shutting out climate refugees and hoarding resources. Can fiction of the anthropocene resist this sort of narrative? Cli-fi, while it can represent catastroph*ism*, has largely done so by reiterating catastroph*izing*. Is there a way to tell a story about climate catastrophe that does not catastrophize?

Pacific Rim is above all else a climate change film, but to call *Pacific Rim* cli-fi would be disingenuous. It is a hybrid homage to both Kaiju and Mecha films, a disaster film, and, most importantly, a monster film. When it was released, *Pacific Rim* was marketed as science-fiction, but "Del Toro calls [the] melding of analogue and futuristic high-tech retro look and setting 'gothtech'" (Thornton 130), which evokes the "Gothic" genre far more than science-fiction. In previous chapters, I have discussed the role of the Gothic—and gothic monsters in particular—in grappling with the historical roots of the anthropocene, and with the monstrous realities of this era. Monsters are complications of easy or reductive social boundaries and dichotomies. The politics of the "armed lifeboat" attempt to enforce a clear distinction between the saved and the drowned, but monsters do not allow for such clear distinctions. If catastrophes are moments of strengthening boundaries, then monsters threaten the very existence of those boundaries (Williams 16). Cohen writes, "The horizon where the monsters dwell might well be imagined as the visible edge of the hermeneutic circle itself: the monstrous offers an escape from its hermetic path, an invitation to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world" ("Monster Culture" 7). Cohen takes his definition of "hermeneutic circle" from Barbara Herrnstein Smith: "the *participation* of prior belief in the perception of present evidence" (126,

emphasis original). Specifically, Cohen quotes Smith in the footnote to the above quote: "The hermeneutic circle does not permit access or escape to an uninterrupted reality; but we do not [have to] keep going around in the same path" (Smith qtd. in "Monster Culture" 22n10). Cohen is arguing that monsters are capable of breaking or rerouting cyclical modes of thinking. Monsters complicate attempts to turn inward, to "purify" society. They are liminal figures—hybrids, complications, not easily classifiable or contained—that offer space for new and surprising connections. *Pacific Rim* features more than one type of monster: the Kaiju and a series of human-hybrids. Despite the inherent difficulties of fully separating the two, they are worth examining one at a time.

3.2. Kaiju: The Monster at the End of the World

The creatures attacking the Earth in *Pacific Rim* are called "Kaiju," a word that directly translates as "monster" but also references a specific tradition of monster movies known in English as "Kaiju movies."[5] Kaiju movies are a (predominately Japanese) cinematic tradition of films about giant monsters destroying cities, a tradition that began with Ishirō Honda's *Gojira* (*Godzilla,* in English) in 1954.[6] Kaiju have, from their beginnings, embodied the above-mentioned features of monstrosity, while also fulfilling the additional role of representing major disasters (Barr 37). *Gojira*, for example, is a reaction to the A-bombs the United States dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 (Barr 39). Taking this tradition into account, what manner of disaster do the Kaiju in *Pacific Rim* represent?

In the opening monologue of *Pacific Rim*, the narrator, Raleigh, sets the scene. He says, "I was 15 when the first Kaiju made land in San Francisco" (*Pacific Rim*), and as he speaks, the

[5] In Japanese "Kaijū Eiga" simply means "Monster Movies," while in English "Kaiju Movies" refers specifically to movies about giant monsters (like *Gojira*).
[6] *Pacific Rim* is dedicated to Ishirō Honda, so it is safe to assume that *Gojira* was foremost in del Toro's mind.

image of an enormous creature looming in the fog behind the Golden Gate Bridge appears on screen. The Kaiju causes massive destruction in a shot sequence that would serve as the climax of a different sort of film, but Raleigh continues to narrate:

> We mourned our dead, memorialized the attack, moved on. And then, only six months later, the second attack hit Manila, and then the third one hit Cabo, and then the fourth, and then we learned, this was not going to stop. This was just the beginning. (*Pacific Rim*)

By the end of the narration, Raleigh is grown man, and he has joined the Jaeger program to fight Kaiju. Raleigh was 15 when the Kaiju started to arrive, and the Kaiju war is still ongoing well into his adulthood. The apocalypse in *Pacific Rim* is dramatic and catastrophic but also incremental, resembling both the onset of climate change, and the escalation of dramatic catastrophes that accompanies that slow change. The Kaiju themselves are analogues for the severe weather events that are the result of Earth's changing climate. In particular, the film uses hurricanes as the central metaphor for the Kaiju and as metonyms for severe weather events in general. Like hurricanes, the Kaiju are large, destructive forces of nature that can only be predicted right before they arrive. Their blood poisons water, just as hurricanes often result in contaminated water supplies, and the film's news footage of the aftermath of Kaiju attacks strongly resembles footage of hurricane damage. Even Raleigh's statement, "the first Kaiju *made land*" (*Pacific Rim*, emphasis added), echoes the phrase "made landfall" used to describe hurricanes hitting coastlines. Furthermore, the category system used to classify Kaiju by size mirrors the hurricane category system. The film makes the connection between Kaiju and hurricanes explicit during the first onscreen Jaeger/Kaiju fight. Helicopters lower the Jaeger into storm-tossed waters and driving rain that resembles a hurricane (as does the weather for all

subsequent Kaiju fights), and Raleigh says, “there are things you can’t fight—acts of God—you see a hurricane coming, you have to get out of the way. But when you’re in a Jaeger, suddenly, you can fight the hurricane. You can win” (*Pacific Rim*). Like severe weather events, the Kaiju are getting bigger and arriving more frequently. As del Toro shows in *Pacific Rim*, not just catastrophe, but the complicated interplay of slow change and catastrophe that characterizes anthropogenic climate change can find a home in non-realistic fiction. Furthermore, the film reveals that the Earth is desirable to Kaiju, who are sent from another planet in another universe known in the film as the “Ante-verse” through the Breach, the tear in dimensions at the bottom of Mariana’s Trench. The creators of the Kaiju (mysterious aliens who appear on screen only once) want to colonize Earth because, as one of the scientists, Newt, discovers, “with ozone depletion and carbon-monoxide polluted waters, well, we practically terraformed it for them” (*Pacific Rim*). Climate change as we understand it is the precursor to the metaphorical, monster-based climate change of *Pacific Rim*: climate change terraformed the planet for monsters. These monsters embody the violent history of the anthropocene crashing into the present. As creatures sent by colonizers from another world, the Kaiju reiterate the colonial violence of the anthropocene; as severe weather events, they replicate the unequal effects of climate change on the Global South (as I will discuss more later); and as monsters, the Kaiju represent the inescapability of the anthropocene’s violent history as it bears on the present.

3.3. Broken Discourse and Building Walls

Before examining human-hybrid monsters, I will first examine how the initial human response to the Kaiju mirrors the dangers of certain responses to climate change disasters. In her study on climate refugees and climate change discourse, international development scholar Betsy Hartman notes, “Threat narratives themselves pose a threat to the kind of peaceful international

cooperation and development initiatives needed to respond equitably and effectively to climate change" (234). The discourse about the dangers of climate change is itself inhibiting solving climate change. Kanngieser and Last say that catastrophizing discourse "feeds into the same atmosphere of control and turning inwards that […] leads to a closing down of borders, and the general mistrust of 'others' used as justification for extreme racism and xenophobia" (Kanngieser). In *Pacific Rim,* the Pan Pacific Defense Corps (PPDC)—the program that builds Jaegers to fight the Kaiju—has lost all the funding for their program to a competing defense system called the Wall of Life—a coastal wall around the Breach, meant to keep out Kaiju. The Wall is designed to seem like it is protecting those behind it, while really being little more than a distraction—comfort for the wealthy while the poor suffer from their neglect. The Wall of Life literally forces the poorest people in the *Pacific Rim* world to the margins. Only those too poor to move inland or find a different job work on the Wall or live on the coast. This plot point literalizes what Bill McKibben writes: "The planet's diameter will remain eight thousand miles, and its surface will still cover two hundred million square miles. But the earth, for humans, has begun to shrink, under our feet and in our minds" (McKibben). He goes on to describe the fact that inhabitable zones in the Earth are shrinking as flood planes and heat waves grow.

Pacific Rim shows this shrinking inhabitable area when, early in the film (shortly after the Jaeger program loses funding) a television announcer says, "We have now relocated millions of civilians and supplies three hundred miles inland to the safe zones," and a shout answers from the crowd: "Safe zones? For the rich and powerful? What about the rest of us?" (*Pacific Rim*). Less of the world is habitable, but those too poor to move will have to remain in the uninhabitable zones. This conflict also mirrors Parenti's "politics of the armed lifeboat" (11); those least responsible for the crisis are the victims of decisions made by those safe from harm.

As international development scholar Gregory White says in an article on climate-related migration,

> The responsibility for climate change, then, becomes an issue in the ethical consideration of border security. […] Accentuating the moral and ethical issues associated with border security is advanced industrialized countries' outsized contribution to climate change. Is it ethical for people moving because of ecological changes wrought by industrialization to be barred from the spaces of the people who caused the problem? (White 6)

This same ethical dilemma is raised in *Pacific Rim*; those too poor to move must remain on the coasts, building the Wall to keep the people who have moved inland safe, while the rich pull funding from the Jaeger program that protects the coasts. At the base of the Wall in Alaska, a sign prominently displays the ration-cards workers get based on where they work on the Wall; the higher up they work, the more rations they get. A foreman at the Wall announces "Bad news: three guys died yesterday working the top of the wall. […] The good news is, I got three new job openings. Top of the wall" (*Pacific Rim*), and holds up three ration cards, before saying "who wants to work? Who wants to eat?" (*Pacific Rim*). The Wall is dangerous, and those dying on it are too poor to leave, and so they remain. The Wall of Life is literally made of the most vulnerable, standing in the way of the hurricane-like Kaiju. Wall-building is the antithesis of monstrous hybridity and early in the film *Pacific Rim* shows that this boundary-making is both cowardly and dangerous.

Bruno Latour in *We Have Never Been Modern,* uses the metaphor of "cut[ting] the Gordian knot" (3) to describe the violence of separating knowledge into disciplines and making boundaries between them: "'But these imbroglios do the mixing,' you'll say, 'they weave our world together!' 'Act as if they didn't exist,' the analysts reply. They have cut the Gordian knot

with a well-honed sword. The shaft is broken: on the left, they have put knowledge of things; on the right, power and human politics" (3). Del Toro literalizes this violent cutting of knowledge by showing that boundary-making is itself an act of violence and neglect, because it both actively diverts energy and resources from addressing the real problems and victimizes the most vulnerable. These knowledge boundaries come up again with the last remaining researchers working for the PPDC —Dr. Newton Geiszler (Newt) and Dr. Hermann Gottlieb. Hermann is a mathematician focused solely on predictive models that show when and where the Kaiju will emerge. Newt, on the other hand, is a biologist who thinks Hermann's predictions are not reliable enough to act upon. They have painted a bright yellow line down the center of their lab, physically separating their work entirely. This artificial boundary is absurd. The particular lab shown in the film is new for Hermann and Newt, who have been working together for some time, but have only just arrived in Hong Kong (at most, days before their first scene). Painting this line, therefore, must have been one of the first things they did upon arrival. At the end of the world, the only two scientists left working to defeat the Kaiju are wasting time erecting a boundary between them as if they were college roommates having a feud. They are both performing essential tasks, but they repeatedly de-value each other's research and refuse to work together.

While this boundary is not as dramatic as the Wall of Life, it is still a significant problem for the protagonists. The Wall of Life and the line through the centre of the K-Science (Short for "Kaiju-Science") lab both draw focus from the task at hand: saving the world. Hermann and Newt's boundary, as well as their arguing throughout the first half of the film, implies they each intend to solve the Kaiju crisis autonomously. In an act of similar naiveté, the scientists and government officials working on the Wall of Life think it will protect them from Kaiju, as

though a Wall will keep the Kaiju at bay, as though monsters will obey boundaries. But monsters will not hold to boundaries. Seconds into the first scene in the lab, a Kaiju organ slides off a table on Newt's side and falls across the line onto Hermann's side, and the camera pans to the floor to show the line, revealing that all the tables bearing Newt's monsters as well as Newt himself have been standing partially on Hermann's side of the lab the entire time. Similarly, moments after the Wall is finished in Sydney, a Kaiju knocks it over and destroys most of the city. Monsters will break down boundaries as though they were never there in the first place—so how can humans, separated by these boundaries hope to defeat them? Here, we arrive at the second type of monster in *Pacific Rim.* The film's tagline is "To fight monsters, we created monsters of our own" (*Pacific Rim*), and these "monsters of our own" are all human hybrids.

3.4. Dissolving and Drifting; Kin and Contamination

David Clark, in an essay on illegibility in monster discourse, writes "a large part of the Minotaur's repulsiveness comes from its grossly indeterminate status, neither human nor nonhuman, but both at once" (44). Monsters are hybrids, neither one thing nor the other, themselves a dissolved boundary. Monstrousness realizes Ghosh's argument that "humanity must transcend the isolation in which [it is] entrapped at the time of its derangement" (Ghosh 162). Almost as if in answer, del Toro says of *Pacific Rim*, "I wanted to make a movie where everything was dented and rusty and off kilter and our heroes are incomplete unless they come together" (qtd. in McDonald 200). Similarly, Ghosh criticizes the failure of realistic fiction to represent "men in aggregate" and writes about its tendency to favor individualism (78). *Pacific Rim* features not only an ensemble cast, with at least six major characters, potentially as many as eight, but also uses each character as synecdoche to represent a broader group of people whose collaboration is needed in order to address anthropogenic climate change: people from all over

the world, from multiple scientific disciplines, from public policy, from engineering, and from construction, all collaborate in enormous Shatterdomes (hangers that house the Jaegers). Individualism has no place amongst those hoping to stop this apocalypse. Isolation is, in del Toro's gothic, incompleteness.

In *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Tsing touches on a similar theme when imagining how life might persist in what she calls "capitalist ruins." She writes, "Staying alive—for every species—requires livable collaborations. Collaboration means working across difference, which leads to contamination. Without collaborations, we all die" *(The Mushroom* 28). As I mentioned in Chapter Two when discussing the kinship between the creature and the other characters, Donna Haraway, in *Staying with the Trouble*, likewise writes about making kin in complex and inventive ways, expanding the meaning of kin beyond the heterosexual, patriarchal family unit, and even beyond the human species (2). Haraway calls this extension of kinship ties beyond the biological, this assumption of responsibility for "human and other-than-human beings," making "oddkin" (*Staying with* 2). For Stacy Alaimo, such responsibility could take the form of something she calls "the dissolve," a place where,

> the domestic does not domesticate and the walls do not divide. […] Dwelling in the dissolve, where fundamental boundaries have begun to come undone, unraveled by unknown futures, can be a form of ethical engagement that emanates from both feminist and environmentalist practices. (2)

This kin-making, this dissolve, in *Pacific Rim* is Drifting. The Drift, a technology that allows thought and memory sharing between bodies, both defines the world of *Pacific Rim* and functions as the film's most important metaphor. Becoming intimately familiar with the inside of another's head is a radical version of Haraway's "oddkin." The Drift makes kin; the Drift is the

dissolve. The space in the Drift troubles the very existence of boundaries between self and other. It moves beyond what Tsing calls "self-containment." Tsing says, "Thinking through self-containment and thus the self-interest of individuals (at whatever scale) made it possible to ignore contamination, that is, transformation through encounter. Self-contained individuals are not transformed by encounter" (*The Mushroom* 28). The Drift is transformative; it is the space of collaborative contamination where monsters are made, but even when characters step into each other's heads they can never fully merge. It is only through this imperfect, monstrous collaboration that success is possible. Hybrid monstrosity in *Pacific Rim* operates on multiple levels: human/machine, human/human, and human/Kaiju.

3.4.1. Human/Machine

Donna Haraway, in *A Cyborg Manifesto*, writes "By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs" (2). In Haraway's language, cyborgs are hybrid monsters, and del Toro's film realizes this idea. The Jaegers, massive humanoid robots, are a triumph of human collaboration; Jaegers cannot be piloted solo; they need at least two pilots to move. In the opening narration, Raleigh describes the brain trauma early Jaeger pilots went through because "the neural load to interface with a Jaeger proved too much for a single pilot" (*Pacific Rim*). The Drift allows two pilots, one operating the left hemisphere, one operating the right, to be joined by a "neural handshake" (*Pacific Rim*) that sends them into the Drift, which Raleigh describes as "two pilots, mind-melding through memories with the body of a giant machine" (*Pacific Rim*). The pilots and the Jaeger not only move together, but also experience thoughts, sensation, and pain simultaneously. This breakdown of boundaries between Raleigh and his co-pilot, Mako, and

between both pilots and their robot body, literalizes the central question raised by the Turing test. As Katherine Hayles writes,

> By including gender [in his explanation of the Turing test], Turing implied that renegotiating the boundary between human and machine would involve more than transforming the question of 'who can think' into 'what can think.' It would also necessarily bring into question other characteristics of the liberal subject, […] the test functions to create the possibility of a disjunction between the enacted and the represented bodies, regardless of which choice you make. (xiii)

The film literalizes this test by putting together man, woman, and machine, and mingling them together to move as one. Bodies and minds become messy, fragmented, and undividable from each other or from the machine. This idea, of blurring the lines of body and mind, is why the Jaegers are not remotely piloted and why the Kaiju are not dispatched using drones—the machine and human become mingled, disallowing the possibility that the machine can be impersonal. Indeed, Drifting is not without consequence—the risks are as significant as the rewards. When Raleigh's Jaeger loses an arm, Raleigh screams and his own arm goes limp. He never fully recovers from the injury; even years later, he cannot operate the left side of the Jaeger, and circuit burns are visible on his left shoulder and side. He is, as Tsing would say, "contaminated" from contact. Jaegers and their pilots are hybrid monsters, full of dents, scratches, burns, and scars. *Pacific Rim*'s version of technology is not a simple solution to humanity's problems, nor does it replace humans. Rather, it blurs the distinction between human and machine, contaminating both by contact with machines.

3.4.2. Human/Human

Raleigh goes out of his way to say that he and his first co-pilot (his brother) do not possess any heroic characteristics other than the fact that they are "Drift compatible" (*Pacific Rim*)—only pilots who are "Drift compatible" are able to enter the Drift and pilot together. Raleigh explains Drifting by saying "the deeper the bond, the better you fight" (*Pacific Rim*); it is not physical strength that makes characters more effective fighters, but rather, their ability to share themselves with each other, to open themselves up to contamination by contact. When Raleigh's brother dies, he leaves the program for years, afraid to open himself up to the physically and psychologically damaging potential of the Drift. When he finally returns to the program, Raleigh cannot get back into a Jaeger without a new co-pilot. Mako, the new pilot, and Raleigh, are both traumatized by past encounters with the Kaiju, and risk further damage to themselves and each other by entering the Drift together, but neither can pilot alone. Indeed, during their first Drift in the Jaeger, they fall "out of alignment" (*Pacific Rim*), each absorbed in a traumatic memory, and nearly destroy the Shatterdome by mistake. The Drift is the ultimate metaphor for coming together, faults and trauma and all, to defeat an overwhelmingly large problem. However, *Pacific Rim* does not suggest that this collaboration is easy; it is difficult and dangerous, but it is also possible and necessary—no one can face the horrors of the anthropocene alone.

3.4.3. Human/Kaiju

The final and most monstrous form of hybridity is found in Dr. Newton Geiszler. Newt, as I mentioned earlier, is a Kaiju biologist, and Hermann, his lab partner and sometimes-friend, calls him a "Kaiju groupie." From his first moments onscreen, Newt is an anomaly; a half-mad scientist, half-monster himself. He is covered in tattoos of Kaiju; the monsters he studies are

inked into his very skin, covering him like armour. Newt takes his kinship with monsters to the next level when he engages in the first ever Drift between a human and a Kaiju. The complications are severe. Newt suffers a major seizure and nearly dies during this experiment but succeeds in discovering what the Kaiju want with Earth. It is some time, however, before he discovers that, in Drifting with a single piece of a Kaiju brain, he has not only Drifted with that brain, he's Drifted with the entire Kaiju hive mind. The vastness of the neural network he taps into nearly gives him a brain aneurysm. He spends the remainder of the film with a scarlet ring around his left iris—a physical scar from his experience, what Tsing would call "contamination." His mind touches the mind of the Kaiju and, like Raleigh's scarred arm, Newt's eye is scarred by the Kaiju. Newt's decision, to reach out and allow the monstrous other in, makes Newt stronger. He finally understands the Kaiju, who they are, what they want, and how to stop them. Newt becomes monstrous by Drifting with a Kaiju, but he does *not* become villainous. This Drift reveals the importance of understanding the Kaiju, rather than simply fighting them. In a deleted scene, Newt chastises Raleigh for not seeing the use of K-Science, saying, "the way I see it, is if you want to stop them [Kaiju], you have to understand them" (*Pacific Rim*). Newt's bond with the Kaiju comes with the price of feeling their tragedy. Ishirō Honda, to whom *Pacific Rim* is dedicated, said of monsters,

> [M]onsters are tragic beings. They're not bad [willingly]. They're born too tall, too strong, too heavy; that's their tragedy. They don't attack [mankind] voluntarily, but because of their physical dimensions they cause danger and grief; therefore man defends himself against them. After several stories of this type, the public finds sympathy for the monsters." (Ishirō Honda qtd. in Ryfle 219)

Newt's knowledge—and, by extension, the viewer's knowledge—of the Kaiju renders their deaths tragic. It is hard to view the film without seeing both their beauty—bioluminescent, enormous, powerful, and each one unique—and their tragedy. The kinship between Newt and the Kaiju is tragic—he has only just begun to understand who they are and what they want, but he cannot save both the Kaiju and humanity. Even the understanding Newt has is imperfect, as shown when Newt's discovery that the Kaiju are clones is almost immediately contradicted by the revelation that one them is pregnant—how can a clone be pregnant? This infant Kaiju is a manifestation of the impossibility of containing or fully understanding monsters; they are by nature uncontrollable. Complications abound at the end of the world, and it is these complications that allow the final and most complicated Drift to take place.

3.4.4. Human/Human/Kaiju

The final Drift in the film is between Newt, Hermann, and the infant Kaiju that should not exist, born on Earth immediately after the death of the Kaiju carrying it, and dead shortly after. As I mentioned earlier, Newt and Hermann clash throughout the film. Their inability to work together or even acknowledge each other's skills prevents them from figuring out how to defeat the Kaiju. Newt is not able to Drift with a whole Kaiju brain himself, even an infant one, and survive to communicate what he learned. Just in time, Hermann arrives and says, "there is only one way […] and that is to do this together. I'll go with you. That's what the Jaeger pilots do, share the neural load" (*Pacific Rim*). Their Drift shatters the boundary that had separated their work and allows them to finally strike at the heart of the crisis. This Drift shows that they are Drift compatible, and have been the entire time, suggesting the boundary between them never really existed in the first place.

McDonald and Clark call Hermann and Newt's Drift "fraternal," but this description does not encompass the strange monstrousness of their connection. Indeed, throughout the film, Hermann and Newt's relationship—like Mako and Raleigh's—is ambiguously romantically coded. Both sets of Drift-partners end the film embracing, having completely destroyed the boundary between them, but the audience is given no more indication as to what the nature of the relationship is. Part of the strength of the Drift as a central metaphor is this ambivalence—or, perhaps, potential—which allows the bond to be romantic, platonic, familial, or something unable to fit neatly into any category. This goes further than *The Shape of Water* in expanding the type of bond that can break down the category of the human and/or individual. Haraway writes, "Kin is a wild category that all sorts of people do their best to domesticate" (*Staying with* 2), and there is certainly nothing domestic about the monstrous kinship of a mathematician, a biologist, and a hive-mind of Kaiju. Furthermore, Newt and Hermann's hybridity is not limited to the moments during the actual Drift. Hermann and Newt return to the Shatterdome following the Drift to tell the other characters what they learned from the Kaiju. They speak with two voices, three bodies, and one mind. They finish each other's sentences, offering a tangled mess of information flowing from the Kaiju hive mind and from each other to guide the other protagonists through the climax of the film and help them to close the Breach. While all Drifting is dangerous, this final Drift is the most dangerous and the most important—a radical, monstrous combination that puts all involved at risk. Commissioning the construction of the Wall of Life, maintaining boundaries between self and other, is an act of cowardice. To Drift, on the other hand, is to become stronger. McDonald and Clark say of *Pacific Rim*, that it "continues del Toro's consistent moral message that it is through the power of combination that redemption is

possible" (199). Newt, Hermann, the infant Kaiju, and the Kaiju hive mind, become entangled, monstrous kin, and because of this entanglement, humanity survives.

Conversely, this same Drift results in the Kaiju being, if not destroyed, at least cut off from the Earth when Newt and Hermann use the information they gain to close the Breach. So this moment of breaking down boundaries between humanity and monstrosity also results in re-establishing the boundary between Earth and the Ante-verse. However, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Kaiju operate differently than the human-hybrid monsters in *Pacific Rim*. Kaiju are stand-ins for the severe weather events caused by anthropogenic climate change and as such are the result of the violence and exploitation of the anthropocene. While the creatures themselves are not ascribed malevolence any more than a hurricane can be said to be malevolent, the Kaiju remain manifestations of destruction and violence and so cannot be allowed to remain. The human/Kaiju Drifts scar the humans who take part, burning into their psyches the horrific realities of the history of the anthropocene, and this knowledge is what allows them close the Breach and put a stop to the escalating series of attacks that would have destroyed the Earth if left unchecked. As Newt says, "if you want to stop them [Kaiju], you have to understand them" (*Pacific Rim*), mirroring the need for understanding the causes and consequences of anthropogenic climate change in order to halt its progress. When the humans Drift with the Kaiju, they Drift with the 2500-ton manifestations of anthropogenic climate change, and its past, present, and future of destruction, and in doing so they are able to stop its progress.

3.5. Fallout

Pacific Rim is by far the most violent of the three films I have covered, and it takes place on the largest scale—not only are the monsters bigger, but so are the stakes, the fights, and the fallout. The destruction in this film is enormous. Not only do the Kaiju cause destruction—

modelled on the destruction left after a hurricane or, in the case of Mako's flashback to her traumatic childhood encounter, the destruction left in the wake of an atomic bomb—but many of the solutions to the Kaiju problem have also resulted in destruction. There are two "exclusion zones" mentioned in the film, one in San Francisco and one in Kowloon; these places are radioactive because Kaiju were killed with nuclear weapons there before the Jaeger program was set up. To parallel this destruction is the individual trauma of Stacker Pentecost, who gets radiation sickness from piloting his Jaeger. Both the exclusion zones and Stacker's radiation sickness from the unprotected radioactive core of the Jaeger foreshadow the implied aftermath of the film. The Breach is closed by detonating two nuclear devices—one at the bottom of Mariana's Trench to kill a Kaiju protecting the Breach, and one inside the Breach itself. This ending—"stopping the apocalypse" (*Pacific Rim*)—does not erase the lingering destruction. The radiation sickness (both literal and metaphorical) lingers beyond the end of the fight, like the exclusion zones remain unsafe long after the Kaiju have been killed and Stacker's radiation sickness lingers long after he leaves the Jaeger program. *Pacific Rim* does not offer any quick fixes to the anthropocene; the world is unalterably changed, haunted by the "slow violence" (Nixon 2) of radiation and destruction. Every setting in the film is haunted by the Kaiju war. Exclusion zones have changed the map and the corpses of Kaiju, left to turn to skeletons, now make up the infrastructure of cities. In one scene set in what characters refer to as the "Boneslums," people have rebuilt an entire district around the ribcage of a long-dead Kaiju that once decimated the area. This haunted, destroyed landscape with its crumbling infrastructure, poisoned water, and radioactive exclusion zones is the anthropocene. Saving the world does not erase the destruction already wrought any more than closing the Breach banishes the Kaiju from the Earth. Even though no more Kaiju can come through the Breach, they are permanently

embedded in the landscape and entwined with the human population. The film ends with a new day breaking after the Breach is closed—the progress of the apocalypse has been halted, but its destruction, and the destruction caused by imperfect solutions will live on.

3.6. Conclusion

> Today… Today… At the edge of our hope… At the end of our time… We have chosen not only to believe in ourselves, but in each other. Today there's not a man nor woman in here that shall stand alone. Not today. Today we face the monsters that are at our door and bring the fight to them! Today we are cancelling the apocalypse! (*Pacific Rim*)

In this, Stacker Pentecost's final speech, lies the promise of *Pacific Rim*. The story offers a way to think about the end of the world not as a time for building boundaries, but as a time for forging strange kinship. In *Pacific Rim*, to stand alone is to court disaster; to abject the Other is to ensure defeat. It is only through embracing one's own monstrousness, and the monstrousness of the Other, that one may find a way forward, a way to stay on this Earth. In del Toro's anthropocene gothic, the time of humans as isolated individuals is over. Just as the Kaiju "[go] through the Wall like it was nothing," monsters destroy boundaries as though those boundaries were never there. The planet has been terraformed for monsters so, in order to continue living on it, humans must become monsters. Stepping into the Drift, becoming monstrous, is a radical act of love and trust. It obliterates the simple boundaries of the self between human, machine, and monster that catastrophizing discourses seek to build. This kind of story, a story that celebrates hybridity, complications, and monstrousness, offers more than catastrophizing, it offers a way forward. If the anthropocene is "the end of our time" (*Pacific Rim*), perhaps it is also the beginning of "a time of monsters" ("Preface" vii)—both the monsters of our creation, wreaking havoc on the world, and our monstrous selves emerging to meet them. When we "face the

monsters that are at our door" (*Pacific Rim*), might we see ourselves, and our potential to be more than we are reflected back at us? It is an act of extreme trust, self-sacrifice, and most of all bravery to open oneself up to the redemptive possibilities of contamination. The only way to face the monsters at the end of the world is to become the monsters that we have always been.

Conclusion

What is a monster? A monster is a hybrid idea, capable of embodying not only a moment in time, but the accumulation of past, present, and future converging in a single moment. This moment, or series of moments, that make up the ongoing "now" is the anthropocene. This "crossroads" as Cohen terms it ("Monster Culture" 4) where the anthropocene monsters emerge is the complex intersection of the entwined histories of human and non-human forces, of the potential of those entwinements, and of their present entanglements. The simplified catastrophizing of cli-fi and the branch of anthropocene discourse it follows cannot hope to capture these entanglements. The anthropocene gothic allows fiction to engage with the anthropocene historically and, in doing so, represent the violence and exploitation that have driven its progress. This genre has the potential to talk back to the catastrophizing narratives of cli-fi by offering a more complex depiction of anthropocene concerns. Guillermo del Toro's anthropocene gothic revels in this complexity. Del Toro's anthropocene is a haunted house with crumbling foundations that cannot withstand its weight; it is a dingy lab with experiments that crawl from their places of confinement to assert their inhuman subjectivities; it is a rusted hangar where machines, humans, and aliens merge to create something monstrous.

I have analyzed these films in chronological order based on when they are set (1901, 1962, and 2025, respectively) rather than when they were released (2015, 2017, and 2013, respectively). This chronology places my analysis of *The Shape of Water* at the heart of this thesis. Much like the anthropocene requires a rethinking of the past in light of present and future events, *The Shape of Water* allows for a rethinking of del Toro's two previous films in light of his most recent work. This film includes both the haunting of the past (the focus of Chapter One) and the fast-approaching future (the focus of Chapter Three), the nineteenth century gothic

novels and fairy tales that inspired *Crimson Peak* and the B-movies that inspired *Pacific Rim*, critique of domination over nature present in *Crimson Peak* and the transgression of human/non-human boundaries in *Pacific Rim. The Shape of Water* brings together all these central concerns of both previous films while leaving out the decay and destruction that characterizes their landscapes. By leaving out the ruins of its two predecessors, this film reveals the concern at the heart of del Toro's anthropocene gothic and, consequently, at the heart of this thesis: not the destruction, but the transformation.

This anthropocene is not a place of annihilation, but of continuation, collaboration, and transformation. There is no perfect story of the anthropocene because there is no singular anthropocene (Menely and Taylor 3); no one story is capable of capturing the infinite complexities of this epoch. Rather than providing a singular narrative, del Toro's anthropocene gothic offers new ways to engage with the complexity of the monstrous anthropocene—a hybrid of history and future, hopelessly entangled in the ongoing now. I wrote in Chapter One that the anthropocene is a ghost story, in Chapter Two that it is a monster story, and in Chapter Three that it is an apocalypse story. It is all of these stories and more. The anthropocene has many stories waiting to be told, and the anthropocene gothic gives us the language to begin to tell them.

Bibliography

Ahuja, Neel. “The Anthropocene Debate: On the Limits of Colonial Geology.” *neel ahuja,* 9 Sept. 2016, https://ahuja.sites.ucsc.edu/2016/09/09/the-anthropocene-debate-on-the-limits-of-colonial-geology/. Accessed 17 Sept. 2018.

Alaimo, Stacy. *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*. University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

Aravamudan, Srinivas. “The Catachronism of Climate Change.” *diacritics,* vol. 41, no. 3, 2013, pp. 6-30.

Barr, Jason. *The Kaiju Film: A Critical Study of Cinema’s Biggest Monsters*. McFarland, 2016.

Brown, Kate. “Marie Curie’s Fingerprint: Nuclear Spelunking in the Chernobyl Zone.” *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, edited by Anna Tsing et. al, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 33-50.

Buckland, Adelene. *Novel Science: Fiction and the Invention of Nineteenth-Century Geology.* Chicago Scholarship Online, 2013.

Bubandt, Nils. “Haunted Geologies.” *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene,* edited by Anna Tsing et. al, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 121-41.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. “The Climate of History: Four Theses.” *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 197-222.

Clark, David L. “Monstrosity, Illegibility, Denegation: De Man, bp Nichol, and the Resistance to Postmodernism.” *Monster Theory*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 40-72.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. “Preface: In a Time of Monsters.” *Monster Theory,* edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. vii-xiii.

—. “Monster Culture (Seven Theses).” *Monster Theory*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 3-25.

Conway, Erik. *Atmospheric Science at NASA*. John Hopkins UP, 2008.

Cox, Donald W. *The Space Race: From Sputnik to Apollo… and Beyond.* Chilton Books, 1962.

Crimson Peak. Directed by Guillermo del Toro, performances by Mia Wasikowska, Jessica Chastain, Tom Hiddleston, and Charlie Hunnam, Legendary Entertainment, 2015.

Crutzen, Paul J., and Eugene F. Stoermer. “The Anthropocene.” *Global Change Newsletter*, vol. 41, 2000, pp. 17-8.

Davies, Ann, et al., editors. *The Transnational Fantasies of Guillermo del Toro*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Fay, Jennifer. *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene*. Oxford UP, 2018.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Chicago UP, 2016.

Goldstein, Amanda Jo. *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life*. Chicago UP, 2017.

“Guillermo del Toro Wins Best Director at the 2018 Golden Globes.” *YouTube*, uploaded by NBC, 7 Jan. 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykv23HpruCo.

Haraway, Donna. “A Cyborg Manifesto.” *Manifestly Haraway*, Minnesota Scholarship Online, 2017, pp. 1-46.

—. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University Press, 2016.

Hayden, Jessica M. et. al. “Land, Wood, Water, and Space: Senator Robert S. Kerr, Congress, and Selling the Space Race to the American Public.” *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 98, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1189-1203.

Harris, Mason. "Vivisection, the Culture of Science, and Intellectual Uncertainty in *The Island of Doctor Moreau.*" *Gothic Studies,* vol. 4, no. 2, 2002, pp. 99-115.

Harrison, Amy, and B. Leigh Hutchins. *A History of Factory Legislation.* Routledge, 1970.

Hartman, Betsy. "Rethinking Climate Refuges and Climate Conflict: Rhetoric, Reality, and the Politics of Policy Discourse." *Journal of International Development*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2010, pp. 233-46.

Hayles, Katherine. *How we became posthuman: virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics.* University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Hobsbawm, E. J. *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day,* edited by Chris Wrigley, Penguin Books, 1999.

Hogle, Jerrold E. "The Gothic Image at the Villa Diodati." *Wordsworth Circle,* vol. 48, no. 1, 2017, pp. 16-26.

Herberchter, Stefan and Ivan Callus. "What is a Posthumanist Reading?" *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2008, pp. 95-111.

Hurley, Kelly. *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge UP, 2004.

Huxley, Thomas. "On the Hypothesis that Animals Are Automata, and Its History." *Nature,* vol. 10, 1874, pp. 362-66.

Johnson, Mark M. "American Chronicles: The Art of Norman Rockwell." *Arts and activities*, vol. 145, no. 3, 2009, pp. 23-5.

Kanngieser, Anja and Angela Last. "Five Propositions/Critiques for the Anthropocene." *The Anthropocene Transitions Blog: To be worthy ancestors,* 10 Jan. 2016, https://kjmcl.wordpress.com/2016/10/01/five-propositions-critiques-for-the-anthropocene/. Accessed 17 Sept. 2018.

Lansbury, Coral. *The Old Brown Dog: Women, Works, and Vivisection in Edwardian England.* The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern.* Translated by Catherine Porter, Harvard UP, 1993.

Levine, George. *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction.* Harvard UP, 1988.

Lewis, Simon L. and Mark A. Maslin. "Defining the Anthropocene." *Nature: International Journal of Science*, vol. 519, 2015, pp. 171-180.

Luciano, Dana. "The Inhuman Anthropocene." *Avidly*, 22 Mar. 2015, http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2015/03/22/the-inhuman-anthropocene/. Accessed 17 September 2018.

Makala, Melissa Edmundson. *Women's Ghost Literature in Nineteenth-Century Britain.* University of Whales Press, 2013.

Marx, Karl. *Capital: a critical analysis of capitalist production.* 3rd ed., Translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, London, Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1889.

McDonald, Keith, and Roger Clark. *Guillermo del Toro: Film as Alchemic Art*. Bloomsbury, 2014.

McKibben, Bill. "How Extreme Weather is Shrinking the Planet." *The New Yorker*, 26 Nov. 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/11/26/how-extreme-weather-is-shrinking-the-planet. Accessed 15 Jan. 2019.

McNeill, J.R. and Peter Engelke. *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*. Harvard UP, 2016.

Menely, Tobias, and Jesse Oak Taylor. "Introduction." *Anthropocene Reading: Literary History in Geologic Times*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017, pp. 1-24.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution.* Wildwood House, 1980.

—. *Science and Nature: Past, Present, and Future.*1st ed., Routledge, 1970.

Moore, Jason W. "The Capitalocene, Part 1: on the nature and origins of our ecological crisis." *The Journal of Peasant Studies,* vol. 44, no. 3, 2017, pp. 594-630.

Murray, Robin L. and Joseph K. Heumann. *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge.* Albany, SUNY Press, 2009.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Cambridge MA, Harvard UP, 2011.

Pacific Rim. Directed by Guillermo del Toro, performances by Rinko Kikuchi, Idris Elba, and Charlie Hunnam, Legendary Entertainment, 2013.

Parenti, Christian. *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence*. Nation Books, 2011.

Pyrhönen, Heta. *Bluebeard Gothic: Jane Eyre and Its Progeny*. University of Toronto Press, 2010.

Ryfle, Steve and Ed Godziszewski. *Ishiro Honda: A Life in Film, from Godzilla to Kurosawa.* Wesleyan UP, 2017.

Sagan, Carl and Anne Druyan. *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*. Ballantine, 1994.

Salvesen, Paul and Jim Shedden. *Guillermo del Toro: At Home with Monsters*. Insight Editions, 2016.

Shaw, John F, and M. Walbrook. *Vivisection: Analysis of the Report of the Royal Commission with Observations Thereon, and Extracts from Evidence,* London, Nineteenth Century Collections Online, 1876, http://tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/6nijD3.

Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. "Belief and Resistance: A Symmetrical Account." *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 18, no. 1, 1991, pp. 125-39.

The Bible. The King James Version, Project Gutenberg, 2011.

The Devil's Backbone. Directed by Guillermo del Toro, performances by Eduardo Noriega, Marisa Paredes, and Federico Luppi, Tequila Gang, 2001.

The Shape of Water. Directed by Guillermo del Toro, performances by Sally Hawkins, Doug Jones, and Octavia Spencer, TSG Entertainment, 2017.

Thornton, Niamh. "Pacific Rim: Reception, Readings, and Authority." *The Transnational Fantasies of Guillermo del Toro,* edited by Ann Davies et. al., Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 121-39.

Tuhus-Dubrow, Rebecca. "Cli-Fi: Birth of a Genre." *Dissent*, vol. 60, no. 3, 2013, pp. 58-61.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt, et. al, editors. *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

—. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in the Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton UP, 2015.

Webb, Caroline and Helen Hopcroft. "'A Different Logic': Animals, Transformation, and Rationality in Angela Carter's 'The Tiger's Bride." *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2017, pp. 314.-37.

Wenzel, Jennifer. "Past's futures, future's pasts." *Memory Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2018, pp. 502-4.

White, Gregory. *Climate Change and Migration: Security and Borders in a Warming World*. Oxford UP, 2011.

"Why is *The Shape of Water* set in 1962?" *Sky News*, 6 Feb. 2018, https://news.sky.com/video/why-is-the-shape-of-water-set-in-1962-11238884. Accessed 15 Nov. 2018.

Williams, Anne. *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*. The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Youngquist, Paul. *Monstrosities: Bodies and British Romanticism*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.