UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

# Flesh and Blood:

# The Inbred Grotesque and Queer Kinships in Rural Gothic Literature and Film

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

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March 2024

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ABSTRACT

Flesh and Blood:

The Inbred Grotesque and Queer Kinships in Rural Gothic Literature and Film

By

Celeste McAlpin-Levitt

This dissertation investigates the prominence of incest tropes in Australian and U.S. Rural Gothic literature and film of the late nineteenth through early twenty-first century. Through a comparative study of texts from and about Tasmania and Appalachia, regions of low-economic status historically imagined to be on the fringe of their respective nations, I trace how stereotypes about inbreeding among the white rural poor reflect an anxiety over state biopower that originated during the founding of these settler colonies. I argue that the fear of "failed" yeoman farmers, whose non-normative sexuality, gender, racial identity, and refusal of labor are understood to degrade the settlement from within, led to the creation of an "inbred" hillbilly figure that can be found throughout the media of settler colonial states. I coin the term "inbred grotesque" to refer to the aesthetic pattern associated with this stock character, whose prominent physical differences, deformities, and disabilities are designed to reflect their internal opposition to settler values. I examine how the inbred grotesque transformed incest into a form of cultural shorthand for alternative and queer kinship patterns that challenge the foundational unit of settler states—the patriarchal nuclear family. Throughout the dissertation, I outline how the hillbilly and inbred grotesque shaped and were shaped by eugenic theory, industrialization, and nationalist movements.

In the first and second chapters, I focus on the literary and historical origins of incest stereotypes in Appalachia and Tasmania, taking as my primary case studies John Fox Jr.'s Virginian "local color" novel *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908) and Marcus Clarke's Van Diemonian convict narrative *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874). In my third chapter, I perform a comparative reading of Cormac McCarthy's novel *Outer Dark* (1968) and Louis Nowra's play *The Golden Age* (1985), examining how these American and Australian writers harnessed the inbred grotesque to express their opposition to postmodernist challenges to reproductive futurism. In my fourth chapter, I move to the birth of the "killbilly" horror genre, the dominant form of the inbred grotesque from the 1970s to the present day, and consider how cult films featuring inbred cannibal families such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), and *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003) have both sustained and challenged hillbilly tropes. Finally, in my epilogue, I discuss the fate of the hillbilly today, considering how this figure has played a key role in the rhetoric of the contemporary Australian and American far- and alt-right movements and how the Left might itself learn to embrace the inbred grotesque.

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## Introduction

> The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus *rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life.*
>
> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)

> Mountain or rural primitivism has always offered endless inspiration for shitty writers.
>
> Elizabeth Catte, *Pure America: Eugenics and the Making of Modern Virginia* (2021)

Throughout my childhood in Knoxville, Tennessee, I occasionally saw a bumper sticker that struck me as strange. It sometimes featured two stick figures riding in a canoe, sometimes it was on a pickup truck and sometimes it was on a Prius, but the words were always the same: "Paddle Faster, I Hear Banjo Music!". Eventually I learned that these bumper stickers were a reference to James Dickey's 1970 novel *Deliverance*, or more likely, the novel's 1972 film adaptation. As I understood it then, the phrase alluded to *Deliverance*'s tourist protagonists trying to escape the murderous hillbillies that they encountered while on a canoe trip in rural north Georgia. When I finally read *Deliverance* for a freshman composition class at the University of Southern California, I learned that I had been wrong. The hillbillies did not try to kill the protagonists: they raped them. At the time, I was surprised that this novel and film which prominently featured a scene of male rape had somehow become a mainstream cultural touch point. *Deliverance* did not simply skirt the taboo, but graphically depicted anal sex at a time when sodomy laws remained on the books in most American states. What gave *Deliverance* permission to do this when no other piece

of media could? Why, over three decades later, did such a variety people still proudly display their love for the film on their cars? And why did the sexuality in *Deliverance* feel somehow connected to its other most infamous moment, the "Dueling Banjos" scene, in which the tourists encounter an intellectually disabled, albino "inbred" boy?

This dissertation examines how a text like *Deliverance* achieved popularity—or infamy—and why queer sexuality and gender, disability and deformity, poverty, rurality, whiteness, and violence are so closely intertwined within this work and many other similar texts. I identify this amalgamation of tropes as signature of the "Rural Gothic," a subgenre of the Gothic that developed in the early literatures of Anglophone settler colonial states. While the Gothic of eighteenth-century Britain most often takes place in feudal castles or medieval ruins, in decayed but bounded settings, the Rural Gothic is located in "wilderness": the undeveloped land at the fringe of civilization. In *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness* (2013), Bernice Murphy defines this setting as "the place where the representatives of 'civilization' are pitched against forces that embody 'savagery,' and order—moral, psychological, and geographical—as opposed to chaos" (16). Examples of the early Rural Gothic include the American "Indian captivity narrative," in which a colonist, typically a woman, recounts a tale of abduction by Indigenous people, and the Australian "lost-in-the bush" story, in which a colonist, again often a woman or child, vanishes mysteriously in the bush. While, as these narratives illustrate, the early British Gothic and the Anglophone settler Rural Gothic contain many substantive generic differences, there is one key trope that they share: incestuous sex and reproduction. As "Flesh and Blood: The Inbred Grotesque and Queer Kinships in the Rural Gothic" explores, the Rural Gothic's retention of the incest theme is not coincidental but the result of a shared set

of settler colonial logics and anxieties. By taking up the literature of two of the major regions of Rural Gothic development, Appalachia in the United States and Tasmania in Australia, I demonstrate that this incest trope developed convergently on a global scale during the founding of settler colonies in narrative responses to fears over failures of state biopower.

The study of the incest taboo dates back to the earliest days of anthropology and psychoanalysis, from Claude Lévi-Strauss' theory of the "exchange of women" to Freud's Oedipus complex. In evolutionary science, incestuous reproduction is understood to increase the rate of inheritance of recessive genetic disorders. This dissertation investigates Western eighteenth-century to twenty-first-century cultural depictions of incest and inbreeding, exploring how this social taboo has been linked to fears of human biological degeneration and why, as a result, "inbred" characters have consistently been featured throughout media of Anglophone settler colonial states. As I argue, the inbred person, born from incestuous reproduction, is frequently depicted as a threat to public order and health. Their existence must be hidden from view, much like the forbidden sexual act that created them; as such, incestuous, inbred figures are depicted as occupying a position of remarkable queerness. "Flesh and Blood" contends that incest is used as a moral shorthand gesturing both to the larger unacknowledged queerness of a given marginalized community and the perception of risk associated with deviant sexuality. Much like queer sex, incestuous sex has been pathologized as not only an act committed by "diseased" individuals, but also as a contagious, biological hazard to the larger population. The evidence of non-normative sexuality is imagined to be written legibly on the body of the inbred, what Lee Edelman refers to in *Homographesis* (1994) as a "disciplinary inscription."[1]

[1] Lee Edelman, *Homographesis*, 10.

I coin the term "inbred grotesque" to name the aesthetic conventions that surround and are inscribed upon the inbred figure. The inbred grotesque takes what are understood to be internal, invisible traits—non-normative sexualities, opposition towards labor and the authority of the state, inappropriate religious fervor—and amalgamates them with external, visible qualities—gender presentation, disability and deformity, and alternative forms of relationality and kinship. I identify this torqued aesthetic as a form of the "grotesque" as it is designed to provoke emotions of disgust, anxiety, horror, and pity. As Geoffrey Harpham outlines in "The Grotesque: First Principles" (1976), the definition of the grotesque is "almost as fluid as that of beauty, is good for one era—even one man—at a time," but "the emotional complex denoted by the word remains fairly consistent" (461-462). Also importantly, Harpham qualifies that the grotesque must feel "representative of reality as he know it" to an observer (462). While the grotesque is commonly conceived of as beyond the everyday, it must contain elements of the believable and recognizable. The grain of truth perceived to be present within the inbred grotesque is what gives the aesthetic construction its lasting importance and power. This purported reflection of reality is why, as this dissertation traces, the inbred grotesque can be found outside the realm of fiction and in eugenic theory, the rhetoric of industrialization, and nationalist movements.[2]

The inbred grotesque appears within the Rural Gothic as the defining aesthetic of the hillbilly. While typically associated with an American setting, the hillbilly stock character developed convergently as a popular figure throughout media of the majority of European settler colonial states. Settler colonization can be defined as a form of colonialism in which

[2] The inbred grotesque, which is predicated on the belief that its aesthetic contortions are at once horrific and mundanely real, should be distinguished from the celebratory "carnival" form of the grotesque outlined by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (1965).

"settlers" migrate to and permanently occupy land with the intention of replacing a pre-existing Indigenous population. Patrick Wolfe argues that settler colonialism can be distinguished from other forms of colonization by its "primary object…the land itself rather than the surplus value to be derived from mixing native labour with it…settler-colonization is at base a winner-take-all project whose dominant feature is not exploitation but replacement."[3] In order to succeed, settler colonial states must continuously achieve three goals: land acquisition, resource extraction, and population control. While this dissertation touches on each of these areas, I understand the inbred grotesque and hillbilly to have developed primarily to meet the necessities of population control. Due to the rejection of "native labor," the structure of settler invasion is predicated on the mobilization of surplus population from the home-nation. As Lorenzo Veracini has traced, this surplus population is composed largely of "agitators," religious dissidents, labor organizers, and convicts whose removal inhibits the development of revolutionary circumstances in the home-nation.[4] At the same time that these groups compose the "shock troops of colonialism," settler elites have tended to retain doubts as to whether this former "surplus population" have had their original oppositional relationship to the state adequately diffused through their displacement to the settlement.[5]

I argue that the hillbilly figure developed as a composite cultural representation of such "agitators" following their uneven integration into the settler state. While the hillbilly is perceived as a benign, politically neutral construct, their representation of the white rural poor is infused with settler colonial anxieties. As a fictional creation, the hillbilly serves

[3] Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, 163.
[4] Lorenzo Veracini, *The World Turned Inside Out: Settler Colonialism as a Political Idea*, 80.
[5] Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "The Rise and Fall of Penal Transportation," 647.

multiple purposes, including the discipline of settlers, the concealment of real intrafamilial sexual abuse within normative kinship, and the erasure of Indigenous presence through symbolic replacement. The hillbilly is a foil to the good settler colonist, the patriarchal "yeoman" farmer. Hillbillies do not engage properly in the public sphere; they challenge the power of the state; their sexual practices and relations of kinship fall outside of the domain of the normative family unit. It is this last tendency that makes the hillbilly a particularly threatening figure; in Focault's words, the "family cell" is "an essential component…of the disciplinary system" (*Psychiatric Power* 80). I characterize hillbillies' alternative forms and perceived deviations of domesticity and matrices of relation as "queer kinship." This is a slippery term that invokes what are at first glance two seemingly disconnected fields: kinship studies and queer theory. Kinship studies originated in the mid-nineteenth century and developed largely along determined structuralist lines. Through the middle-to-late twentieth century, social scientists studying kinship primarily aimed to divine underlying similarities across cultures. Kinship studies categorized "societies organized mostly or entirely on the basis of kinship, in which ones role depends on the kinship categories into which one falls, were distinguished from societies where this gives way, at least in part, to links made between individuals on other grounds, such as fealty, agreement to act in a certain capacity, and so on."[6]

More recently, "critical" kinship studies has challenged this approach to the study of close human relations, instead attempting "to examine practices of naturalization, to think of kinship as a technology rather than as a taken for granted social structure, and to think about the 'human' in human kinship in ways that destabilize the centrality of humanism within

[6] Robert Parkin, *Kinship: An Introduction to Basic Concepts*, 136.

kinship studies."[7] As evidenced by the works in the recent collection *Queer Kinship: Race, Sex, Belonging, Form* (2022), this renewed approach to the concept of kinship has opened it up to new theoretical intersections. Tyler Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman, the editors of *Queer Kinship,* write in their introduction that while queer theorists have often rejected the "idiom of 'kinship'" in favor of more expansive terms such as "*belonging*, *intimacy*, and *sodality*," there has been a recent turn to kinship as a way of understanding queer relationality (2). These scholars contend that kinship is a useful concept for queer theorists insofar as it "lacks a center: it is diffuse and mobile, a *doing* (Bourdieu 1977) that we discover in a vast web of relationality that crosses 'official' and uncodified social bonds alike" (3).

For my purposes, the concept of queer kinship is useful because of how it is legible to a wider audience invested in settler patriarchy. In the settler imaginary, hillbillies' queer kinship destabilizes the "family cell" by offering distorted, substitute forms of relationality, thereby claiming the power of the traditional nuclear family. Counterintuitively, I also characterize this vision of queer kinship as understood to be "reproductive," either via non-normative forms of biological procreation or through the use of queer sex to create new kinship bonds. While hillbilly identity may be genetically determined, it is also something which, through sexual and relational contagious contact, any settler may become and must therefore guard against. This "guarding" itself demands a renewal of patriarchal authority within the so-called normative family, including forms of control such as intrafamilial sexual abuse.

[7] Damien W. Riggs and Elizabeth Peel, *Critical Kinship Studies: An Introduction to the Field*, 4.

Settler kinship and reproduction is premised on the preservation of the category of whiteness. As such, whiteness studies is an essential methodological approach in this project. Following Cheryl Harris' assertion that whiteness may be understood not simply as a racial identity but an object of property, the inbred grotesque can be read as contesting the hillbilly's claim to whiteness.[8] The hillbilly's grotesque characterization is in part a result of the figure's rejection of the requisite behavior of whites in upholding white supremacy. Despite having purportedly realized the settler colonial dream of a monoracial community, the hillbilly is depicted as suspiciously close to Indigenous and, in the American context, enslaved Black people. As my discussions of eighteenth-century Virginian "lubbers" and nineteenth-century Tasmanian "bushrangers" illustrate, this proximity threatens the integrity of the category of whiteness for all settlers. The hillbilly's expansive queer kin networks challenge norms of white male breadwinners and white female domesticity. Yet at the same time that the hillbilly's racial status is put into question by the inbred grotesque, they retain a claim to a kind of warped whiteness, as the frequency of "hyper-white" albino hillbillies shows. As Matt Wray argues, the hillbilly possesses "a monstrous transgressive identity of mutually violating boundary terms," constantly shifting between racial purity and irredeemable racial difference.[9]

Throughout my analysis of appearances and impacts of the inbred grotesque, I trace how the aesthetic form manifested in two seemingly unrelated, geographically distant settler colonial locales: Tasmania in Australia in Appalachia in the United States. Tasmania, *lutruwita* in the reconstructed Indigenous Palawa kani language, is a heart-shaped island located across the Bass Strait below mainland Australia. The mountainous, largely rural state

[8] Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property."
[9] Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, 2.

is approximately the same size as Ireland but, at 572,800 residents, has only slightly over a tenth of Ireland's population.[10] Tasmania is known for its mineral resources, forests of valuable Huon pine, and extensive system of hydro-electric dams. This southernmost outland has also for over a century maintained a status in the mainland Australian imaginary as home to "yobbos" or "chiggers," regional parlance for rural poor whites. Among the Australian states, Tasmania consistently lags behind in income and wealth distribution.[11] Under its first colonial name, Van Diemen's Land, the island was the location where repeat offenders from the Australian mainland were sent to serve harsh sentences at experimental prisons that were among the first to implement criminal pathophysiology: the petri dish for Bentham's panopticon and the practice of solitary confinement.[12] These convicts were also mobilized to displace and kill Aboriginal Tasmanians during the colonial genocide known as the "Black War." Tasmania is also home to a thriving Gothic tradition. As Gerry Turcotte observes, "Tasmania is a particularly apt place to begin a discussion of the Gothic since it has so often been figured, in the Australian mainland imaginary, as a space of terror, of backwardness, of depravity"; the island is the "darkest" region of a settler nation that was itself originally "constructed as a space of monstrosity."[13]

[10] Australian Bureau of Statistics, "National, state, and territory population."
[11] "Income and Wealth Distribution by State," McCrindle, mccrindle.com (2014)
[12] "The Separate Prison," Port Arthur Historic Site.
[13] Gerry Turcotte, "Re-mastering the Ghosts: Mudrooroo and Gothic Refigurations," 130-131.

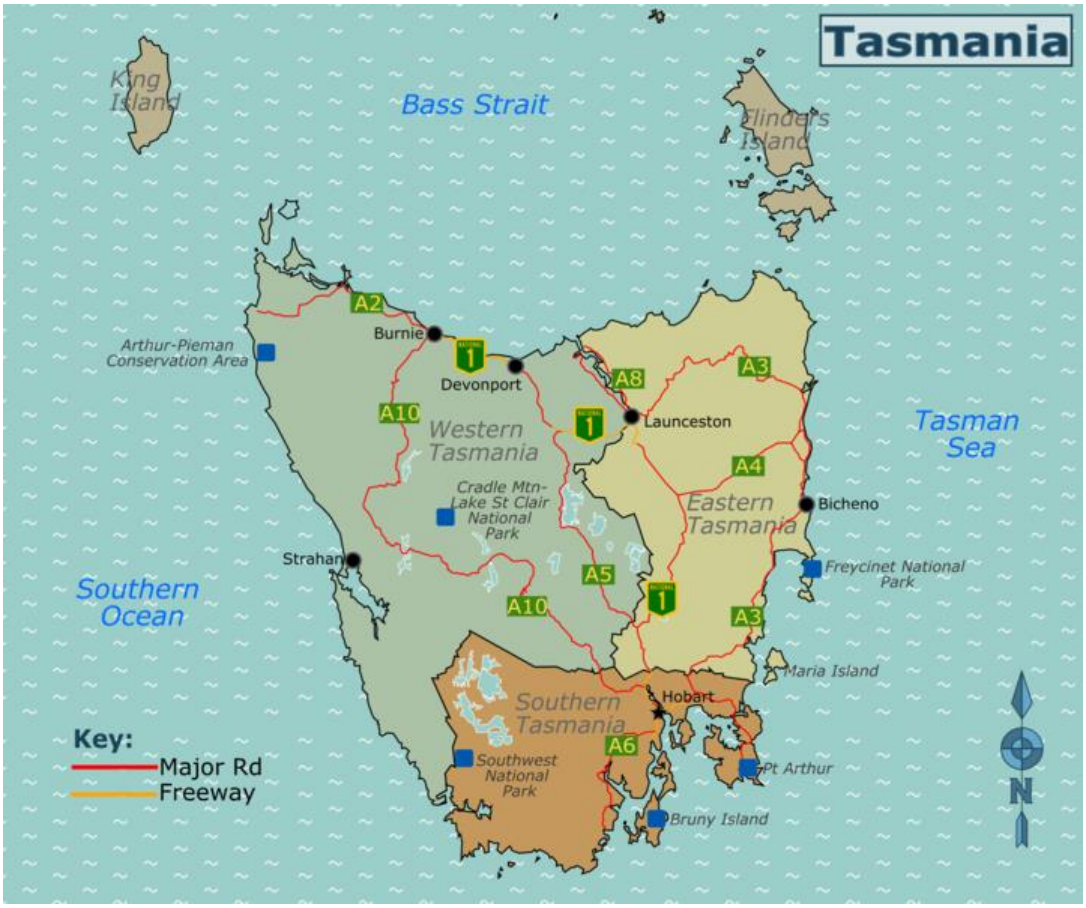


Figure 1. Map of Tasmania.[14]

While geographically larger and landlocked, I argue that the Gothic conception of Tasmania as a "space of terror, of backwardness, of depravity" more than resembles the American Gothic imaginary of Appalachia. Appalachia, named for the mountain range that extends through the eastern United States, is a socio-economic region that was first delineated following the American Civil War. Appalachia's lowest point is generally considered to be in the upper regions of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, while its highest point is located in the Catskills Mountain in New York. However, it is Appalachia's middle

[14] "File: Tasmania map.png."

states, West Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Kentucky, that are most commonly associated with the region. Much like Tasmania, Appalachia is a region with many extractible resources, from coal to lumber to hydropower. It is also commonly depicted as inhabited by moonshiners, feuding clans, and of course, "inbred" people. While my study of the American hillbilly occasionally detours to locations that occupy cognate places in the rural imaginary, such as rural Texas or the Ozark Mountains, I identify Appalachia as the primary location of America's collective "backwoods."

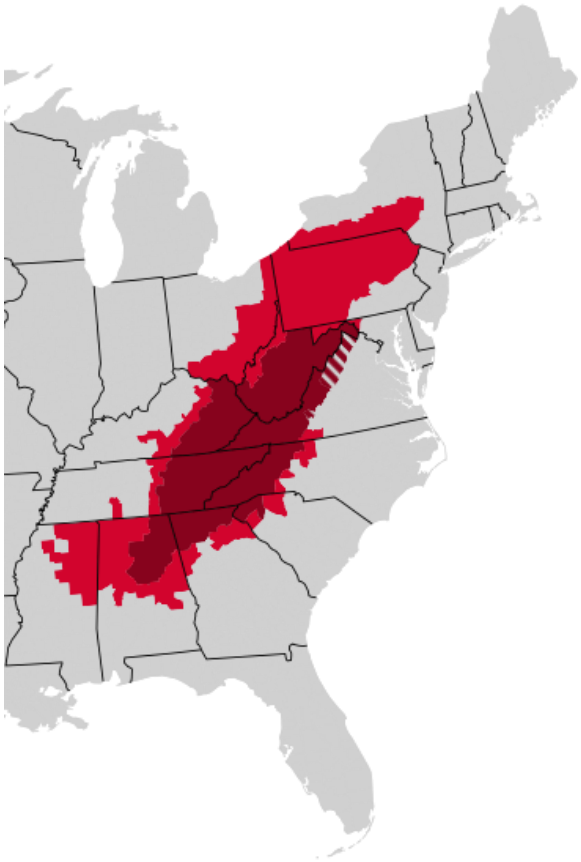

Figure 2. Map of Appalachia.[15]

[15] "File: Map of Appalachia without county borders.svg."

This dissertation's comparative approach is a significant deviation from previous studies of cultural depictions of the white rural poor, which tend to be limited to a single—and most often American—context. The similarities between these two convergent "hillbillies" are striking, and by bringing Australian and American traditions into conversation, I am able to identify the core qualities of the inbred grotesque that they share. While this project is limited through its focus on Anglophone literature, there exist other cultural figures, such as the Argentinian "gaucho," who may play analogous roles in the media of settler colonies not established by the British. Such similar characters may open up additional routes of inquiry in the future.

My sustained focus on the incest trope itself is also an unusual approach for the critical conversations I enter into. Remarkably little attention has been given to the rural incest trope despite its long-standing prevalence in popular culture and status as a defining trait of the imaginary defining the white rural poor. Only one recent critical text by criminologist Karen E. Hayden, *The Rural Primitive in American Popular Culture: All Too Familiar* (2021), has given this kinship trope sustained attention. As Hayden writes:

> the message of the inbred community is clear: degeneracy, primitivism, savagery, regression, lawlessness, and an overall devolution with result if groups are allowed to become too insular, too close, *too familiar.* For the mythology of inbredness to become so entrenched to be unassailable, it needed to creep into the popular culture of the mid to late nineteenth century. The mythology grew so potent and enduring because it has been continuously recreated over time, resulting in a type of taken-for-granted, mundane knowledge permeating everything from schoolyard ridicule to horror stories (4).

Hayden compellingly traces the sociological development of the incest trope and its connection to the economic positioning of poor and rural whites in America, but her research does not extend to the myriad ways in which to be "inbred" encompasses much more than

one form of non-normative sexuality. This project both expands the understanding on the incest trope and offers an explanation for its development.

In undertaking this expansion, this dissertation contains two parts. The first section surveys the creation and historical background of the inbred grotesque and associated hillbilly figure. The first chapter focuses on early twentieth-century Appalachian "local color" writing, while the second chapter examines nineteenth-century Tasmanian convict narratives, treating both these genres as early forms of the Rural Gothic. The second section considers how American and Australian mid to late twentieth-century Rural Gothic media adapted the inbred grotesque for new audiences and political milieu. The third chapter examines how reactionary writers from both regions adapted hillbilly figure in their responses to the rise of postmodernism. The fourth and final chapter takes up the "killbilly" horror film to consider the future of the inbred grotesque and investigate whether this aesthetic construction has the potential to be reappropriated by the Left.

Chapter one, "Hillbilly Effigy: Settler Colonial Biopolitics and the Inbred Grotesque," begins by reviewing previous critical approaches to the hillbilly, in particular highlighting Matt Wray's work on "white trash" racialization and Anthony Harkins' hillbilly cultural historiography. This survey builds towards my project's definition of the character as a broadly global figure defined by their characterization via the inbred grotesque. The chapter then outlines how the hillbilly and this accompanying aesthetic construct developed first in accounts of isolated frontier communities in Virginia and North Carolina known at "Lubberland." As a result of migration and political factors in the wake of the American Civil War, this previous "lubber" imaginary is shown to have been mapped on to Appalachian "mountaineers," a subgroup of whom were then designated as the first "hillbillies." The next

section expands on the notion of the inbred grotesque, focusing on how the aesthetic queers the hillbilly and signifies their risk to the repronormative white settler population. The inbred grotesque is then analyzed as fulfilling a rhetorical need of settler colonial states. I trace how the aesthetic construct appeared within influential eugenic studies such as Richard Louis Dugdale's *The Jukes* (1877) and Henry H. Goddard's *The Kallikak Family* (1912) at the same time it developed within early American Rural Gothic literature. The chapter then takes up John Fox Jr.'s "local color" novel *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908) as a case study through which to appraise the inbred grotesque, looking in turn at how Fox utilizes tropes associated with the aesthetic: the "blood feud"; the unhygienic, incestuous family "cabin"; extractible, reproductive resources; and the religious fanatic. The chapter culminates with a discussion of Fox's vision of the return of state biopower to the mountains, gesturing towards how this novel and others like it influenced government policy in and beliefs about Appalachia in the long term.

Chapter two, "'The Hated Stain': Settler Patriarchy and the Queer Convict Gothic in Van Diemen's Land" draws on primary source material ranging from local newspaper articles to social media posts to rock songs to outline instances of incest stereotypes and the inbred grotesque that appear in depictions of rural Tasmania. Here, in the Australian context, the hillbilly trope originates with a figure who stands as a fraternal twin to the Appalachian mountaineer: the convict. This chapter explore why Tasmania is central to the Australian convict imaginary, surveying Van Diemonian bushranger tales and early perceptions of the island on the mainland. With this as a jumping off point, the chapter proceeds to expand upon the role of the family cell in the mechanisms of biopower, considering how the hillbilly's self-replication via the corruption of other previously healthy, upstanding settlers is depicted

as uniquely threatening to the health of the state. I consider how during the mid-nineteenth-century Van Diemonian convict sodomy panic, anti-transportationists mobilized the inbred grotesque to cultivate a public fear of contagion. Finally, through my reading of scenes of flagellation and cannibalism in Marcus Clarke's Convict Gothic novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874), the chapter traces how such anxieties were not purely about the spread of disease, but the expansion of non-normative, queer kinship networks between poor settler men.

Chapter three, "Eating Their Young: Postmodern Hillbillies and the Inbred Child," begins by tracing how, during the 1930s, the hillbilly figure evolved from the subject of comedy and melodrama to a standby of the Social Realist novel that was seen more than ever as a flesh and blood reality. The chapter then investigates how the inbred grotesque, through its depiction of incest as the lurid domain of the cacogenic, irreparably failed hillbilly, contributes to a "veiled" fantasy of incest, normalizes incestuous desire while simultaneously pathologizing it. Surveying feminist scholarship on incest, this chapter interprets intrafamilial sexual abuse by the "upstanding" settler as in fact an integral extension of state biopower, in which children are treated as property. I then argue that the increasing legitimacy of the inbred grotesque allowed the aesthetic convention to be mobilized by mid to late twentieth-century writers who were concerned with how postmodern thought appeared to be changing the public understanding of kinship. Taking Cormac McCarthy's Appalachia-set novel *Outer Dark* (1968) and Louis Nowra's Tasmania-set play *The Golden Age* (1985) as examples, this chapter examines how these writers positioned their atavistic hillbilly protagonists and their families as sympathetic foils to the postmodern family. However, rather than challenging the inbred grotesque, I argue that McCarthy and Nowra's works advocate for a renewal of

reprofuturist belief. This chapter concludes by considering how these texts advance the fear that if the "settler" family abandons its investment in the normative symbolic Child, it will be replaced by the biologically defective "inbred" Child, leading to a crisis for the settler state.

My fourth and final chapter, "Killbilly Kinship: Neoliberalism, Horror Film, and the Inbred Cannibal Clan," addresses the continuing reverberations of the inbred grotesque among contemporary audiences via a popular new media form: the formula making and formula breaking "killbilly" horror film. The chapter begins by discussing how this genre's key trope, the "inbred cannibal clan," dates back to the earliest days of settler colonial invasion, when the "cannibal colonizer" figure developed in reaction to repressed panics over the early failures of colonial settlement. This chapter traces how, beginning in the early 1970s, an atmosphere of social and economic uncertainty lead American and Australian horror filmmakers to revive the "cannibal colonizer" trope. I argue that, despite critical perceptions that these films criticized the state and normative family, the killbilly genre sought to reassure viewers that, despite threats from marginalized rural "Others," the underlying structure of society remained secure. The chapter concludes by reviewing the genre's revival in the wake of 9/11, when a subset of filmmakers finally broke with the inbred grotesque's reactionary history and attempted to harness the hillbilly's potential for social critique.

Finally, the epilogue of "Flesh and Blood" moves to discuss the fate of the hillbilly today, considering how this figure has played a key role in the rhetoric of the contemporary Australian and American far- and alt-right movements. This epilogue surveys how the recent success of works such as J.D. Vance's *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016) illustrates that the academic and popular narratives of rurality still rely on the settler vision of rural poverty as a result of

endemic disease. At the same time, I argue that Vance and others like him seek to reclaim the hillbilly as an emblem of white nationalism, purging the figure of the inbred grotesque and erasing awareness of hillbillies' complicity in settler colonial violence. After surveying how some vocal liberals and Leftists have mistakenly reacted by increasingly characterizing the white rural poor via the inbred grotesque, I end by considering how the Left might itself learn to embrace radical, anti-normative potential of the hillbilly.

## Chapter One

### Hillbilly Effigy: Settler Colonial Biopolitics and the Inbred Grotesque

> Every stranger in Appalachia is quick to note the high percentage of defectives among the people. However, we should bear in mind that in the mountains proper there are few, if any, public refuges for this class, and that home ties are so powerful that mountaineers never send their 'fiftied folks' or 'half-wits,' or other unfortunates, to any institution in the lowlands, so long as it is bearable to have them around. Such poor creatures as would be segregated in more advanced communities, far from the public eye, here go at large and reproduce their kind.
>
> Horace Kephart, *Our Southern Highlanders* (1913)

In 1904, forty-two-year-old former Yale librarian Horace Kephart, disenchanted with city life, abandoned his wife and six children and embarked for the North Carolina mountains.[16] He would spend the next twenty-five years documenting his interactions with the "mountaineers" whom he met on his travels throughout Appalachia, ultimately publishing the part-memoir and part-informal sociological study *Our Southern Highlanders* (1913). Utilizing his book's large readership, Kephart would go on to lead the successful campaign for the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Financed largely by private donors, including 4,500 school children who raised $1,000 in pennies, the park would displace the residents of approximately 1,200 mountaineer homesteads within its boundaries.[17] Kephart, like many other of the park's founders, approached this preservation project as both an environmental and moral crusade. His personal appeals and published descriptions of mountaineers as culturally and physically degraded were circulated in media

[16] George Ellison & Janet McCue, *Back of Beyond: A Horace Kephart Biography.*
[17] Michael Frome, *Strangers in High Places: The Story of the Great Smoky Mountains*, 173.

accounts of the park's development, with preservationists promoting the terrains beauty while arguing that the mountaineers' backwoods lifestyle posed a danger to public health.

Ever since the final holdout mountaineers were evicted in 1937, the most popular attraction in the park has been Cades Cove, a lush valley where abandoned cabins, churches, and even wheat fields have been preserved in artifice as an outdoor museum of history and folk-free folk culture. Visitors drive along in bumper-to-bumper traffic on the paved central thoroughfare, receiving a view out the car window of historical rural mountain life before continuing on to local attractions such as the Hatfield and McCoy Dinner Feud and subsequently returning to their multi-story, indoor-plumbed log cabin Airbnbs. As one mountaineer predicted during his eviction, the park has succeeded in its original purpose: "to provide a playground for rich people" (Frome 195).

Why has the mountaineer, or as they would become more popularly known, the hillbilly been such an enduring object of both fascination and disgust? In *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (2004), Anthony Harkins contends that "pre-modern and ignorant 'hillbillies' [are] one of the most lasting and pervasive images in American popular iconography, appearing continuously throughout the twentieth century in nearly every major facet of American popular culture from novels and magazines to movies and television programs to country music and the Internet" (3). This purportedly benign comic portrayal of rural poor white people's economic, cultural, and, most important for this chapter, genetic impoverishment has endured as a result of the hillbilly figure's saturation with ongoing social anxieties. The hillbilly's poverty and whiteness places them into what sociologist Matt Wray has referred to as "a dangerous threshold state of being neither one nor the other," leading to "a monstrous transgressive identity of mutually violating boundary

terms." [18] The hillbilly is defined by their essential ironies: both white and poor, settler and imagined "Native," vigorous and lazy, patriotic and subversive, evangelist and heathen, family-centered and sexually deviant. As a settler colonist, the hillbilly participates in the violence of the settler colonial project; however, they are simultaneously understood to retain a potentially revolutionary orientation towards sovereignty that their original displacement via settlement was intended to diffuse. As the rhetoric of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park's founders illustrates, the hillbilly is at once part of the foundational mythology of settlement and a regressive obstacle to progress; this duality poses an existential challenge to settler states that are invested in both "making live" and "letting die" such a contradictory subject. The hillbilly as Other mist be read through the dual lenses of biopolitical theory and settler colonial studies as an intransigent obstruction to the mechanisms of settler "biopower"—the state's control over the biological processes of the population. As a result, the hillbilly is uniquely positioned to expose what Foucault termed the "death-function in the economy of biopower," through which modern political authorities' defense of life is mirrored by an equal and opposite destruction of life.[19]

While most often associated with an American setting, the hillbilly evolved convergently as a broadly global character and oppositional necessity for biopolitics that can be found in most if not all settler colonial locales. In each of these contexts, hillbillies share a common history as agents of settler colonial genocide, yet they are also uniformly portrayed as operating outside of or even refusing the power of the State. What the hillbilly is called may differ from place to place; there is a substantial body of related derogatory terms, from Australian and New Zealand "bogans" and Newfoundland "skeets" to South African "japies."

[18] Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, 2.
[19] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, 258.

I have selected hillbilly from among these possibilities not because it is the broadest and most encompassing name. While "poor white trash," in accordance with Matt Wray, would come closest to achieving this status,[20] the composite term "hillbilly" most clearly conveys a concentrated extreme of class and geographical status. The hillbilly is defined by name for their location at the fringe of the frontier, and yet the actual location of what Anthony Harkins calls "hillbillyland" is fluid. As Harkins writes:

> because the hillbilly image/identity has always been a site of contending attitudes toward modernity, it has occupied a mythical far more than a concrete geographic locale…indeed, most cultural consumers, to the extent they considered the matter at all, conceived of 'hillbillyland' as, at best an amorphous area of the upper South and, more often, as anywhere on the rough edges of the landscape and economy (5).

For my purposes, hillbillyland may be classified as a what Foucault called a "heterotopia of deviation," a location where "individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed."[21] The similar "redneck" figure, who may be found in an urban setting and engage in conventional work or even politics, should be differentiated by their presence in normative spaces. As the oxymoronic wordplay of *The Beverly Hillbillies* suggests, the hillbilly can exist only as long as they do not interact with the outer world. The hillbilly is not a proletarian or small-holding peasant, but instead belongs to the lumpenproletariat, the non-laboring underclass that Marx and Engels viewed as "an essentially parasitical group" lacking the capability of forming a "clear class-consciousness."[22]

The category of the hillbilly is thus both expansive enough for my purposes, potentially encompassing a variety of subsidiary figures from autonomous rural

[20] Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*.
[21] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias," 47.
[22] Robert L. Bussard, "The 'Dangerous Class' of Marx and Engels: The Rise of the Idea of the Lumpenproletariat."

homesteaders to convicts transported to border settlements, and immediately recognizable as a result of their widespread and longstanding global cultural dissemination. By diverting from a strong tendency towards limited regional specificity in studies of the hillbilly, this dissertation project seeks to demonstrate how this perceived "trash" is not a singular cultural occurrence but instead an inevitable problematic residue—telling remainders—of the structure of settler colonialism. In this opening chapter, I will first focus on the social group that is most immediately associated with the term "hillbilly": the white rural poor of the Appalachian mountains. Following a survey of the history of this hillbilly varietal's aesthetic construction and settler colonial origins, including a definition of my key term "inbred grotesque," this chapter proceeds to analyze how one of the most enduringly influential examples of the Appalachian local color novel, John Fox Jr.'s *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908). As my reading shows, the Fox's book exemplifies this hillbilly phenomenon and has contributed to several of its key features. More generally, this chapter serves to demonstrate how representations of the "defective" hillbilly in both social scientific literature and the Rural Gothic novel reflect a larger paradox of biopower. The Appalachian hillbilly is key to understanding, on a global scale, disciplinary and generic attempts to contend with this figure, who has served as both a cornerstone of the structure settler invasion and a challenge to the integrity of the settler colonial dream.

It is important to begin any discussion of the hillbilly by insisting on this figure's status as a stock character based in stereotype who must be differentiated from the people they are intended to caricature. The hillbilly's imagined representation of the white rural poor has been treated as more of a social scientific fact than a conceptual fiction; therefore, it is crucial to preemptively note that hillbilly narratives are a highly distorted, commodified

reflection of these communities. For instance, the trope of the Appalachian hillbilly relies on a persistent narrative of the region's uniform white British (in particular Scotch-Irish[23]) heritage that has been long disproven by all demographic and historical measures. Historian of Appalachia Wilma Dunaway refers to this enduring but false belief as the "ethnic homogeneity thesis."[24] By virtue of their status on the literal margins, the Appalachian rural poor have historically been a racially heterogenous class category. Yet there remains a pervasive belief in the uniform whiteness of the settler colonial rural fringe, an idea which itself stems from the refusal to acknowledge continued Indigenous presence that results from the logic of settler colonialism. In fact, the erasure of rural racial and ethnic diversity is an intended consequence of the hillbilly trope and among its many tangible effects and intended purposes.

It is important to note that the settler white rural poor are not all characterized by the hillbilly trope; settler states are continuously focused on reincorporating this social category, or parts of it, into the ideal of the "classless" settler colonial state. The hillbilly's foil, the "yeoman" farmer, is a sacrosanct constituent part of settler structure, a figure who represents a productive return to the idyllic "natural order" of the colonizing home nation. As the inverse of this pastoral fantasy, the hillbilly is not a real person at all, but a bogeyman of settler colonialism. Imagined as an irreparably failed settler, their violent tendencies mirror the denied and obscured, always ongoing violence of settlement that in this iteration is directed back at settlement itself. The hillbilly's lifestyle is an accumulation of settler fears: thriving in concealed hollers, they have "gone Native"; they neglect patriarchal familial and

[23] "Scotch-Irish" is an Americanism that refers to Ulster Protestants who emigrated from the north of Ireland to America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the Australian context, the hillbilly is also understood to be in part descended from immigrants and convicts of this ethnoreligious group (Leyburn 327).
[24] Wilma A. Dunaway, "The Legacy of Social Darwinism in Appalachian Scholarship."

sexual order; they parody Christianity in their anti-modern version of faith; and, through their fabled laziness and much reviled stasis, they fail to expand the authority of settlement, instead degrading it from within.

What are the hillbilly's earliest origins, or perhaps, more accurately phrased, what are the hillbilly's origins imagined to be? In the American context, the first written account of an ancestor to the hillbilly can be traced back to the early eighteenth century. In 1728, William Byrd II, heir to a wealthy colonial planter, published a geographic survey of the boundary line between Virginia and North Carolina. Byrd referred to this borderland territory as "Lubberland," and documented how it had been settled by poor white "lazy lubbers" who survived through subsistence farming and foraging in their isolated frontier communities. [25] Described as physically repulsive, "yellow-skinned and nearly noseless," lubbers were the "dregs" of England, Scotland, and Ireland and their American-born children.[26] Byrd hypothesized that their innate degenerate tendencies were invigorated by the temperate climate of the colony. Lubbers disregarded gender roles, were sexually promiscuous, and sometimes socialized with escaped slaves and the Lumbee, Chowanoke, and other American Indian groups. Byrd's popular comic account was quickly mimicked by other travel writers visiting the colonies. As historian Nancy Isenberg writes, by the late eighteenth century these narratives had developed a common understanding that America's white rural poor were further degraded than their European equivalents. Nevertheless, this reviled residue had its uses; Isenberg writes that these "waste men and waste women (and especially waste children, the adolescent boys who comprised a majority of the indentured servants) were an expendable class of laborers who made colonization possible…waste people wasted away,

[25] William II. Byrd, *William Byrd's Histories of the Dividing Line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*.
[26] Sylvia Jenkins Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, 4.

fertilizing the soil with their labor while finding it impossible to harvest any social mobility" (Isenberg 42).

Always simultaneously "expendable" and essential, such "waste people" were understood as the raw material necessary for settlement to encroach further into the more remote mountainous regions of the Eastern United States. There, the mythos of Lubberland would be displaced by a new provincial formation: Appalachia. The region, which stretches the length of the Appalachian mountain range from north of Birmingham, Alabama to Amenia, New York, was first occupied largely by landless poor whites moving westward from the Virginia and Carolina Tidewater region. Early on, these mountaineers experienced some public acclaim for their contribution to settler expansion. The term "mountaineer" evolved at this time to refer to what was at first conceived of as a somewhat noble figure; mountaineers were imagined to be "stalwart, forthright, and picturesque."[27] Their seizure of land from the Cherokee in particular was much lauded, and accounts of this poor pioneer class praised their unchecked use of violence.[28] The Appalachian area would soon become home to several major manufacturing hubs but was generally more agrarian and economically stratified than the rest of the country, with three-fifths of the agricultural labor force composed of free and enslaved landless laborers.[29]

Appalachia would not be conceived of as a delimited geographical region until the American Civil War. Some Appalachian counties, in which there were voting majorities of

[27] Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, 4.
[28] The folk hero Daniel Boone is among the most iconic figures of this cultural moment. John Filson's first depiction of Boone in *The Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucke* (1784) and several biographies that followed would turn Boone into a household name by the turn of the century. Boone is largely remembered as a prime example of the "Indian-hating frontiersman" trope; however, this image was promulgated by nineteenth century writers after his death and conflicts with statements Boone made about American Indians in his lifetime (Faragher 320).
[29] Wilma Dunaway, *The First American Frontier*, 77.

poor whites who resented that the system of slavery, which had inhibited the development of a Southern white working class, deviated from their lowland neighbors in voting against secession. This led to a targeted rhetorical response from secessionists and pro-slavery apologists, who began to theorize in their own interests that perhaps "poor whites in the South were poor not because of slavery—they were poor because they were suffering from hereditary defects" (Wray 18). According to secessionists, the mountaineers of Appalachia lived desperately poor, brutish lives cut off from a government and wider society that they resented any imposition from. At the same time, as Elizabeth Catte documents in *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia* (2018), in the post-Civil War period, industrialists visited the newly delineated region and discovered an abundance of natural resources, from minerals, most famously bituminous coal, to timber. The cultural creation of Appalachia already begun by secessionists would serve as effective propaganda for extractive companies seeking to justify "their expansion and the recruitment of local population into their workforce as benevolent actions that would bring backward mountaineers into their own as equal participants in America's expanding spirit of industry" (Catte 37). Mountaineers, already imagined as oppositional, would often prove less than accommodating to industrial developments that rarely served their interests and often exposed them to new forms of environmental slow violence. In response, with a trove of stereotypes already at the ready, industrialists and their media mouthpieces turned to a "civilizing mission" rhetoric to justify their incursions. Those mountaineers so obstinate as to refuse inclusion in this "spirit of industry" were christened with a new pejorative: the "hillbilly."[30]

[30] The etymological origins of the term "hillbilly" are unclear. Anthony Harkins writes that "the most credible theory is that Scottish highlanders either in their native country or in the New World linked two older Scottish expressions, 'hill-folk' and 'billie' (a synonym for 'fellow' or 'companion')" (48). Regardless of how or when

As the Appalachian hillbilly figure circulated in Anglophone media around the globe, a set of common tropes solidified in the international public consciousness that rendered this figure recognizable. Perhaps the most prominent of these tropes was the emphasis on the hillbilly's extreme physical and intellectual difference from other whites. In "The Tradition of 'Poor Whites'" (1934), Dutch sociologist A.N.J. den Hollander imagined the brutish scavenging lifestyle of the American mountaineer:

> He lives in a dilapidated log cabin and ekes out a wretched existence by the half-hearted cultivation of a few corn rows, by hunting squirrels in the pine woods, and by fishing for catfish around the cypress stumps of sluggish streams. There is something wrong with him, something inferior possibly, in his blood. (447)

While the hillbilly languished in their chosen backwoods home, as den Hollander's words illustrate, the predominant theory of the day held that it was "not bad environment but 'bad blood' that tainted the poor white trash" (Wray 18). This preoccupation with a difference in the hillbilly's "blood" is essential to understanding this figure, as the hillbilly is distinguished from the conventional white settler population not solely through geography and class, but also through their constant, ever-threatening biological degeneration.

**Origins of the Inbred Grotesque**

> "A seven-year-old girl who can run faster than her brothers. *'It ain't easy being a redneck virgin in a family this big.'"*
>
> "Redneck Virgin," entry by user Turbokiller69, June 25, 2014, *Urban Dictionary*

These writers' fascination with and fear of poor whites with "defective blood" reflects the hillbilly's predominant aesthetic mode, which this dissertation refers to as the "inbred

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the term arose, Harkins' examples show that "hillbilly" had entered vernacular usage by the late nineteenth century.

grotesque." This term encompasses a confluence of stereotypical traits that includes participation in incestuous sex and reproduction but may also incorporate queerness and gender non-conformity, a refusal of labor, a tendency towards violence, physical or intellectual disability and deformity, non-normative kinship networks, and the violation of food prohibitions, from "dirt eating" to cannibalism. Through the organizing logic of the inbred grotesque, these irregular characteristics are attributed to an innate biological corruption that continuously reproduces and intensifies itself through forms of reproductive deviance. The inbred grotesque is a powerful cultural tool that harnesses the revulsion of taboo to imagine a subset of poor settler whites as a threat to settler colonial racial order. The hillbilly's claim to whiteness (however attenuated by adjectives such as "sallow" or "pallid") belies an inner corruption that is potentially imperceptible to an ignorant observer. The inbred grotesque's effect is to render the signs of this internal degeneracy as qualities visible to the naked eye while creating an awareness of the hillbilly's risk to the repronormative white population. As we have seen, this aesthetic deployment is not politically innocent but has its roots in the rhetoric of U.S. Southern secessionists, Northern progressives, and absentee industrialists. While at surface level these camps may appear to have had little in common, they each at times perceived the hillbilly as a valuable tool of propaganda. Building on these groups' assertions that something was potentially wrong with not only the culture but the "blood" of the hillbilly, eugenic researchers took up the inbred grotesque and provided a biological rationale for this deterioration. This narrative framework that eugenicists utilized as justification for the sterilization and institutionalization of "feebleminded" hillbillies. This useful story was simultaneously advanced in literature of the period, contributing to an

advancement of hillbilly "fact" via fiction that popularized a belief in the real-life existence of the inbred grotesque.

As the reader may have already noticed, I have elected to use singular "they" and "them" pronouns to refer to the hillbilly. They are a figure defined in part by their gender ambiguity, which the inbred grotesque portrays as unproductive and anti-normative in their recessive form of whiteness. A hillbilly may present as a man or woman, but perhaps more often than not in the eyes of those who have imagined them, they are a person who does not recognizably fit into either role. As with the figure of the invert, the hillbilly's pathologized queerness is most immediately deemed recognizable through their performance of gender roles rather than their sexuality. In his survey of Lubberland, Byrd was continuously shocked by how lubber men allowed women to take on traditionally masculine roles at work and in the home. Byrd wrote that "the men, for their parts, just like the Indians, impose all the work upon the poor women. They make their wives rise out of their beds early in the morning, at the same time that they lie and snore, till the sun has risen one third of his course, and dispersed all the unwholesome damps…thus they loiter" (27). Lubber men were seized by "the distemper of laziness" (20) while lubber women were active, dynamic, and sexually promiscuous. Notably, Byrd identified the lubbers' aberrant gender roles as making them "just like the Indians." As Wray discusses in *Not Quite White*, while Byrd maintained that poor whites were racially distinct from American Indians, he also viewed the lubbers' "deviation from sexual mores and norms" as marking the two groups as concerningly "culturally akin" (29).

This characterization of the hillbilly using familiar tropes about the gender and sexuality of Indigenous peoples would develop further as settler colonial societies extended

their policies of erasure—from containment to limited visibility via legislated assimilation—of continued Indigenous presence. In *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (2011), Scott Lauria Morgensen identifies settler colonialism as a structure marked by an intensification of sexual prohibitions. According to Morgensen, settler preoccupation with how Native sexual and gender diversity and matrifocal traditions differs from their own is substantive and strategic. As Morgensen writes, "modern sexuality arises in settler colonial societies as a function of the biopolitics of settler colonialism. In the United States, the sexual colonization of Native peoples produced modern sexuality as 'settler sexuality': a white and national heteronormativity formed by regulating Native sexuality and gender while appearing to supplant them with the sexual modernity of settlers" (20). Normative, "modern" settler sexuality as a technique of biopolitical regulation therefore fundamentally relies on establishing an Other whose deviant inclinations must be controlled. As C. Heike Schotten notes, "this biopolitical operation is the specifically *settler colonial* function of *sovereignty*, which produces the native as 'savage' simultaneously as it brings the settler into being as 'civilized.'"[31] This contrast buttresses the formation of patriarchal settler hierarchies and allows for the enclosure of women and children as private property; the "civilized" are distinguished from the "savage" by their willingness to consent to biopolitical methods of control.

To return to Byrd and his eighteenth century, we see the settler who has failed to uphold the colonial project begin to be incorporated into this "savage" Other formation. When the hillbilly's kin networks do not conform to the gendered order of white male breadwinners and white female domesticity, this difference is framed as a much larger

[31] C. Heike Schotten, *Queer Terror: Life, Death, and Desire in the Settler Colony*, 33.

challenge to the fundamental underpinnings of settler structure. This perception of threat creates the opportunity for a new biopolitical caesura—a categorial break—within the highly protected class of settler whites. Settler colonial states depend on an ever-increasing Indigenous erasure. Their structural inhibition to acknowledge continued Indigenous presence, which would risk their claims to sovereignty, creates the need for fresh caesuras within the previously prioritized population. The hillbilly's racialized "break" in the category of whiteness leads the tropes of sexual racism, in which racialized men are sexually predatory and white racialized women are alluring yet dangerous femme fatale. Formed from the existent archetype of the queer Native, the inbred grotesque hillbilly creates another of the necessary "caesuras within the biological continuum" upon which settler colonial biopolitics relies.[32]

While the caesura of the hillbilly can be read as contributing to the mass psychological repression of Indigenous presence, there is an additional, perhaps more compelling reason why the state refuses to "make live" this white settler figure: the hillbilly embodies the failed settler colonist. Lorenzo Veracini anticipates this spectre in his reading of settlement as a "displacement" of diverted European revolutionaries. In *The World Turned Inside Out: Settler Colonialism as a Political Idea* (2021), Veracini contends that settler colonialism was first formulated as a method for producing "non-revolutionary circumstances where actual or potential revolutionaries could be turned into 'sturdy yeoman' and independent farmers, and where examples of reconstituted hierarchical, or egalitarian but equally conflict less societies could be reproduced" (15). After evaluating the heightened revolutionary sensibilities of the lower classes in eighteenth-century Europe, Veracini reaches

[32] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76* 254.

the conclusion that settler colonialism's "objective was to remove agitators more than anything else" (80). The settler project would prove enduringly effective at achieving this goal. Displacement promised settler colonists an anti-revolutionary fantasy of a perpetually productive, politically conflictless community in which each nuclear household could claim an individual patriarchal sovereignty. While settler colonialism's promise, based in the lie of an infinite and empty *terra nullius*, cannot be realized, it is reliant on and defined by continued settler commitment to the never quite realized project. Settler colonialism's success might be measured by the durably reactionary political climates and the perception of state 'historylessness' held by the citizens of settler states to this day.

However, I contend that despite the success of settler structure's displacement and diversion of revolutionary subjects, there remains a repressed memory of these colonists' political antecedents that haunts settler culture. The hillbilly figure was created to capture and address this spectre while affirming normative settler life. The hillbilly's characterization via the inbred grotesque renders them a fundamentally ambiguous figure, an infringement of categories that conflicts with the goal of the settler colony: infinite, extractive capitalist production. This always deferred dream relies on heterosexual reproduction and normative gender roles to achieve its aims. Since this is an unachievable goal, the hillbilly's oppositional sensibility is positioned as the obstacle to the dream's realization; after all, the hillbilly's grotesquerie stems from their refusal of sexual, racial, and material production. What the hillbilly does produce is defined as defective, either recognizably deformed or, even more threateningly, carrying an invisible germ of deviance into the healthy white population. Rather than having their revolutionary sensibilities neutralized through displacement to the settlement, the hillbilly's original anti-normative posture is only exacerbated by foreign soil.

While lacking agency and immobile, the "shiftless" hillbilly stands in the way of what Veracini calls settler colonialism's fantasy of "perpetual primitive accumulation" (*World Turned Inside Out* 298). The common trope of the hillbilly as "stuck" in time is a consequence of this idea of their political regression. In an 1899 article for *The Atlantic* titled "Our Contemporary Ancestors in the Southern Mountains," Berea College president William Goodell Frost asserted that "the question is whether the mountain people can be enlightened and guided so that they can have a part in the development of their own country, or whether they must give place to foreigners and melt away like so many Indians" (9). While outwardly romantic, this positioning of the hillbilly as "contemporary ancestor" to the industrious settler is far from simple nostalgia; Goodell Frost views the mountaineers as a problem, a populace which must either be reintegrated or, in the event of such efforts fail, eradicated.

In recent years, settler colonial states have been increasingly theorized as sites of intensified biopolitical regimes. This is part of a general move in settler colonial theory to denaturalize the settler apparatus by examining its use of biopower. In the article "The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now" (2011), Scott Lauria Morgensen writes that:

> settlers…are inexplicable apart from their relationality to Indigenous peoples, as well as to forms of indigeneity of their own imagining that undergird settler subjectivity. All this structures how European settlers ever come to represent the West. To the extent that they do, their relationality to indigeneity through settlement also constitutes the West, even if this quality remains naturalised (59-60).

The settler project's "life" is predicated on the existence of a real or imagined indigeneity that it can define itself against. As Foucault contended, "the fact that the other dies does not mean simply that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is

something that will make life in general healthier."[33] The racialized, queered "degenerate" subject represents a repressed but ever-looming threat to the health and integrity of the settler colony; the death and negation of this symbolic death therefore promotes settler life.

It is this foundational biopolitical principle that catalyzed the eugenics movements in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While it is important to foreground the effects of eugenics on the lives and bodies of Black and Indigenous people of color, who were the movement's primary targets, this focus on race also led eugenicists to direct their attention to white subjects whose lives did not cohere with the standard conception of whiteness. Some of the earliest work of eugenic field researchers focused on poor rural white families and kinship networks that had long been culturally portrayed as having "degenerate" blood. Eugenics provided a scientific reasoning for the received wisdom of the hillbilly figure's criminality, feeblemindedness, sexual promiscuity, and alcoholism. Eugenicists theorized that the root of these problems was "cacogenics—kinds of sexual reproduction deemed deviant and unhealthy, most often in the form of incest (consanguinity)." [34] According to the prevailing theory, isolated from the larger healthy white community and having rejected settler capitalist modernity, the hillbilly had reverted to a "primitive" state in which they acted upon their sexual impulses without any regard for even the oldest taboos.

This characterization was, predictably, in fact a mapping on of previous belief about consanguineous sexual relationships about Indigenous groups. As criminologist Karen E. Hayden explains in *The Rural Primitive in American Popular Culture: All Too Familiar* (2021), in the eighteenth century:

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[33] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76,* 255.
[34] Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, 19.

> evolutionary theorists like Lewis Henry Morgan observed consanguineous marriages among some Native American groups as well as other Indigenous groups around the globe… Morgan's evolutionary framework purported that such kin marriages were incompatible with the process of evolution, and therefore must be seen as a stage that 'had to be surpassed in order to be civilized.' (22)

Following this logic, hillbillies, by engaging in incest, were understood to be devolving. Many eugenicists feared that, given that Appalachian "hillbilly" populations were believed to have been untouched by civilization for hundreds of years, it might be too late for intervention to save their genetic stock.[35] As Horace Kephart, influenced by the preceding decades of eugenic studies and echoing other progressives of his day, concluded in 1913, "the evil consequences of inbreeding of persons closely akin are well known to the mountaineers; but here knowledge is no deterrent, since whole districts are interrelated to start with" (*Highlanders* 297).

One of the earliest and foundational eugenic case studies that sought to apply cacogenic reproductive theories to real people is Richard Louis Dugdale's *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity* (1877). Dugdale argues that generations of reproduction via prostitution, rape, and incestuous sex had caused the proliferate, profligate Juke "hill family" of rural New York, to become a public nuisance. According to Dugdale, their various social ills had cost the state a total of $1.3 million.[3637] Dugdale inspired similar studies of poor rural white families that positioned their sexual habits as the source of their physical and mental inferiority. In *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-*

[35] Some eugenicists argued that rural white inbred populations should in fact be encouraged to continue reproducing cacogenically in order to speed up their inevitable decay. Anthony Ludovici argued in "Eugenics and Consanguineous Marriages," inbreeding might be encouraged among genetic elites so as to cement positive traits; it might likewise be "encouraged among tainted or morbid stocks, so that disease and deleterious hereditary factors should become canalized as soon as possible." However, he acknowledged "it may be a long time before mankind, in these democratic times, so hopelessly under the sway of magic, will see the wisdom of this course" (155).
[36] Scott Christianson, "Bad Seed or Bad Science?"
[37] Adjusted for inflation, this is roughly 38.1 million USD in 2024.

*Mindedness* (1912), Henry H. Goddard claimed cacogenics had caused a family line in the New Jersey Pine Barrens to develop persistent hereditary intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses. Goddard falsified much of the family tree and likely doctored photos of the family's children to make his subjects appear more sinister.[38] Eugenic efforts like these, which relied on falsified data or which willfully misinterpreted malnourishment and lack of medical care as hereditary illnesses, were justified via the subjects' perceived threat to white racial superiority.[39] Elizabeth Catte has argued that we should:

> think of eugenics not as a science, but as a solution to a collective fear; that someday, a world might exist where wealth and whiteness did not guarantee power. The destabilization of what many eugenicists considered the 'natural order' might arrive on two fronts: from Black and other nonwhite people securing rights, privileges, and access to space, a process eugenicists felt would be hastened along by interracial marriage and procreation, and from worthless white people, especially women, contaminating the race from within by producing defective children. [40]

Catte views the category of "worthless whites" as especially useful for eugenicists, who had "built an intentional glitch in the matrix in their invention of this group…you couldn't tell if someone was feebleminded simply by looking at them, speaking to them, or watching them work. To the untrained eye, they were indistinguishable from people perceived as 'normal'" (38). The genetic threat was invisible and everywhere; it would be up to these scientific experts to train the public to recognize and regulate potential deviants.

This "collective fear" would eventually lead to collective action. The U.S. Supreme Court's 1927 *Buck v. Bell* decision affirmed a Virginia statute that instituted the compulsory

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[38] "Goddard's first purpose for publishing photographs in *The Kallikak Family* was to convey the image of objective scientific documentation of the Kallikak family members by using realistic illustrations of his thesis of the hereditability of feeblemindedness" (269). Martin A. Elks, "Visual indictment: a contextual analysis of the Kallikak Family photographs."

[39] These case study pseudonyms were later used in a largely forgotten and short-lived 1977 NBC sitcom, *The Kallikaks*. The show centered around the Kallikak family, West Virginia migrants to California who operate a gas station, and their attempts to commit welfare fraud and feuds with the neighboring Jukes family (Holsopple 2).

[40] Elizabeth Catte, *Pure America: Eugenics and the Making of Modern Virginia*, 44.

sterilization of the intellectually disabled for eugenic purposes. Carrie Buck, an 18-year-old white girl, had been committed to the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and the Feebleminded by her adoptive family, the Dobbs. The Dobbs claimed that Buck was feebleminded, a condition that they claimed had resulted in her engagement in premarital sex and conception of a child. The Dobbs were likely motivated by the fact that Buck became pregnant after Mrs. Dobbs' nephew raped her; Buck did not have an intellectual disability.[41] In an 8-1 decision, the Court approved the state's proposal to sterilize Buck, accepting the argument that her "promiscuity" was a familial, inherited trait passed down from grandmother to mother to daughter. In the majority opinion, progressive Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes famously wrote that "Three generations of imbeciles are enough" (Lombardo 169). Thousands would be sterilized in both Virginia and other states that subsequently adopted similar laws.

While eugenicists outwardly maintained the appearance of scientific detachment, their development of the "feebleminded" hillbilly relied heavily on the figure's parallel development within the Rural Gothic, the genre which more than any other form of media first brought the hillbilly to a large popular audience. The Rural Gothic is both a highly provincial genre, with each regional form reflecting an intense preoccupation with the unique characteristics of its place of birth, and a broadly global phenomenon. The birth of the Gothic in England in the mid-eighteenth century, has often been read as a reaction to Enlightenment rationality which sublimated anxieties over changing social hierarchies and scientific thought. As the Gothic expanded quickly to the British colonies, sites where such fears were often concentrated, the genre had a marked effect on much of the earliest Anglophone settler

[41] Paul A. Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck V. Bell,* 140.

writing. Genre theorists have traced the Gothic's archetypical obsession with the Other to its thematic origins in subgenres such as the nineteenth-century "Imperial Gothic."[42] Most definitions of the broad category of Gothic rely on a list of commonly shared tropes: medieval ruins, supernatural occurrences, decaying aristocrats, Catholic priests and nuns, melodrama, and death. Incest also numbers among the clichés that make the genre so readily recognizable.

As Jenny DiPlacidi outlines in *Gothic Incest: Gender, Sexuality, and Transgression*, portrayals of incest in the Gothic date back to Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), in which the titular character Ambrosio rapes his sister Antonia. DiPlacidi contends that representations of incestuous relationships by early Gothic writers, to the disdain of critics of the time, was part of a larger critique of heteronormative order and the family. As DiPlacidi writes, "representations of incest are…synonymous with the Gothic as a whole: complex, multifaceted, and consciously resistant to the dominant social and sexual hegemonies in their models of alternative agencies, sexualities, forms of desire and family structures" (3). However, as a genre defined primarily by its tropes, the Gothic has always been malleable, a characteristic that has contributed to its noteworthy endurance and frequent usage by writers with opposing intentions. While the Gothic incest trope may have developed as a literary technique for explaining social mores and exploring the anti-normative, it would be utilized for entirely different purposes in what may be the Gothic's most reactionary subgenre: the Rural Gothic.

While not limited to colonial locales, the Rural Gothic was unquestionably shaped by its early settler settings. The origins of this subgenre have been delineated by Bernice

[42] Patrick Brantlinger, "Imperial Gothic."

Murphy in *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness* (2013). Murphy focuses on how early American Gothic literature adapted to the "moral, intellectual, and emotional landscape of the US" (4) by repositioning the locus of fear from the feudal castle to the "forest beyond the settlement…the place where the representatives of 'civilization' are pitched against forces that embody 'savagery,' and order—moral, psychological, and geographical—as opposed to chaos" (16). As Murphy argues, the Rural Gothic's persistent obsession with categorizing characters clearly along this dichotomy stems from an obscured settler phobia: "whilst the Puritans feared the Indians, there was one thing that they were even more afraid of—and that was *becoming* like them." The Indian captivity narratives that made up some of the earliest American Gothic novels were the first reflection of this fear, but it would pervade the genre as a whole as it progressed. As the hillbilly character developed, they took on the role of the formerly civilized settler who, as a result of their existence on the boundary line between wilderness and settlement, moves across the binary into the category of savage. These "backwards pioneers" were depicted as "resentful…and degenerate," and marked by a "highly suggestive racial and cultural 'otherness'" (9). Self-isolated in the mountains, the hillbillies' inward turn was imagined as leaving no alternative to consanguine marriages; such violation of taboo illustrated how little respect they now had for settler standards of sexuality and kinship. Throughout the American early colonial period and with increasing fervor into the nineteenth century, Rural Gothic literature featured the hillbilly in literary terms that operated in tandem with the social sciences. The depiction of the inbred grotesque in popular culture created an understanding that underwrote an aesthetic fiction as fact.

**"An arrested civilization": Appalachian Local Color Writing and John Fox Jr.'s *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908)**

> "Another word for hillbilly love, a.k.a, incest... *'Eewww, Jason just kissed his sister. Talk about Appalachian love.'"*
>
> "Appalachian Love," entry by user illogical philosticist, December 23, 2014, *Urban Dictionary*

As the Rural Gothic progressed from its early origins, the hillbilly would begin to take center stage as the genre's most significant character. In the context of the U.S., the post-Civil War creation of Appalachia led to a marked expansion of the "local color" style that paralleled popular news media accounts of the region. Appalachian local color, one of many branches of rural American literary regionalism, was a predecessor of the twentieth-century Southern Gothic that developed many of the latter genre's signature tropes.[43] At the turn of the century, a pivotal moment for the development of the hillbilly, local color writers understood the potential mass appeal of the mountains and the backwoods lives of the strange whites who lived there. The exciting new playground of Appalachia was an ideal setting for the local color genre, which is perhaps best known for its "literary use...of regional persons that reinforced their representation as strange, exotic, or queer."[44] John Louis Spivak, John Fox Jr., and Mary Noailles Murfree (writing under the pen name Charles Egbert Craddock) were among those whose writings popularized the image of the mountaineer as "stuck" behind the modernizing nation, a notion that simultaneously sentimentalized and pathologized the hillbilly and their whiteness. Appalachian local color writers came from largely urban, middle-to-upper class Southern backgrounds and pitched their style toward a

[43] Lucia Ann Stretcher Sigmar, "The Gothic Tradition in Southern Local Color Fiction."
[44] Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, *Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture,* 29.

national rather than regional audience. Their readership had already been familiarized with Appalachia by early eugenic studies and ethno-touristic anthropological writings and were eager to consume more media about this seemingly foreign land within their own country.

Early Appalachian local color writing often took the form of comic short stories that centered on reoccurring hillbilly characters like Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's pugnacious Georgia "cracker" Ransy Sniffle and George Washington Harris' womanizing, whiskey-drinking Tennessean Sut Lovingood. This conformed to the general pattern of "thick" descriptions of characters' personalities and habits in local color writing as a whole. However, as the subgenre developed alongside industrial incursions into the region, the humorous hillbilly took on a more threatening cast as local color writers began to emphasize the figure's anti-social and oppositional nature. A typical Appalachian local color narrative at the turn of the century centered around an enterprising young industrialist or scientist who came to the region with the intention of uplifting its backwards people. Inevitably, the hillbillies he met would resist this perceived incursion, aggressively or with passive refusal, until the protagonist prevailed over them through his force of will and superior reason. By the dénouement, the hillbillies would have been lifted from their life of regressive squalor, with large extended families crammed into concerning proximity within a single shack, into the modern enlightenment of a nuclear family household in a company-owned and regulated town.

In Appalachia, local color writing often featured an innovative new regional plot device: the "feud." The feud provided a source of narrative conflict while contributing to an understanding of the hillbilly as illogically, indiscriminately violent in contrast with the protagonist, who was tasked with resolving this irrational dispute and instructing the hillbillies in correct kinship structures. John Uri Lloyd's *Red Head* (1903), Arthur Whitefield Spaulding's *The Men of the*

*Mountains* (1915), and John Louis Spivak's *The Devil's Brigade* (1930) are only a few examples of local color writing that centered on this sensationalized trope. The feud would also be adapted to the screen, first with Buster Keaton's comedy *Our Hospitality* (1923) and later in cartoon form with *A Feud There Was* (1938) and *Musical Mountaineers* (1939), featuring Elmer Fudd and Betty Boop respectively. The most infamous inspiration for this proliferation of fictional Appalachian feuds was the conflict between the real life Hatfields and McCoys, two families straddling the Kentucky-West Virginia border whose names have become an internationally recognized metonym for a bitter rivalry.

Many modern explanations for the notorious feud have depicted the Hatfields and McCoys as somehow innately violent. In the 2007 article "Tumors May Have Fueled Hatfield-McCoy Feud," Vanderbilt University endocrinologist Revi Mathew argues that it is possible the McCoy family was predisposed to a hereditary genetic disorder called von Hippel-Lindau disease, which can cause adrenal tumors which may raise adrenaline levels.[45] However, some Appalachian historians have challenged the common understanding of the conflict as a series of senseless tit-for-tat killings. In *Feud: Hatfields, McCoys, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900*, Altina Waller offers the thesis that the Hatfields were concerned with defending community autonomy while the comparatively wealthy McCoys were allied with the forces of industrial capitalism. Waller reveals a hidden economic dimension within popular depictions of the feud, which she argues portrayed what was in fact resistance to corporate incursion as illogical, "barbaric" violence.

[45]According to Dr. Mathew, the disease can "produce hypertension, headache and sweating intermittently depending on when the surge of these compounds occurs in the bloodstream…these compounds could possibly make somebody very angry and upset for no good reason." Von Hippel-Lindau disease has been found in two modern-day descendants of the McCoys, but otherwise there is little evidence offered in the article to support this theory.

Although less explored in the literature, the concept of the hillbilly feud also shares many similarities with the Cherokee clan system's "law of the blood feud."[46] While the Cherokee were forced to abandon the tradition in the early nineteenth century as the clan system fragmented in the wake of colonization in Appalachia, this legal and religious system of deterrence demanded that following an inter-clan murder, the murderer must be put to death. In their absence, it was stipulated that one of their clan members would be offered in exchange. Christian missionaries and colonial government officials, ignoring how the rarity of the usage of the blood feud spoke to the general importance placed on social harmony in Cherokee society, used the law as evidence of cultural barbarism and as a means to rhetorically position settler violence as proportional. The potential transference of the "feud" onto the hillbilly again illustrates the ways in which this figure has been molded by earlier stereotyped imaginings of Indigenous groups.

Among the most influential depictions of Appalachian feuds during this period was John Fox Jr.'s *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908). The novel was immediately popular upon its publication, selling out its first edition in just a few months and becoming the third best-selling book of 1908 and fifth best-seller of 1909.[47] *Lonesome Pine*'s publication was followed by a stage adaptation that premiered on Broadway in 1912, a 1913 song of the same name later covered by Laurel and Hardy, and three film adaptations in 1916, 1923, and 1936, respectively.[48][49] In *Lonesome Pine,* the highly educated young mining engineer John "Jack" Hale visits the Cumberland Mountains in Eastern Kentucky in search of coal. This industrious protagonist soon encounters two rival mountaineer clans, the Tollivers and the

[46] Michelle Daniel, "From Blood Feud to Jury System; The Metamorphosis of Cherokee Law from 1750 to 1840," 98.
[47] Emily Satterwhite, *Dear Appalachia: Readers, Identity, and Popular Fiction Since 1878,* 59.
[48] *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1914), dir. Cecil B. DeMille; *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1923), dir. Charles Maigne; *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1936), dir. Henry Hathaway.
[49] *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* was also referenced by Gertrude Stein in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1932). Writing in Alice's voice, Stein summarizes thusly: "It had practically no story to it and it was not exciting or adventurous, and it was very well written and was mostly description of mountain scenery" (239).

Falins, in the midst of a generations-long feud. Seeking to establish law and order in the area so that he can realize his mining dream, Hale rallies together a small band of educated "gentleman-regulators" (95) to police the locals. Through his grit and ingenuity, Hale ultimately succeeds in taming the mountains and marrying the naïve blonde Appalachian beauty June, thus saving her from a consanguine, premature marriage with her malicious, dark-haired first cousin Dave Tolliver.


Figure 3. Advertisement for 1923 film adaptation, *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*.[50]

[50] "File: Lonesome Pine 1.png."

John Fox Jr.'s heroic industrialist John Hale bears a resemblance to his creator in more than name alone. Fox was born in Paris, Kentucky, nearby the urban center of Lexington, on December 16th, 1862.[51] Fox grew up attending the private Stony Point Academy where his father was headmaster; however, Fox Sr.'s school was not profitable, and Fox Jr. resorted to applying to the local "Garth Fund for Poor Boys" to earn a scholarship to attend Kentucky's Transylvania University and later Harvard. After graduating in 1883, he worked as a journalist in New York City, writing articles for *The New York Times* among other prominent outlets. Fox then made an abrupt career turn and embarked on a land-speculation venture with his older brother James in the Cumberland Mountain range at the meeting point of the Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky borders.[52] Fox's base for this and other regional ventures was the small rural town of Big Stone Gap, Virginia, the "Gap" where he would set many of his novels and short stories. While Fox would find the most success as a writer, he persisted throughout his life in pursuit of a career as an industrialist, "building roads, opening coal mines, speculating in timber and mineral options, buying and selling land."[53] These projects frequently failed, leaving Fox in debt throughout most of his life even as his novels became best-sellers.

In the article "A Felicitous Convergence of Mythmaking and Capital Accumulation: John Fox, Jr. and the Formulation of An(Other) Almost-White American Underclass," Darlene Wilson contends that Fox likely tailored his narratives to popularize investment in the region in an attempt to inflate the value of his own assets. Wilson bases her interpretation on evidence from the archive of Fox's personal papers. She argues that while the harmful

[51] Aaron Davis, "John Jr. Fox (1862–1919)."
[52] *The Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning,* "John Fox, Jr."
[53] Harriet R. Holman, "John Fox, Jr.: Appraisal and Self-Appraisal," 19.

side effects of most local color writing on the real-life mountaineers were unintended, Fox deliberately schemed "to undermine local resistance to the 'new order' and to absentee control by implementing land and political policies that encouraged depopulation" (7). As Wilson explores, while Fox publicly praised the beauty of the mountains, in his private letters he described Big Stone Gap as "commonplace" and claimed to resort to living in "southwest Virginia only when he hadn't the funds to stay in New York, Louisville, or, when his funds were really low, Lexington" (16). Fox spent only six months in the mountains from 1890 to 1905, and while he claimed to have based his narratives on personal experiences with Big Stone Gap locals, many of these stories were in fact received as second or third-hand anecdotes. For Fox, empty mountains with no inconvenient claimants to land were profitable mountains, and as the plot of *Lonesome Pine* would show, if the hillbilly was to be reformed they would need to be not just controlled but removed.

Like his creator John Fox, John Hale is an alumnus of Transylvania University, and upon graduating he is drawn to the "wild coal-swollen hills" of the Cumberlands (*Lonesome Pine* 41). Here, Fox is quick to establish Hale's settler credentials:

> John Hale, by instinct, inheritance, blood and tradition—pioneer. One of his forefathers had been with Washington on the Father's first historic expedition into the wilds of Virginia. His great grandfather had accompanied Boone when that hunter first penetrated the "Dark and Bloody Ground," had gone back to Virginia and come again with a surveyor's chain and compass to help wrest it from the red men, among whom there had been an immemorial conflict for possession and a never-recognized claim of ownership. (40)

Historians now generally agree that the widespread myth of Kentucky as a "Dark and Bloody Ground" that no Native American group had ever inhabited or held a claim to was purposefully fashioned to justify American westward expansion. The region had historically been claimed by the Shawnee, with portions used by the Cherokee and other tribes. However,

the English had deliberately encouraged the Iroquois to move into the region, creating new inter-Indigenous conflict that was then framed as a thousand-year-old feud.[54] While this short passage neatly dismisses Native rights to the land, Hale's own claim is shored up by his own right of "blood." Hale's superior colonial pedigree entitles him to seize the land from its new feuding, uncivilized inhabitants: the mountaineers.

The novel begins with Hale's first encounter with a mountaineer family, the Tollivers. To pass the time as he surveys the land in search of mineral deposits, Hale goes flyfishing in a creek in Lonesome Cove. Unbeknownst to him, the cove is a stronghold of the expansive Tolliver clan. His rod is a technological wonder that shocks the nymph-like, pre-pubescent June Tolliver when, "bare foot" (1), she spies on him from the woods. Already, as will continue throughout the novel, Hale and June's relationship is sexually charged despite her age; while Hale's love for the child June is framed as a pure, almost platonic affection, June's more intense infatuation reflects the novel's underlying preoccupation with mountain girls' inappropriately precocious sexuality. As Hale later lectures June's cousin Loretta: "'The trouble in the mountains is that you girls marry so early that you don't have time to get an education'" (64).[55] This sentiment would later be echoed by Horace Kephart, who contended in *Our Southern Highlanders* that among the Appalachian mountaineers, "extremely early marriages are tolerated, as among all primitive people. I knew a hobbledehoy of sixteen who married a frail, tuberculous girl of twelve, and in the same small settlement another lad of sixteen who wedded a girl of thirteen. In both cases the result was wretched beyond description" (297). While eugenicists often encouraged early marriage of the "fit" so as to ensure the maximum

[54] A. Gwynn Henderson, "Dispelling the Myth: Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Indian Life in Kentucky," 3.
[55] *Child Bride*, a 1938 exploitation film, utilized the concept of hillbilly child marriage in a similar way. Framed as an educational film advocating for the creation of more age of consent laws, the film controversially featured its twelve-year-old lead actress in a nude swimming scene.

number of child births, the premature marriage of the "unfit" was viewed as leading to further cacogenic reproduction.

Hale and June's bucolic moment is soon interrupted by the arrival of June's father, "Devil" Judd Tolliver. "Devil" Judd aims his rifle at the "furriner," the less-than-endearing term with which all the mountaineers refer to Hale, who is shocked by the appearance of the "giant mountaineer" (12). However, after Hale proves his bravery by holding his ground and establishes that he is not a revenue officer searching for hidden moonshine stills, "Devil" Judd good-naturedly leads him to a nearby coal deposit. Hale immediately makes plans to buy up the land cheaply and bring in mining operations. At the same time, Hale is distracted from his plans by his fascination with the strange, almost alien Tollivers. Wondering "What sort of wild animals had he fallen among?" (24), Hale observes with distaste the small, dirty cabin that "Devil" Judd, his second wife, and children all inhabit. Simultaneously, he finds the family roughly charming, and while "Devil" Judd is monstrously oversized and June's wicked step-mother is gaunt with some unexplained malady, the child June is blonde and beautiful.

Hale is given an explanation for this contradictory family when he meets and forms an allyship with a local lawyer and anthropological hobbyist, Hon. Samuel Budd. As Hon. Sam explains:

> You see, you mustn't judge them by the standards of today—you must go back to the standards of the Revolution. Practically, they are the pioneers of that day and hardly a bit have they advanced. They are our contemporary ancestors… you see, mountains isolate people and the effect of isolation on human life is to crystallize it… They are a perfect example of an arrested civilization and they are the closest link we have with the old world. (97)

Hon. Sam's "anthropological drool" (99) is clearly inspired by William Goodell Frost's theory of the mountaineer as a "contemporary ancestor" to the modern American. Hale is

intrigued and sees in June the evidence of the Tolliver's original "good blood." On discovering that the family "had come from eastern Virginia, and the original Tolliver had been a slave owner," Hale concludes that the family name was "undoubtedly, a corruption of Tagliaferro" (101). Hale even begins to wonder if "the children of that day would, if given the chance, wipe out the handicap of a century in one generation and take their place abreast with the children of the outside world" (101).

Hale's optimistic vision of a productive hillbillyland at first glance appears to contradict the logic of the inbred grotesque; however, this romantic polar imaginary is in fact necessary for the aesthetic to operate. David Whisnant discusses the role of this contradiction in *All That Is Native & Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*. According to Whisnant, the upstanding hillbilly plays a similar role to the trope of the "Noble Savage." As Whisnant writes, "the 'savagism' of the Indians was functionally analogous to mountaineers' social and cultural 'backwardness'; both derived from a culturally based misperception. Like the Indians, mountaineers were ambivalently characterized as noble ('100% Americans of the best stock') or ignoble (inbred degenerates, feudists, and moonshiners)" (257). June Tolliver conforms to the former, "noble" category. Unlike the rest of her family, intelligent, innocent June is uncorrupted by civilization, and embodies an idealized early settler identity which is framed as no longer existing in its most pure form even among elites such as Hale's circles.

Both Hale and Hon. Sam comment continuously on how pretty, vivacious June conforms to the convention of an "English rose"; such floral metaphors are grafted onto her throughout the novel. However, in the earliest draft of *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, Fox originally wrote June as a Melungeon girl. The presence of the Melungeon ethnic group was first documented in the Cumberland Gap in the seventeenth century. In Fox's time, the

Melungeons were generally believed to be of Portuguese descent, but likely with some Indigenous ancestry. Historical research and genetic testing has since confirmed that the multi-racial group is descended from the children of free Black and poor white unions in early colonial Virginia, who subsequently moved to the state's then frontier and intermarried with American Indian groups.[56] Fox's choice to recast the outlier June as unquestionably white allows her character to be more easily recovered, or harvested, into civilization by Hale. Yet at the same time, this early draft reveals an underlying anxiety about the proximity of the hillbilly to other racial groups, despite Fox's apparent adhesion to the Appalachian ethnic homogeneity thesis.

Hale pays to send June to school, first in the "Gap" and subsequently at a larger urban private school. There she learns how to embody the ideal of settler womanhood, all the while serving as a foil to her less-malleable, "ignoble" relatives. Persuading the mountaineers to "wipe out" their "handicap" is easier said than done, and while Hon. Sam views them as crystallized in time, Hale discovers that they are poised to begin moving backwards in evolution. Hale is particularly disturbed by how the living conditions of the mountaineers facilitate this degenerative tendancy. To Hale's dismay, father, step-mother, and siblings "all slept in one room" of their windowless log-cabin (206). As A.N.J. Hollander's earlier description of the typical poor white's "dilapidated" log-cabin attests, this structure carries a form of spatial stigma that stems from the irregularity of its living environment. While simultaneously a romantic symbol of the frontier, the extreme efficiency of domestic space and lack of division between family members inhibits the privacy necessary for the functioning of a heterosexual nuclear family. Walls are the means through which the base

[56] John Shelton Reed, "Mixing in the Mountains," 27.

biological activities of sex and personal care can be hidden from the view of other family members, allowing for the preservation of the purity of the family mythos. The absence of physical boundaries inhibits the formation of the individual subjects and instead encourages all-too-familiar family relations.

This proximity leads to deleterious effects. As Hale discovers, "deterioration is easy in the hills—superficial deterioration in habits, manners, personal appearance and the practices of all the little niceties of life. The morning bath is impossible because of the crowded domestic conditions of a mountain cabin and, if possible, might if practiced, excite wonder and comment, if not vague suspicion. Sleeping garments are practically barred for the same reason" (249). Hale himself begins to suffer from this deterioration after many years in the mountains; however, his inherited pioneer stamina prevents him from suffering the same outcome as the less physically developed mountaineers.

Fox's depiction of the John and June's star-crossed, inter-class romance contrasts with his own advice to his brothers, as paraphrased by Wilson, "to avoid entanglement with mountain women, admittedly beautiful but mysteriously fertile; in his words, they appeared a 'prolific, dark race' and not one that would mix well with their own sort" (14). Yet June, always positioned as an outlier, has both this "admitted" beauty and the adaptability to be trained into mixing well with Hale's "sort." One of their first intimate interactions is a nature walk during which Hale teaches June the names of the flowers around them. As they stroll, the young girl asks him a stream of eager questions, including the painfully ingenuous "'Whut's po-e-try?'" (163). Hale's delight in educating June positions him as the Pygmalion to her Galatea; her tabula rasa mind is receptive if also barbaric. As critic Harriet Holman bluntly put it in a 1971 biographical sketch of Fox, "A reader of today…is likely to boggle at

Fox's heroines, pretty girls all of them molded by the genteel tradition, hardly flesh and blood at all. They seem strangely flat and unresponsive creatures, almost autistic."[57] It is this insipid quality that attracts Hale, leading him to believe that "the little girl back there was born for something else than slow death in that God forsaken cove" (87).

Throughout June's education, Fox uses classical and literary allusions to corroborate her difference from her kin. He first establishes her similarity to Virginie, the heroine of eighteenth-century French novelist Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788). Hale observes that "all the time [June] worked at her studies tirelessly—and when she was done with her lessons, she read the fairy books that [he] got for her—read them until 'Paul and Virginia' fell into her hands, and then there were no more fairy stories for little June" (173). June's idyllic, verdant upbringing in the mountains resembles that of the novel's two titular children, who grow up on the island of Mauritius under French colonial rule and experience a "natural" childhood resembling that prescribed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Emile* (1762). Like Virginie, June exists in a pre-Edenic state as a child; however, again like Virginie, once June reaches puberty, she is forced to shed her happy naïveté and take her place in settler society. Both Virginie and June must have their adolescent sexuality properly channeled by civilization or risk deteriorating into adult women without a sense of modesty or propriety. June occasionally references her dead older sister, Sally, who serves as a cautionary tale for the younger girl. While Sally was sent to a poor local school as a teenager, her untimely passing of an untold cause suggests that this rudimentary education alone was not enough to change her fate.

[57] Harriet R. Holman, "John Fox, Jr.: Appraisal and Self-Appraisal," 24.

Fortunately for June, due to Hale's timely intervention, she is transformed from barefoot, cabin-bound mountain girl into the ideal embodiment of white settler womanhood: Europe's namesake, Europa. The comparisons to this figure begin as once she transitions into high school, where "rumour had gone ahead of June. Hale had found her dashing about the mountains on the back of a wild bull, said rumour. She was as beautiful as Europa, was of pure English descent and spoke the language of Shakespeare" (23). In Greek mythology, Europa was a Phoenician princess abducted and raped by Zeus, who took the form of a beautiful white bull to seduce her. Fox had used the figure of Europa in an earlier novella, *A Mountain Europa*, which was serialized in *Century* magazine in 1892. The plot closely resembles that of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, and likely served as a model for the later novel. In this iteration of the relationship between entrepreneur and mountain girl, young absentee landowner Clayton arrives in the Cumberland Gap set on developing the mineral rich lands of his inheritance. While there, he encounters beautiful, blue-eyed Easter Hicks, who, due to the scarcity of other beasts of burden, has resorted to riding a bull through the mountains. Clayton and Easter, as with Hale and June, eventually marry; however, in the novella, the couple's happy ending is cut short by Easter's drunken, angry father, who attempts to shoot Clayton during the couple's wedding reception. Easter selflessly throws herself in front of Clayton and is shot and killed.

This finale appears tragic, but when considered in the context of the story as a whole, it is the only way that the narrative can successfully resolve. While Hale often questions whether his relationship with June is wise, at one point even wondering whether he is "building a lovely Frankenstein" (*Trail* 241), Clayton is much more hesitant about his love match. Although Easter's beauty and carriage are described along near identical lines to those

of June, Clayton is suspicious of his bride's ancestry. He wonders to himself "who could tell what blood ran in her veins?" (3), and doubts whether Easter could successfully adapt to his prosperous urban lifestyle. However, Clayton understands that his unwise flirtation with the impressionable Easter has already led her to fall in love with him, and that he must now marry her out of gentlemanly obligation, whether or not they are a good match.[58] Easter's convenient death resolves Clayton's fears, freeing him to move on from this youthful entanglement and, it is implied, marry a woman who shares his background. Fortunately for Hale, unlike Clayton, this *raptus* of his own Europa while she is still pre-pubescent gives him more time to shape her in his image.

In both *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* and *A Mountain Europa,* the protagonist's hold over his romantic interest is challenged by another would-be suitor. On first meeting the Tollivers, Hale is introduced to June's first cousin and would-be suitor, the moody teenager Dave Tolliver. Hale observes that the "fierce" mountain youth "must have been almost six feet tall, young as he was, and while he was lanky in limb he was well knit. His jean trousers were…tight over his knees which were well-moulded, and that is rare with a mountaineer. A loop of black hair curved over his forehead, down almost to his left eye" (23). Dave is all but engaged to "his little cousin—the girl whom, boy that he was, he had marked, when she was even more of a child than he was now, for his own. His people understood it as did her father, and, child though she was, she, too, understood it" (50). However, while they have grown up together in a similar manner, Dave is no virtuous Paul to June's Virginie. For the progressive Hale, this predetermined incestuous child marriage is a warning sign of the mountaineers' immanent deterioration. While Dave is physically fit, down to his rare "well-moulded"

[58] Importantly, it is Easter's undeniable status as a white woman that creates such an obligation.

hillbilly knees, he is consistently depicted as overly emotional. Dave is vain and impulsive, often deliberately courting conflict with the Falins. While never explicitly described as queer, Dave's exclusively homosocial orientation and the thrill he gets from violent physical encounters with the young Falin men carries an erotic charge.

Dave's behavior leads the college-educated Hale, trained as he is in the social sciences, to observe that the boy's apparently healthy body conceals an unhealthy mind. Although Hale remains condescendingly polite to Dave throughout all their interactions, Dave loathes Hale on sight. "He had heard of the coming of the 'furriners' on the Virginia side. He had seen some of them, he was suspicious of all of them, he disliked them all—but this man he hated straightaway. he hated his boots and his clothes; the way he sat and talked, as though he owned the earth…" (50). While Dave and Hale's conflict appears to center over June, Dave's observation that Hale behaves "as though he owned the earth" demonstrates how June and "the earth" are symbolically entangled throughout the novel. The metaphor of woman as an embodiment of land is a familiar one, and often used to the point of cliché in the settler colonial context. As Dave and Hale compete for June's affections, they each seek to establish their extractive "rights" to both her and Lonesome Cove.[59] Dave's claim to both the girl and the land is based in his original ownership and deep familiarity; he has grown up with June and the mountains as his birthright. Meanwhile, Hale's claim is based in his capacity for production and improvement. If Dave retains his tenure over these properties, he will never cultivate them to their full potential as Hale, a "furriner," could.

[59] This homosocial triangle, while important for the novel, takes center stage in the 1936 film adaptation, in which a young Henry Fonda portrays Dave, whose attempts to murder Hale and end his budding romance with June dominate the plot.

Despite this contention between Dave and Hale, June's symbolic association with the land does not solely position her as an object to be controlled. As her teachers and Hale inculcate her in the proper behavior of settler women, June begins to take on an active, agentive role in relation to the mountains. One of Hale's first romantic gestures is to order his employees to plant a flower garden on the Tolliver property. June is immediately enchanted by the garden, "the like of which she had seen only in her dreams" (194):

> There was a broad grass-walk…the flowers were planted in raised beds, and all the ones that she had learned to know and love at the Gap were there, and many more besides. The hollyhocks, bachelor's buttons and marigolds she had known all her life. The lilacs, touch-me-nots, tulips and narcissus she had learned to know in gardens at the Gap. Two rose-bushes were in bloom, and there were strange grasses and plants and flowers that Jack would tell her about when he came. (195)

While June acknowledges the more mundane beauty of the native plants, it is the "strange" flora that impresses her most. While presented as innocent and instinctually feminine, June's cultivation of the flower garden is more than a simple hobby. In the article "Nothing but land": Women's Narratives, Gardens, and the Settler-Colonial Imaginary in the US West and Australian Outback," Tom Lynch asserts that "one of the ways many women participated in the settler-colonial project was by the cultivation of decorative flower gardens in…barren 'nothing but' landscapes" (376). These "nothing but" landscapes that Lynch identifies are areas of settler occupied land where the natural world is figured as uniquely opposed to human life. The prototypical "nothing but" landscapes include deserts, empty prairies, and outback vistas; Hale's inhospitable if awe-inspiring mountains clearly fit the mold. For Lynch, decorative gardens operate as compelling symbols of settler control of the land. In June's garden, some select native plants are allowed to exist alongside native flora, but many more are "weeded" out as biologically inferior, unaesthetic, and damaging to the desirable plants. While Hale introduces the idea of garden, knowing that June is not yet fully educated

in the norms of settler femininity and could not imagine embarking on such a project by herself, June immediately devotes herself to its upkeep. It is this impractical, arduous work that proves to Hale that she has become invested in a shared settler imaginary; now cultivated, she can herself become a cultivator.

June's labors in the garden echo Hale's own efforts to domesticate the land. Hale unabashedly identifies himself as the "vanguard of civilization" (98) when he arrives in the mountains. He does not hold this title alone for long, however. After Hale has discovered coal, he is joined by:

> other members of that vanguard [that] began to drift in now by twos and threes from the bluegrass region of Kentucky and from the tidewater country of Virginia and from New England—strong, bold young men with the spirit of the pioneer and the birth, breeding and education of gentlemen, and the war between civilization and lawlessness that was the result of isolation, and consequent ignorance and idleness started in earnest (98).

Hale enlists these men in his attempt to bring law and order to the region. While taking inspiration from their fellow "gentlemen" of the "Ku-Klux clan," Hale's posse opt to "hew to the strict line of town ordinance and common law and do the rough everyday work of the common policeman" (95). Hale and company view themselves as empowered by the state and frame their actions as in the interest of the common people rather than their own industrial aspirations.

Their first target is the ongoing Tolliver and Falin feud, which Fox modeled along the familiar pattern of the Hatfields and McCoys. Hale learns that the childish feud began with the actual quarrel of children: "Two boys were playing marbles in the road along the Cumberland river, and one had a patch on the seat of his trousers. The other boy made fun of it and the boy with the patch went home and told his father. As a result, there had already

been 30 years of local war" (58). The conflict that follows from this catalyst is thus painted as part of an extended, collective tantrum. Wilson observes that:

> the idea of infancy is a significant theme in Fox's representation, approved by corporate imperialists, portraying mountain people as childlike, ignorant of mature 'order,' and in gross need of civilized instruction, which, according to Phillips, translates to high cultural writing visiting itself upon a barbaric tabula rasa. Dependent, powerless, and speechless, such colonized infants are receptive to the example of their elders (Wilson 30).

By depicting the warring hillbillies' resistance to state control as foolish violence, Fox undercuts the possible political logic of similar, real actions by mountaineers. Fox's use of the hillbilly thus conforms to their classic role: as a strawman for the biopolitical violence of the settler colony. Fox presents state force as justified violence proportionate to that directed by the hillbilly at the settler structure itself.

Hale's crackdown on "ignorance and idleness" in the Gap is itself no idle threat. Among his primary goals is the institution of capital punishment. While much of the writing that John Fox claimed was drawn from his life is pure fiction, the novel's several depictions of state executions do owe a debt to his experience in the real Big Stone Gap. At his brother James' request, Fox participated as a member of the recently formed paramilitary "Home Guard" during the first state administered hanging in the county on September 2, 1892. Seeking to set an example for the mountaineers, the Home Guard arrested Thomas Talton Hall on the charge that he had murdered a constable, one of over a dozen murders the so-called "feudsman" was alleged to have committed. Few records of the trial and execution remain other than John Fox's cinematic essay "The Hanging of Talton Hall," which was published in *Blue-grass and Rhododendron* (1901), a collection of stories recounting Fox's experiences in Kentucky and Virginia. In the essay, Fox refers to crowds of mountaineers dressed in their Sunday best arriving from the surrounding counties to view the hanging,

filling Big Stone Gap until "the neighboring hills were black with people" (241). Some of the Home Guard in attendance, all wealthy well-educated men who had recently moved to the community, are documented as having worn uniforms modeled on those of British military officers in India (Wilson 20). Fox describes the atmosphere as carnivalesque despite the context of a display of state power: "a stranger would have thought a county-fair, a camp-meeting, or a circus was the goal" (239). Fox claims to have repeatedly interviewed the jailed Hall, whom he calls "Bad Talt." In Fox's essay, Hall confesses to his myriad crimes, finally succumbing to his guilt at having lived a life of violence. According to Fox, Hall had been turned in by his enemy the "Red Fox," described in another essay in the same collection as an old and deeply religious mountaineer who himself was later convicted of murder and executed.

These two men, one real and another whose existence is unconfirmed by the historical record, would appear with only slight alteration in *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*. By the end of the novel, Hale has personally overseen the execution by hanging of two central characters, "Bad" Rufe Tolliver and the "Red Fox," caricatures who reflect differing forms of the hillbilly trope. Bad Rufe, the so-called "terror of the Tollivers" (29), is an overtly violent, degenerate hillbilly. Rufe is also openly incestuous. When he returns from the wild West to take part in the feud, Rufe leers at his niece June, who herself has recently returned from school in the city. The newly self-aware June is disturbed by his lingering gaze:

> Shuddering, she felt his evil eyes sweep her from head to foot, for the beast within was always unleashed and ever ready to spring, and she dropped back into her seat, speechless. Young Dave, entering from the kitchen, saw Rufe's look and the hostile lighting of his own eyes flashed at his foster-uncle, who knew straight away that he must not for his own safety strain the boy's jealousy too far. (310)

The shock of this double instance of incestuous desire is heightened by the potential violence between the two men. Rufe's behavior is perhaps the clearest instance of the inbred grotesque that permeates the novel in subtler ways. Rufe is adopted into the Tolliver clan as a child, but rather than mediating the horror of his incestuous desire, this adoption reinforces the notion that the family is already prone to improperly expansive, non-normative forms of kinship. Additionally, unlike the rest of the Tollivers, whose claim to whiteness is mostly confirmed, Rufe's uncertain parentage allows for a degree of racial ambiguity to enter the text.

Rufe's potential for criminality is subsequently confirmed when he announces "'I'm goin' over to kill me a policeman'" (296). This murder plot arises out of Rufe's vague dislike of Hale's increase of police presence in the mountains. Rufe lacks the forethought to select a specific target such as Hale for this assassination, and when Rufe does shoot and kill an officer in the Gap, he takes no steps to hide his own identity; the act is positioned as all the more cruel because it is so illogical. Like Dave, Rufe possesses an overly emotional, hyper-sexual masculinity that contrasts with Hale's more assured, civilized virility. Once Hale finally apprehends Rufe following a standoff with the Tollivers, a trial is held, and with the aid of June's tearful yet stern testimony against her own kin, Rufe is sentenced to death. The day of Rufe's execution is a test of the strength of Hale's newly enforced police state. As Hale anticipates, the Tollivers and Falins arrive in force to fight one another and any officials they find. Leaning on "the curious power he instinctively had over rough men" (95), Hale intervenes between the two families and reminds them that the force of law will "prevail" (320) no matter how they resist. Once the hillbillies realize they are beaten, "Devil" Judd makes one last effort to fulfill his promise to his foster-brother that he will not let him hang and, from a hiding spot, he shoots Rufe as he stands with open arms in the prison window.

But the Tollivers are not allowed even this small, symbolic victory; the bullet passes through Rufe's shoulder, and he is hung moments later in a demonstrative, spectacular show of state violence.

The second man to hang, the Red Fox, is an altogether different mountaineer from Rufe. As his moniker implies, he is a more cunning iteration of the hillbilly; when Hale first hears of him, he is shocked to learn of the man's many and seemingly conflicting occupations: "'yarb' [herb] doctor and Swedenborgian preacher, revenue officer and, some said, cold-blooded murderer" (37). Hale understands that there is something uniquely threatening about the Red Fox. Comparing him with Rufe, he observes "that was a common type of the bad man, that horseman who had galloped away from the gate—but this old man with his dual face, who preached the Word on Sundays and on other days was a walking arsenal; who dreamed dreams and had visions and slipped through the hills in his mysterious moccasins on errands of mercy or chasing men from vanity, personal enmity or for fun, and still appeared so sane—he was a type that confounded" (67). The Red Fox's metaphysical control over men and claim to the power of the state establishes him as Hale's primary rival in the novel. Although he is largely framed as an outsider figure, the Red Fox is an occasional "revenue officer," tasked with discovering and shutting down hidden moonshine stills.[60] The Red Fox might be interpreted as providing a form of community policing, as he is deeply connected to the local people and appears to only intervene when he understands it to be acceptable according to their shared values. Yet Hale conveniently concludes that the

[60] As Emelie K. Peine and Kai A. Schafft discuss in their article "Moonshine, Mountaineers, and Modernity: Distilling Cultural History in the Southern Appalachian Mountains," the moonshiner in many ways "represents the pinnacle" of an "imaginary Appalachia" (93). The authors argue that the figure of the moonshiner has been used both by outsiders to represent regional opposition to the apparatus of the state and internally as a method of resistant cultural reproduction. Several episodes in *Lonesome Pine* involve Hale shutting down "tigers," illegal moonshine dispensaries (143).

Red Fox's work on behalf of the state is done purely out of his own self-interest, thus interpreting what could be seen as restraint as fickle favoritism.

Hale similarly dismisses the Red Fox's work as a preacher. As is often the case in depictions of the hillbilly, while cut off from the outside world in many ways, the mountaineers of the Gap identify as Christians. At the same time, they possess an archaic religious intensity that Hale understands to be unhealthy. Hale observes that "their pride was morbid, and they were very religious. Indeed, they used religion to cloak their deviltry, as honestly as it was ever used in history" (100). The Red Fox is a Swedenborgian, a member of the New Church that was inspired by the writings of the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist and mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg. While the New Church identifies as Christian, the Swedenborgians' disagreements about the nature of the Holy Trinity and validity of certain books of the Bible were controversial and led many Protestant denominations to view them as a heretical sect.[61] Additionally, Swedenborg claimed to have received direct spiritual guidance during the writing of his compositions on the nature of humanity and the universe, which left the New Church open to accusations of occultism. Missionaries brought Swedenborg's teachings to the U.S. during the early nineteenth century, where the religious movement flourished and spread during the Second Great Awakening.[62] While radical evangelical revival movements such as Pentecostalism that are popular in Appalachia have more often been mapped onto the hillbilly imaginary, John Fox's incorporation of Swedenborgianism accomplishes a similar aim.[63] The Red Fox's leadership in this mystical,

[61] Jane Williams-Hogan, "Swedenborg and Swedenborgianism," 214
[62] Ibid, 224.
[63] The relatively rare and isolated Pentecostal religious rite of "snake handling" or "serpent handling" has had an enduring effect on the hillbilly imaginary. The practice, which is inspired by several Bible passages that describe followers of Christ who were protected from snake bites, involves holding and handling venomous snakes as a testament of one's faith. As recently as 2019, the film *Them That Follow* received criticism for its stereotyped portrayal of snake handling.

divisive denomination establishes him as dangerously charismatic. Hale discovers that the ignorant mountaineers believe that "the Red Fox communicated with spirits, had visions and superhuman powers of locomotion" (38). As his parishioners believe the Red Fox to possess divine powers, his influence over them is profound, and certainly greater than that of the government.

After the Red Fox's lifetime of unchecked power in the mountains, Hale finally brings him to trial on the charge that he has murdered the elder Dave Tolliver. Dave Sr. opposes the Red Fox's marriage to a Tolliver woman, thus enraging the Red Fox, who bides his time until, many years later, he is presented with the chance to shoot the man from behind without witnesses. Hale cross checks the Red Fox's alibi and, after making a forensic evaluation of the gun that killed Dave, concludes that the Red Fox must be the killer. When the Red Fox appears in court to defend himself, he resorts to a familiar technique of cloaking his "deviltry": reciting the Bible. Stating that he wishes his friend, Jesus Christ, to speak for him, "the old man fished his Bible from his pocket and calmly read such passages as might be interpreted as sure damnation for his enemies and sure glory for himself—read them until the Judge lifted his hand for a halt" (215). Once the Red Fox is sentenced to death, he continues his blasphemy by claiming that he will be resurrected on the third day after his execution. His wife, described repeatedly as "a little old woman in black, dumb and noiseless," attends to his needs in prison (70). Hale understands theirs to be an abusive marriage, and moreover, suspiciously childless. The state-mandated death of her husband thus appears to free her from her bondage; however, "dumb and noiseless" as she is, her own opinion on the matter is neither asked nor given.

Hale's harsh policing of the mountaineers is allayed by the land speculation "boom" that he brings to the Gap, buoying the local economy and filling the pockets of the locals. This sudden prosperity is described as an irresistible force of nature that Hale's arrival precipitates: "The boom spread down the valley and into the hills. The police guard had little to do and, over in the mountains, the feud miraculously came to a sudden close" (233). Finally, to Hale's great satisfaction, economic progress brings civilization to the mountains. While the mountaineers repeatedly fall for scams, such as a so-called "singing teacher" who overcharges his naïve students and then simply runs them repeatedly through scales, the Gap develops into a small cultural oasis. That the boom and accompanying peace do not last is a realist turn that reflects Fox's own experience in land speculation, but the brief spike in income is enough to uplift those mountaineers who are capable of being salvaged. By the novel's end, many of those mountaineers who have opted to comply with the state decide to venture "West" to a vague frontier where, perhaps, they will be able to begin truly participating in the American project. Hale and June remain behind alone on the Tolliver land, transforming it into an Edenic paradise all their own.

This mountaineer migration, both in fiction and reality, echoed setter colonialism's original attempt at diversionary displacement of revolutionary subjects and indeed served the same purpose. In major news outlets and periodicals of the time, Fox publicly championed a policy of removal from the mountains. In one of his schemes, the mountaineers would be made to swap locations with black workers from the Carolinas. As Fox argued, "assigning blacks to mine coal and white mountaineers to raise tobacco on shares and work in cotton mills…would prevent the potentially explosive problem of having blacks and poor Appalachian whites living in adjacent, similar economic conditions" (Wilson 27). Fox

understood this interracial proximity as having the potential to further the mountaineer's process of racial degeneration; on the other hand, removal from the mountains would provide opportunities for the Junes among them to reinvest in the settler project.[64] The unstated, desirable side effect of such a policy would of course have been the emptying of land that could then be bought cheaply by speculators, who might then exploit their new black workforce without concern of the mountaineers' simultaneous claims to white racial entitlements and a right to the land that perversely echoed that of Native groups.

As industrial development and the creation of large nature preserves in Appalachia displaced homesteaders in the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth century, many former mountaineers did move West or sought jobs in the emerging the Rust Belt. Rather than lessening the hillbilly trope, this outflux led to concerns of "brain drain" and fears of the white rural poor's incursion into cities and suburbs. In *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area* (1963), often credited as the first definitive history of the region, Harry Caudill offered the following lament:

> As the more intelligent and ambitious people moved out of the plateau, the percentage of mental defectives relative to the total population rose sharply. Their low intelligence added to their employment woes, but their votes were as potent as those of the wealthiest merchants in the county seats…such disability as they may suffer does not prevent them from procreating, and they beget great gangs of children who tend to inherit or soon to acquire the shortcomings of their parents and to become Welfare beneficiaries as soon as they are born. (287-8)

[64]The textile mill industry of the Carolina Piedmont that developed between 1900 and 1920 did ultimately reflect Fox's segregationist dream. According to Joey Fink in 2022 entry in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, "Southern Textile Worker Struggles in the 20th Century," mills employed primarily rural white migrant families, who were housed in "mill villages" in which "owners provided social services in exchange for employee loyalty and subservience." During this time, mill workers "produced and consumed 'hillbilly music' that helped them acclimate to industrial labor, strengthen bonds in the village, and define their working-class identity," eventually contributing to the birth of country music as a genre (Fink).

As the following chapters explore, this post-modern vision of the hillbilly would continue to closely echo earlier voices like Kephart and Fox while also evolving in the face of new national social and economic concerns.

*The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* and other local color writing had profoundly shaped the national perception of this white rural poor, and the genre's influence would continue on long after these works had faded out of popularity. Fox's writing was received with a wide-eyed credulity; one early review of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* in the *Baltimore Sun* referred to it as more "a study of anthropology" than a novel.[65] The book offered a compelling framework for "understanding" an Appalachia that journalists could readily implement in their own writing on the region. In 1935, a year before the release of the novel's final film adaptation, Virginia schoolteacher Edith Maxwell was accused of murdering her father near Big Stone Gap and received the nickname "The Lonesome Pine Girl" in the press. On her return from Radford State Teachers College to her home in rural Wise County, Maxwell's father, Trigg Maxwell, had attacked her while drunk. She testified to hitting him with a high-heeled shoe in self-defense. He died soon afterwards, possibly of a heart attack or stroke. The case, which received significant national attention, was framed as a battle between a violent Appalachian past and the forces of education and progress. Maxwell, like June, had successfully made the journey from her mountain home to the urban center, where she was redeemed through education. Her father's abuse mirrored the male mistreatment of women that Fox had described in his novel. While Maxwell was ultimately found guilty of murder, sympathetic media accounts of the trial included "almost incessant references" to Fox's novel, leading one "Wise County newspaper editor to quip that 'most of

[65] *Baltimore Sun*, November 22, 1908.

the news stories on the Maxwell case have been written in hotel rooms with a bottle of "corn" [liquor] in one hand and a copy of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* in the other.'"[66][67]

By reading between the lines of commentary by Appalachian social scientists and writers of the time, it is not difficult to gain a sense of how mountaineers themselves felt about such public depictions. As Goodell Frost wrote in "Our Contemporary Ancestors":

> when Mr. [John] Fox gave a reading from his Cumberland tales in Berea, the mountain boys were ready to mob him. They had no comprehension of the nature of fiction. Mr. Fox's stories were either true or false. If they were true, then he was 'no gentleman' for telling all the family affairs of people who had entertained him with their best. If they were not true, then, of course, they were libelous upon the mountain people! (6)

Kephart would repeat this tale nearly word for word in *Our Southern Highlanders* (282). Throughout his book, Kephart praises Fox's commitment to realism, citing the *Lonesome Pine* author's wisdom on the mountaineer on thirteen occasions as he compared the poor Appalachians whom he met to Fox's characters. Kephart recounts giving a volume of Fox's stories to a mountaineer man, "curious to learn how these vivid pictures of mountain life would impress one who was born and bred in the same atmosphere." Kephart was shocked when the man reported that "'That tale-teller…is jest makin' fun of the mountain people by misspellin' our talk. You educated folks don't spell your own words the way you say them'" (350). With his own transcription choices as preface, Kephart follows this interaction with an extended aside on the importance of authentic dialect writing. Yet while the mountaineer's words, much like those of the protestors at Berea College, have their intention and grammar

[66] Sharon Hatfield, *Never Seen the Moon: The Trials of Edith Maxwell*, 44.
[67] Edith Maxwell was sentenced to twenty years in prison, but was pardoned in 1941 after serving only six years by the governor of Virginia, James Hubert Price, at the behest of the then First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (Hatfield 245).

twisted to conform to the hillbilly trope, their rhetorical force still shines through the cracks of these texts.

Echoing the cries of the "mountain boys," this chapter's reading of the mutualistic partnership between eugenics and the Rural Gothic concludes that popular fiction would proceed to influence the scientific "truth" of the hillbilly into the twenty-first century. The hillbilly's promoters, whether motivated by progressive ideals or capitalist ambitions, had harnessed the primal settler fear that a subset of their fellow colonizers had not fully committed themselves to the dream of eternal growth, and indeed were even working against the colony's interests. The hillbilly is of course only one of many divisive cultural figures that fulfills biopower's continuous need for increasingly elaborate scientific, political, and sociocultural methods of sustaining life through the denial of life. As the product of biopolitical racism, the hillbilly's whiteness remains insulative even as it heightens the perception of their blood's threat to public health. At the turn of the twentieth century, the hillbilly, while deviant and dangerous, still retained a recognizable glint of humanity: they were potentially salvageable if forcefully ushered into settler modernity. In the chapters to follow, I will uncover other global hillbilly histories that parallel this American version of the trope and explore how, in the decades to follow *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, the hillbilly imaginary would develop and darken in ways which Fox and his contemporaries could never have predicted.

## Chapter Two

## "The Hated Stain": Settler Patriarchy and the Queer Convict Gothic in Van Diemen's Land

*Tonight, my mother died.*
*I cried and carried her for miles.*
*With a knife I freed her insides,*
*And dragged her to town by daylight.*

*Down main street of this town*
*More people crowd around*
*To sew the wound of my mother.*
*No hole in the ground, no priest, now the town*
*Left to follow the blood to the hills.*
*And there, in a cage, in an inconsolable state*
*Lay my brother, panting like a dog run away.*

Harmony, "Black Bobs"

In 2011, the Australian rock band Harmony released "Black Bobs" as the second track on their debut album. As Harmony's Tasmanian-born singer-songwriter-guitarist Tom Lyngcoln explained in an interview with the alternative music magazine *Mess + Noise*, the concept for the unpolished, downbeat song drew on "a piece of officially sanctioned madness [he] was told in primary school by a teacher." According to Lyngcoln, Black Bob was:

> A threat lauded over young children that if you misbehaved, Black Bob would come down from the hills and kill you. There are many variations on this story. It is a disturbing piece of Tasmanian folklore: at the turn of the century, a boy dragged his recently deceased mother into the nearest town from their home at Black Bobs…disemboweling her to lighten the load. The horrified townsfolk sent the local constabulary to the home and they found a deformed child chained to a pole in a cage barking like a dog. The child, in one version of events had a snout and large incisors. The accuracy of these reports vary but most Tasmanian children have been traumatised by the tale of Black Bobs.[68]

[68] Tom Lyngcoln, "Track by Track: Self-titled by Harmony," *Mess + Noise*, July 2011.

In its recounting of this local legend, "Black Bobs" follows the typical structure of a murder ballad. Murder ballads are traditional genre of folk music that tell the tale of a real or fictional killing, often from the perspective of the murderer, who reports why and how they committed their grisly crime. Murder ballads originated in the United Kingdom and Scandinavia, achieving widespread popularity with the advent of the broadsheet ballad, and were later exported to the British colonies. One exemplary case of this musical movement is the early twentieth-century Appalachian murder ballad "The Knoxville Girl," in which a murderer gives a bloody account of his killing of his fiancée. The origins have been traced to the nineteenth-century Irish ballad "The Wexford Girl"; this ballad itself drew inspiration from a seventeenth-century English broadside ballad, "The Bloody Miller."[69] While the murderer of "The Knoxville Girl" does not give a reason for the crime, the narrator of "The Bloody Miller" explains that he has murdered his lover because she is pregnant; femicide is a common theme throughout the genre.[70] As such illicit sexuality demonstrates, the genre has historically been considered the product "of violent and unruly cultures, born from and, thereon, popularised in remote and rural areas at a distance from the formal legal institutions of the state and thus characterized by some degree of lawlessness."[71]

The Black Bobs tale, which takes its name from the rural locality of Black Bobs in Tasmania's southwestern River Derwent valley, is a fitting story for a murder ballad. The origin of the name "Black Bobs" is unclear; much like the polymorphous hollers of Appalachia, Tasmanian is known for its varied, unorthodox place names. However, it is possible the name comes from a former Indigenous resident; the appellation "Black" was

[69] Graeme Thomson, *I Shot a Man in Reno: A History of Death by Murder, Suicide, Fire, Flood, Drugs, Disease, and General*, 59.
[70] "The Bloody Miller," 1684.
[71] Daniel Newman, "Murder Ballads and Death in Song," 18.

frequently added to the English names of Aboriginal Tasmanians during the colonial period. For instance, a Tasmanian Aboriginal man named Robert, or "Black Bob," is recorded as having worked for George Augustus Robinson, the English preacher tasked with the relocation of Tasmanian Aboriginal people to the Bass Strait Islands following the Black War.[72] Lyngcoln's retelling of Black Bobs is anemic in comparison to some of the other versions of the tale in circulation. The disabled "dog boy" is a recurring character in the story. In a 2013 article "Why Do We Joke About Tasmanian Incest?" for *Yawp Magazine*, Sydney-based comedian Peter Green writes that "according to different reports, this kid was either an armless or legless torso or simply just a torso and head, or possessed all his limbs but was on all fours barking like a dog, or was a Downs Syndrome afflicted individual OR, best of all, a head on legs, with no body in between."[73] In some accounts, there are multiple dog children. As British historian Norman Davies details in a rare, published account of the story, during a raid on a farm in the River Derwent valley, a group of social workers discovered "a variety of deformed children…kept tied to wooden posts in the farmyard."[74] In Davies' report on the local lore, it was the common belief that these children were the product of generations of unchecked incestuous sex.

Although the Black Bobs tale appears to originate from an oral storytelling tradition, the twenty-first century proliferation of ever more gruesome versions of the legend owes much to the internet. While the tale is still primarily a niche interest among those Australians who grew up hearing it, an assortment of blogs and forums serve a small but eager constituency of Black Bobs enthusiasts. The content of their posts oscillates between bawdy

[72] "Robert: Aboriginal Life Stories—Robinson's Clan Guides."
[73] Peter Green, "Why Do We Joke About Tasmanian Incest?," 1.
[74] Norman Davies, *Beneath Another Sky: A Global Journey into History*, 388.

comedy, conspiracy theories, and, on occasion, genuine historical research. On the public Facebook group "The Legend of Black Bobs," over six hundred primarily Tasmanian subscribers fiercely debate the story, with sensational posts about Black Bobs lore often receiving criticism from members with connections to the locality who may have joined the group to chat with other Bobsian residents or to praise the natural beauty of the area. In response to a post in which a subscriber recounts that her father warned her to "never go in there" when driving by Black Bobs, another subscriber comments "Fucking fairy tales."[75] In another post, a subscriber writes that "my mum and dad used to drive trucks through black bobs and have told me many stories about a midget (alfie?) that used to hitchhike and they would give him a ride. On many occasions he would be on the side of the road and once they stopped more would run out from the bushes. They also told me about the child chained up like a dog which they saw for themselves." To this, a subscriber responds "That midget ur telling stories about is my uncle. More running out from the bushes? You cunts need to lay off the drugs."[76]

"Legend of Black Bobs" subscribers on the hunt for the origin of the story have collectively searched through online newspaper archives for mentions of the Black Bobs locality. Among their more promising leads is a short in article titled "Cripple in Chains" in the Tasmanian capital Hobart's daily paper, *The Mercury*, published May 4, 1932. According to the article, "In a letter read at the meeting of the Hamilton Council, held at Hamilton yesterday, it was alleged that a cripple in receipt of a pension at Black Bobs was fastened to the wheel of a cart with fencing wire, and secured with a padlocked chain round his neck" (6). While some council members concluded that this person who "got around on all

[75] Mary Butler, Black Bobs discussion, *Facebook*.
[76] Kristy Lee Arnol, Black Bobs hitchhiking, *Facebook.*

fours…ought to be sent to New Norfolk [Insane Asylum]," a government inspector reported that the man was "well-nourished and healthy…those responsible for his care stated that they had to chain him up, as they were afraid of his wandering into the bush" (7). A follow up *Mercury* article the day after, "Amazing Story: Alleged Treatment of Cripple," adds that "the letter further alleged that the parents were receiving the invalid pension issued in respect of the cripple, and added that there were six men of working age in the family. They were living on the pension" (5).

However different each version of Black Bobs may be, these narratives share a few common motifs displayed in the *Mercury* articles: congenital disability, violence, the refusal of labor, and the proliferative breakdown—if not dismemberment—of the family. As Davies' version of the story attests, when these perhaps too closely-related tales provide a cause for such abnormalities, the answer is always the same: inbreeding. Consequently, among the most common topics in the "Legend of Black Bobs" group is the prevalence of incest in Black Bobs. Despite the fact that posts alleging inbreeding are the target of local ire, even receiving accusations of "slandering…ancestors," they can be found throughout the group forum.[77] Such "slander" is familiar territory for the Southern Australian island state, which, from the early days of its colonial origins, has been the breeding ground for a persistent incest stereotype. Peter Green claims that Black Bobs itself is the origin of the trope. According to Green:

> Past the village of Ouse, there lived an extended family of timber cutters who, over a couple of generations became more and more isolated from the rest of society. When the social security services came to visit, they found the families living in sheds, and heaps of kids with disabilities…The social security official took a look around, suggesting to the family that it might be prudent to make the male children and the female children sleep in separate buildings. This advice was taken on board, and the next time the social security visited they were proudly shown the family's

[77] Melinda Wade. Black Bobs incest. *Facebook.*

> new sleeping arrangements. Still in the same room, but with the boys on one side and the girls on another. A strand of barbed wire was installed down the centre of the space (1)

While Green claims that the story and stereotype "stem from the 1920s and 1930s," mainland Australians have joked about the Tasmanians' propensity for incest since the early nineteenth century.[78] The existence of inbred "two-headed Tasmanians" among the state's rural poor is one of the oldest forms of this humor, and depictions of the comical affliction can regularly be found depicted on tourist memorabilia today.[79] Medical historians have hypothesized that the rumor stems from a regional tendency to develop goiters that was once attributed to a genetic predisposition rather than the island's iodine deficient soil.[80] Tasmanian incest comedy continues to be popular in the present. For instance, in 2004, when asked why she wanted to appear on the competition show *Australian Idol*, finalist Amali Ward replied "'To prove to mainlanders that Tasmania is not just about incest! The amount of jokes I've heard is ridiculous.'"[81] In a 2015 satirical YouTube music video "Started with My Cousin (Drake Tasmania Parody)," the Sydney comedy group Tom's Roundabout Crew sings about Tasmanian incest to the tune of Drake's "Started from the Bottom": "Cousin, why you got a set of extra toes? / Now our families on a roll / Half a million brother-uncles" (Armstrong 01:15-01:30). The video has over 57,000 views and 1,100 likes; one comment below the video reads, "It's funny because it's true." More than 10,000 miles and a hemisphere away from Appalachia, the inbred grotesque appears again,

[78] The island's association with physical extremes and body horror dates even further back. One of the first European discoverers of Tasmania, Dutch explorer Abel Tasman, reported in 1642 that the island off the Australian continent was possibly inhabited by giants. Likely drawing on this account, Jonathan Swift described Lilliput, an imaginary land in *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) peopled by pigmies and giants, as to the north-west of Van Diemen's Land.
[79] Alison Alexander, "Tasmania's Reputation," 1.
[80] Roy Scragg, "Goitre Monitor: The History of Iodine Deficiency in Tasmania," 167–170.
[81]Nicole Anae, "'The New Prima Donnas': 'Homegrown' Tasmanian 'Stars' of the 1860s Emma and Clelia Howson," 173.

recognizable through its aesthetic configuration of horror, comedy, scientific reason, and viral fictional narrative.

Despite the theories above, there has been no consensus, critical or popular, on the origin of the Tasmanian incest stereotype. By applying the concept of the inbred grotesque as I did in the previous chapter in an Appalachian context, I will illustrate how this aesthetic mode evolved convergently in an altogether different British settler colony despite little apparent cultural resemblance or cultural exchange between the regions. Once again, tracing the origin story of the inbred grotesque in Tasmania requires a return to the foundational myths of this settler state. However, rather than a long forgotten "Lubberland," the origin of the inbred grotesque in Tasmania is the subject matter of continued public debate and strong regional identity: the convict system. This "hated stain" has been alternately a source of anxiety, shame, and pride throughout the two centuries that it has shaped even Tasmania's very name. While in the U.S. South, the hillbilly archetype was patterned off of the Appalachian mountaineer, in Australia, a parallel hillbilly was modeled from the Tasmanian convict.[82] Through a comparative analysis of the startling similarities between these seemingly unrelated mountaineer and convict imaginaries, this chapter shows how the hillbilly figure's characterization emerges via the inbred grotesque to reflect the larger, intentional pattern in the settler strategy of biopolitical racialization.

Penal transportation is a cornerstone of Australian history: a reality that has been alternately suppressed and celebrated since the declared end of that nation's convict era in

[82] My use of the term "convict" reflects current common academic usage and is best suited to reflect how this group was and is part of a stigmatized cultural imaginary. While the British government officials referred to transportees as "convicts," most nineteenth-century Australian incarcerated people preferred to be referred to as "government men/women." Among the public, it was considered bad form to refer to an individual directly as a "convict."

1868. Few Australian regions could be said to hold as strong an association with the convict system as Tasmania, where the settler project first took the form of a penal colony. Until 1856, the island was named Van Diemen's Land, in honor of Anthony van Diemen, Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies. From the beginning of British occupation in 1803 until transportation to the island was formally ended in 1852, Van Diemen's Land received 72,000 convicts, 42% of the total sent to Australia over the course of the system's lifetime.[83] Penal transportation was a common sentence in British courts from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century. British courts, which had lagged behind continental Europe in Enlightenment-era sentencing reform, viewed transportation as a humane alternative to execution. Transportation was a sentence given for even minor property crimes. The system's primary stated purpose was the removal of Britain's "criminal class," although transportation had the additional, less-remarked-upon benefit of increasing the colonial labor force.[84]

By 1840, three-quarters of the population of the Van Diemen's Land colony were convicts, ex-convicts, and their children.[85] These convicts were enlisted to violently displace local Aboriginal groups during the "Black War" of 1824-1832, a period of conflict between settlers and Aboriginal Tasmanians which is considered a genocide by many historians.[86] In

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[83] James K. Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land,* 9.

[84] "Copy of a DESPATCH from the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone to Governor Sir C.A. Fitzroy, May 7, 1846, Downing Street," *Convict Discipline and Transportation: Correspondence on the Subject of Convict Discipline and Transportation: Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons, Volume 1*, 3. As then member of William Gladstone wrote of Van Diemen's Land in official correspondence, "The new colony has been founded as a receptacle for convicts, who, by pardon or by lapse of time, have regained their freedom, but who may be unable to find elsewhere an effective demand for their services." While Gladstone later expounds on the pressure of public opinion and reform as a motive for transportation, this brief but important mention of the transportation system's intention to maximize the employment of emancipists is telling.

[85] Caitlin Mahar, "Vandemonians," 1.

[86] The term genocide has been contested during the still on-going Australian "history wars," a term for the academic and public debate over the contemporary national characterization of the European colonization of Australia that emerged in the 1990s.

1830, convicts played a large part in what would be called the "Black Line," in which thousands of settlers formed a human chain to traverse the island searching for Tasmanian Aboriginal people who had resisted displacement to the Bass Strait Islands.[87] As this historical episode demonstrates, convicts were an integral part of British settler society on the island. Despite the stigma of convict status, non-recidivists were typically granted the status of "servant," with limited rights similar to those they would have held in England. This status was necessary and intentional given that convicts made up such a large portion of the colony's population; as such, convicts, depending on their class background and skills, could even be appointed to professional positions in the colony. The British plan for occupation of the island relied on convicts eventually becoming free small landowners. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart has referred to convicts as the "shock troops of colonialism" due to the settler state's near total reliance on them in the early stages of settler occupation.[88]

Despite the prominent role of convicts in early colonial society, throughout this period of development there remained a constant awareness among British officials that the early settler population of Van Diemen's Land was composed mainly of those deemed a threat to social order in their home state. This led to concerns that this tenuous new society might be threatened from within by potentially socially, and by extension biologically, unruly residents. An official inquiry in 1838 voiced the fear that the continuation of the convict system might intensify and spread the "stain" already spreading across the colony: "there belongs to the [convict] system [the] monstrous evil of calling into existence, and continually extending, societies or the germs of nations, most thoroughly depraved, as respects both the

[87]Henry Reynolds, "An Indelible Stain?," *A History of Tasmania*, 70. Importantly, despite claims of Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples' "extinction" in 1876, since the mid-1970s Aboriginal Tasmanian activists of multi-racial ancestry have campaigned for recognition of the Bass Strait Islands Palawa community's Aboriginal descent.
[88] Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "The Rise and Fall of Penal Transportation," 647.

character and degree of their vicious propensities" (Boyce 238). In an effort to stymie any potential revolt, Van Diemonian magistrates implemented the harshest capital punishment system of any British colony of the time, with floggings and later extended solitary confinement ordered for "laziness, insolence…[and] careless damage to tools."[89] Recidivists could find themselves remanded to one of a number of large, crowded penal stations or, in the case of women, "female factories" where daily supervision and discipline in the name of reform were taken to extremes.

Predictably, these conditions intensified escape attempts by convicts. Those who managed to evade recapture became "bushrangers" at the fringes of Van Diemonian settlements. The bushrangers, sometimes referred to as "banditti," validated officials' fears. These reprobates were characterized in government reports and media along familiar hillbilly lines; they widely considered sickly and sexually debauched. Bushrangers were viewed as living in overly close proximity to the Aboriginal Tasmanians; their occasional supply raids on homesteads threatened settler lives, wealth, and hierarchy. In "Convicts and the Colonisation of Australia, 1788-1868," Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Deborah Oxley survey the complex history of relationships between convicts and Tasmanian Aboriginal people, noting that:

> Some convict absconders integrated into Aboriginal society, while bands of convict bushrangers are known to have formed working alliances. Sexual relations sometimes meant local women exploiting new options; at other times (more frequently?), it meant men exploiting them. Infamously, in VDL [Van Diemen's Land], Aboriginal women were either forcibly taken by sealers or exchanged as part of negotiations with Aboriginal groups and were subjected to sexual slavery. Most of Tasmania's current Aboriginal population traces descent from mixed unions. The perceived threat of miscegenation later created the opportunity of assimilation, becoming formal policy in the 20th century (1)

[89] Paul Collins, *Hell's Gates*, 64-67.

Historians Tom Lawson (*The Last Man: A British Genocide in Tasmania*) and Lyndall Ryan (*The Aboriginal Tasmanians*) have argued that between 1808 and 1820 in the Northern Tasmanian Bass Strait Islands, a Creole culture developed as a result of cross-cultural, economic, and sexual interactions between European sealers and the Indigenous Cape Barren Islanders. However, this islanded collaboration was accomplished in shared exile. As the British occupation advanced, colonial officials often tactically mobilized convict racism to incite tension and competition between the two groups.

Such strategies would become increasingly necessary as the threat of bushrangers to the still small and largely isolated colony increased. Despite their apparent motivation by self-interest, bushrangers were far from apolitical. As Henry Reynolds writes in *A History of Tasmania* (2012), the colonial portrayal of the bushrangers as a kind of insurgency had some truth to it:

> Many bushrangers had more in mind than plunder. They, too, had a political agenda. They were often motivated by a strong sense of injustice, particularly about their treatment in gangs and on settlements, and the impossibility of receiving a fair hearing about justifiable grievances. When they raided the homes of the gentry they performed carefully thought-out rituals of insurrection, called on assigned servants to judge their masters, and forced the masters to don servants' clothes and serve the bushrangers at the table and even in every possible way to humiliate the often-cringing master and mistress. It was a direct challenge to the overriding emphasis in the colony of deference and subordination (157)

This cultural template for the bushranger was set by the convict Michael Howe, a former Yorkshire highwayman who for four years led a band of fellow escapees and Tasmanian Aboriginal women in attacks on settlers and soldiers. Titling himself "lieutenant-governor of the Woods," Howe's guerilla tactics led to a six-month declaration of martial law in the colony in 1815.[90] Often likened to Robin Hood, Howe was known for both his love of

[90] K.R. Von Stieglitz, "Howe, Michael (1787—1818)," 560.

flowers and his insistence on Biblical instruction among his followers. Yet while Howe styled himself as a father to his followers, rumors of his kangaroo-skin diary, written in blood, and his Aboriginal partner Black Mary would fashion him as a principal villain in the narratives of the early settlement. [91] Immediately following his capture and death in 1818, Howe became the subject of Australia's first literary output, T.E. Wells' account of Howe's life and crimes, *The Last and Worst of the Bush-Rangers of Van Diemen's Land* (1818).

The book's title would prove premature. Howe would soon be eclipsed in the public consciousness by a much more sinister figure: Irish convict escapee Alexander Pearce. Pearce was transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1819 for the "theft of six pairs of shoes." In 1822, after committing various petty offenses in the colony and being sentenced to a collective 175 lashes over the course of six and a half months, Howe was transported to the notoriously inhumane Macquarie Harbor Penal Station on Sarah Island. This island off the wind-swept, rugged West Coast, located near the present-day tourist village of Strahan, was purported to be inescapable (Collins 62). This did not stop Pearce, who with a group of fellow convicts tasked with cutting the native Huon pine on the mainland, overpowered their guard and escaped into the bush. Unwilling to return and facing starvation, they resorted to killing and eating one another, at first collaborating to draw straws and then turning on each other as desperation set in. Sole survivor Pearce was eventually captured, after which he escaped once more and again cannibalized his co-escapee. Following his final recapture and execution in 1824, Pearce's skull was preserved and sent for study to the American professor

[91]James Bonwick, *The Bushrangers; Illustrating the Early Days of Van Diemen's Land,* 9. Even as bushrangers were figured as too close to Aboriginal Tasmanians, especially Aboriginal women, they were also depicted as brutally violent towards them. Bonwick recounts that Howe shot and wounded Black Mary, who was pregnant with his child, to distract a group of soldiers who were in pursuit of the couple through the bush, allowing him to escape (50).

of anatomy Samuel Morton, a phrenologist whose monumental book *Crania Americana* gave ranking order to different races based on cranial capacity.[92]

Pearce would become an enduring reference point in Tasmanian media and culture as the darkest form of the Australian bushranger.[93] Indeed, the prevalence of the surname "Pearce" in the Black Bobs locality has been cited as evidence of an incestuous line of descent from the infamous Pearce.[94] This implausible allegation was incorporated into the plot of the 2008 Tasmanian horror film *Dying Breed*, in which Pearce's rural inbred cannibal descendants prey on unsuspecting tourists.[95] Pearce established the model of the convict cannibal that would become increasingly well-known during the later sensationalized trials of Thomas Jeffrey, hanged for the murder and subsequent consumption of a fellow fugitive in 1826, and Charles Routley, a bushranger hanged in 1830 for multiple killings, including a victim who, with gustatory suggestiveness, was alleged to have been "roasted alive" (Davies 386).

[92] John M. Thearle, "The Rise and Fall of Phrenology in Australia," 523.
[93] Roger W. Byard and Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "Cannibalism Amongst Penitentiary Escapees from Sarah Island in Nineteenth Century Van Diemen's Land," 1.
[94] Nalda Murray, Pearce name association, *Facebook*. This association has possibly resulted in some in the community to alter the spelling of their names to "Pierce."
[95] I will be discussing *Dying Breed* and similar Australian horror films at length in Chapter Four.

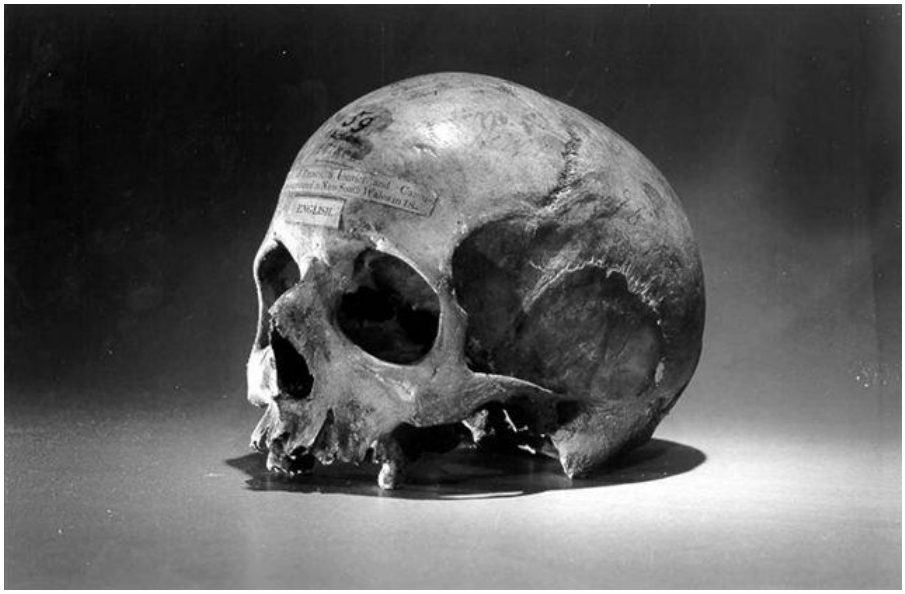

Figure 4. Skull of Alexander Pearce.[96]

As the colony grew through mid-nineteenth century, the concern over Van Diemonian convicts made its way to mainland Australia, leading to a moral panic during a period of increased crime in Melbourne. Draconian legislation like the Convicts Prevention Act of 1852 was introduced to prevent free Van Diemonian former convicts from entering "pure communities" such as Victoria. The Act "provided for the arrest of any Van Diemonian convict found living in Victoria whether conditionally pardoned or not and including those who had not committed any crime, the confiscation of property, a sentence of working in irons on Victorian roads from one to three years, or their return to Van Diemen's Land."[97] In *The Eureka Stockade* (1855), an eyewitness account of an Australian gold miners' revolt against colonial authorities, Italian travel writer Rafaello Carboni described an interaction with an archetypical "Vandiemonian": "a sulky ruffian, some five feet high, with the head of a bull-dog, the eyes of a vulture, sunken in a mass of bones, neglected beard, sun-burnt, grog-

[96] "File: Skull of Alexander Pearce.jpg."
[97] Stefan Petrow, "Fear, panic, and persecution: The Argus and Victorian anti-convict legislation in the 1850s," 1.

worn, as dirty as a brute…their heart must be of the same stuff as that of vultures, because they are of the same trade" (67). As Carboni's words illustrate, the Van Diemonian is at once viewed as "native" to his island, even physically shaped by the landscape, and improperly equipped to survive in the bush, starving and "sun-burnt" on his too-pale skin. The vivid bestial imagery in this description mirrors an earlier 1831 account of Kangaroo Island by Captain George Sutherland. In an overwhelming list of animal smells, tastes, and textures, Sutherland describes the former Van Diemonian convicts he claimed to have encountered there as "complete savages, living in bark huts like the natives, not cultivating anything, but living entirely on kangaroos, emus, and small porcupines, and getting spirits and tobacco in barter for the skins which they lay up during the sealing season. They dress in kangaroo skins without linen, and wear sandals made of seal skins. They smell like foxes."[98]

As the passages above demonstrate, the Van Diemonian convict, whether escaped or pardoned, held a strong cultural association with the wildness of the frontier throughout the nineteenth century. In her article "The Settler Evolution: Space, Place and Memory in Early Colonial Australia," Grace Karskens alleges that this rurality is one of the defining traits of the convict that originated in colonial policy. British officials at first anticipated that an agrarian lifestyle would work to reform convicts, and consequently developed strategies to encourage emancipated convicts to become "small landowners, anchored to a new earth" (Karskens 3). Through working the land, the convict would be "morally sanitized" by participating actively in the imperial project.[99] However, this pastoral expectation faltered as emancipated convicts broke ground on their farms. According to Karskens, these farms:

> were roughly cleared, strewn with fallen timber and studded with tree stumps. Unlike their betters, these farmers did not conceive of their farms as discreet blocks of

[98] Robert Montgomery, *History of the British Colonies*, 492.
[99] Kirsty Reid, *Gender, Crime and Empire: Convicts, Settlers and the State in Early Colonial Australia*, 19.

> ‘civilisation’ set in the menacing ‘wilderness’ at all. Their boundaries were blurred, fenceless farms running into the bush, and the bushland and wetlands were regarded as extensions of farms, as grazing land for stock, hunting grounds and an inexhaustible source of timber and bark. The early farmers and their families lived in tents and bark huts. They worked hard and they drank hard, and many were kept very poor by frequent floods and freshes, on the lowlands especially (7)

These smallholders, with their swamps, cramped living quarters, and disregard for the productivity of the land, echo the American lubbers and mountaineers.

Yet while there were undoubtedly many former convict subsistence farmers, again, much as in the Appalachian context, the cultural imaginary of the Van Diemonian convict and their hillbilly descendants must be differentiated from lived realities. Despite their popular depiction as young, white, English, and rural, convicts were as often assigned to stations in the colony’s growing urban centers. As Karskens writes, they were also in fact “a diverse lot…among them were people from all the regions of the British Isles, all speaking different dialects and accents, Jews and African-Americans, black West Indians, and later Aborigines, Maori and Khoisan...There were thieves, forgers and political prisoners, artisans, tradespeople, unskilled and unlettered people, men and women, old and young” (4). No matter the differences between these convicts and their origins, they would come to have many experiences in common, not the least being branded by the inbred grotesque.

**Settler Kinship and the Inbred Grotesque in Van Diemen’s Land**

> “The island of incest off the coast of Australia. All Tasmanians are related to each other.
> *‘Why are you going to Tasmania?’*
> *‘Because my cousin is marrying my sister.’”*
>
> “Tasmania,” entry by user Bel, *Urban Dictionary*

This chapter explores how the inbred grotesque contains both an implicit and explicit queerness that manifests in the global hillbillies' gender, sexuality, and, most importantly, kinship bonds. It is from these queer qualities that the inbred grotesque's external physical and intellectual differences are understood to flow. As the mid-nineteenth-century moral panic over Tasmanian convict sexuality and the consequent portrayals of queer convicts in late nineteenth-century Tasmanian Gothic literature demonstrate, the inbred grotesque is dependent on a logic of queerness as not non- or even anti-reproductive, but as terribly—irrepressibly—fertile. Relying on the metaphor of infection, the inbred grotesque paints all sexuality outside the heterosexual nuclear family, from incest to sex work to sex between men, with the broad brush of violence and genetic danger. The inbred grotesque depicts queer and non-normative sex as not only a biological—embodied—health risk to the population, but perhaps more threateningly, as jeopardizing the institution of the family through its feared propagation of alternative, intimate, and conflicting kinship forms. As a queer subject, the hillbilly is imagined as reproducing themself through sex. This reproduction is not primarily through the birth of children, though such damaged offspring are at issue; instead, the ranks of hillbillies swell through self-replication via the corruption of other previously healthy, upstanding settlers. While sex itself serves as the vector of infection, it is the resulting bonds of queer kinship, a parody of the nuclear family that nevertheless manages to harness and potentiate the power granted to the domestic within biopolitics, that are understood as most disruptive to the settler project.

To examine how the Van Diemonian convict imaginary led to the development of the Tasmanian hillbilly, this chapter uses Marcus Clarke's serialized novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874) as a case study. *His Natural Life* is the narrative of a wrongly convicted

British aristocrat who is transported to Tasmania, where he witnesses and experiences the full range of "horrors" of the convict system—most notably, queer relationships and experiences between men. Clarke's novel grounds the logic of sexual contagion endemic to the inbred grotesque in the Vandiemonian context. *His Natural Life* reflects the myriad ways in which ideas of queerness, embodiment, and kinship are interwoven within the inbred grotesque; read in historical context, the novel demonstrates how, from the nineteenth century to the present moment, this construction has impacted the public perception of Tasmania's white rural poor.

My characterization of the Vandiemonian convict imaginary as distinctly if not primarily queer may surprise some readers already familiar with the figure. Despite the significant evidence that the existence of same-sex convict relations was a frequent subject of heated public discussion in Van Diemen's Land throughout the mid-nineteenth century, this debate has largely been neglected in contemporary historical studies, museum exhibits, and convict heritage sites. This oversight is due to a number of factors, including the transition to a reclamation of the regional convict legacy that has occurred in recent decades, in which the convict as a symbolic collective Australian ancestor has been reimagined as then brave, hyper-masculine victims of a vicious system. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to recognition for the queer convict imaginary is the reputation and legacy of the anti-transportationist movement. Modeling themselves after American abolitionists, Tasmanian activists campaigned from the late 1840s until 1852 for the end of transportation. As this chapter will explore, anti-transportationists were not solely motivated by humanitarianism; a significant faction opposed transportation due to their investment in the economic success of the colonial project. Anti-transportationists, having observed the transition from the predominant

understanding of non-normative sexuality as isolated, religiously-prohibited acts to a scientific and heritable identity category, seized the moment to mobilize fears of convict "sodomy" as a contagious threat to the family.

While the question of why "sodomites" existed would be disputed for the next century, for both anti-transportationists and their colonial official adversaries, it was clear that forms of kinship outside of the nuclear patriarchal family were viewed simultaneously as a gateway to and natural result of non-normative sexual relations. The Australian colonial project itself was from its very beginning overtly concerned with appropriate and inappropriate forms of settler kinship and their attendant sexualities. Marian Aveling has argued that the early governors of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land were, even before the Victorian doctrine of "separate spheres," explicitly concerned with the creation and maintenance of a patriarchal gendered structure for the "lower orders" in their society. Colonial officials constructed their new colonies around a top-down system of rule "publicly by the head of state and privately by heads of families, ideally small landowners employing family labour."[100] Governors, acting as benevolent "fathers" to their convict "children," demonstrated the role of the patriarch with the assumption that it would then be mirrored on a micro-scale within individual households.[101] Instruction in such family matters began as early as the six-month voyage over; transportation vessels were strictly gender segregated, and women-bearing convict ships in particular adopted a regimented daily schedule of gendered work such as sewing, often accompanied by religious sermons or moral lectures.[102] The Van

[100] Marian Aveling, "Imagining New South Wales as a Gendered Society, 1783-1821," 5.
[101] The first Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, David Collins, established this template and was famously strict in his supervision of convict sexual affairs outside of marriage, even as he was rumored to have had sex with multiple convict women. Kirsty Reid. *Gender, Crime and Empire: Convicts, Settlers and the State in Early Colonial Australia.* 10.
[102] Joy Damousi, *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia*. 16. The convict ship's emphasis on the reinforcement of gender roles must bring to mind its contemporary and, in

Diemonian assignment system, by which on their arrival convicts were loaned out by the government as low-cost labor to free settlers, was adopted in no small part because colonial officials understood this transition as an opportunity to model the bourgeois family for convicts, who would theoretically later carry this moral lesson into their own married lives.[103]

The intentionality with which colonial officials approached the creation of the convict family denaturalizes kinship, exposing how the family has been mobilized in the service of the biopolitics of the State. In *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-74*, Foucault outlines how the family, despite its pre-modern, sovereign origins, has continued to operate in modernity as "a sort of cell within which power is exercised" (79). Foucault characterizes this family cell as "an essential component…of the disciplinary system" (80). For Foucault, the family's most significant disciplinary role is to oblige the individual to engage in work and reproductive labor through its "system of commitments and obligations" to other family members, who simultaneously subject each other to constant supervision (80). In *Foucault and Family Relations: Governing from a Distance in Australia* (2019), Malcolm Voyce contends that this disciplinary function of the family, and the managed gender roles and sexuality implicit in it, are apparent in the Australian colonial context. Voyce views the settler system of isolated rural smallholder farms in the Australian bush as posing a unique challenge to centralized state rule, resulting in a strong reliance on

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this respect, inverse, the slave ship. As Hortense Spillers contends in her landmark 1987 article "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," the slave ship can be read as the site of kinship disruption, in which white Europeans engaged in a "profitable 'atomizing' of the captive body…[This] provides another angle on the divided flesh: we lose any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of relatedness between human personality and its anatomical features, between one human personality and another, between human personality and cultural institutions. To that extent, the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory" (68). The resulting denial of domesticity disrupts the process of gendering, creating a liminal space of gender identity.

[103] Joy Damousi, *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia*. 67.

the family cell as a "convenient vehicle" for enforcing state agendas (9). The Australian settler family was:

> infiltrated by the disciplines and co-opted by *biopower* in 'supplementary' ways. These 'disciplines'… have acted to modify family behavior, where families began to internalize social norms on issues such as education, health and mothering. These interventions put the family in a position where it becomes in its own interests to conduct itself according to social norms in matters such as education and raising children. (5)

This was particular important for facilitating settler colonial aims of production and consumption and the regulation of sexuality.

While Voyce presents this mobilization of the Australian free settler family cell as largely successful, historian Kirsty Reid's *Gender, Crime and Empire: Convicts, Settlers and the State in Early Colonial Australia* (2007) examines how, despite the state's considerable use of regulatory violence, the colonial management of convict kinship was less than effective. Colonial officials were correct that convicts would quickly form fresh kinship connections in their new world. Yet despite their fantasy of strictly directing the form these relationships would take, "rather than sources of order and authority, families were, in a host of different ways, fast becoming both catalysts to, and emblems of, a world turned upside down" (Reid 32). Building upon Aveling's thesis, Reid considers how the act of transportation itself was a deliberate process of terminating the previous kinship bonds held by convicts. As Reid writes:

> contemporaries were well aware of the emotional dislocation and pain caused to convicts by exile—indeed, many of them regarded it as one of *the* most central components of the terror and dread instilled by transportation, and they argued that it should therefore be stepped up wherever possible by, for example, accelerating the speed at which men and women were removed to the ships and by expediting, if not altogether abolishing, the space and time in which convicts and their families took their farewells (2).

Rejecting a persistent perception of convicts as "vagrants and wanderers" (3), Reid cites letters sent by convicts to their loved ones to illustrate how transportation involved a severing of kin relationships that was both total and terrible.

Colonial officials believed this supposedly clean break between convicts and their previous unwholesome, often unmarried or non-biological kin would form them into the kind of tabula rasa from which healthy, correctly reproductive settler families could be formed. Arguably more than any other British colony due to the use of transportation, the settler project in Australia was deliberately structured towards this aim and best positioned to achieve the necessary rupture. All of which raises the question: Why, then, over two-hundred years after the first British military outpost was established on the island in 1803, has Tasmania become synonymous with the violation of the most profound Western familial and sexual taboos? Why, rather than the yeomen their descendants were intended to become, did convicts give birth to hillbillies? To understand this cultural (re)production, we must turn once again to a Gothic literary trend that, more than any cultural force, influenced the rise of the inbred grotesque in Tasmania.

**"The glitter of a cess pool": Queer Convicts in the Tasmanian Gothic**

> Shall Tasman's Isle so fam'd
> So lovely and so fair
> From other nations be estrang'd
> The name of Sodom bear?
>
> Australian ballad, unknown author (1845)[104]

[104] Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding*, 531.

The vast majority of the artistic output of Tasmania, from the island's first literary works to the present, can be characterized as Gothic. As in the case of the U.S. Southern Gothic, the Tasmanian Gothic genre is defined by the anti-normative, grotesque figure at its center: the convict. Early Tasmanian literature was near universally in its concern with the convict, both as protagonist and antagonist, drawing heavily from on the experiences of escapees and bushrangers. Colonial Australian literature as a whole began with the Tasmanian Gothic: the continent's first novelist, Henry Savery, was a Van Diemonian convict. In 1831, he published *Quintus Servinton: A Tale Founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence*, a bildungsroman borrowing from his own experience of as the son of a prominent banker transported after a conviction of forgery.[105]

Although both Savery and his protagonist Servinton saw little real change in lifestyles following their convictions, simply continuing their earlier work in finance on behalf of the colony, the Irish-born convict poet Frank MacNamara, known popularly as "Frank the Poet," wrote with candor about an altogether different variety to the convict experience. MacNamara was originally transported to Botany Bay in 1832 for stealing a piece of cloth; during his decade in New South Wales, he was sentenced to fourteen floggings (650 lashes) as well as time in road gangs, on the "mill," and in solitary confinement, placing him among the "the top one percent of all convicts who were so punished."[106] After an escape attempt in 1842, MacNamara was resentenced to seven years in the Port Arthur convict settlement, near Van Diemen's Land's capital Hobart.[107] Most of MacNamara's poems, which contain a mix of Irish bardic style and classical allusions, were written for his fellow convicts and

[105] Rod Howard, *A Forger's Tale: The Extraordinary Story of Henry Savery, Australia's First Novelist*.
[106] Mark Gregory, "Australian Working Songs and Poems: A Rebel Heritage," 102.
[107] R.H.W. Reece, "MacNamara, Francis (1810-1861)," 1.

circulated by word of mouth. These poems were sometimes framed as petitions, including a targeted threat of a hunger strike in verse demanding the removal of a particularly violent cook.[108] One of MacNamara's best remembered works is an epigram written on the occasion of his pardon and move to Melbourne:

> Farewell Tasmania's isle! I bid adieu
> The possum and the kangaroo.
> Farmers' Glory! Prisoners' Hell!
> Land of Buggers! Fare ye well.[109]

MacNamara's poems would transition from a singularly convict oral tradition to wider print circulation in the mid to late nineteenth-century Australia in the form of recorded bush songs and broadside ballads.

MacNamara established several key tropes for the Tasmanian Gothic tradition to come: a perversion of the pastoral, extreme physical violence, crises of religious faith, and widespread anti-normative sexuality and gender. Yet while convict narratives remained the island's dominant literary product throughout the nineteenth century, Savery and MacNamara would soon have their own deeply personal narration eclipsed by that of outsiders. Much as with the Appalachian local color writers, most of the prominent pioneers of the Tasmanian Gothic genre had either tenuous ties to the region or had had limited experience in its urban centers. Their own new form of Tasmanian Gothic writing reflected an apocalyptic mirror vision of the settler project's aspirations in which "inhospitable" land remains forever untamed, roamed by bushrangers and Aboriginal people, and into the horizon of which women and children regularly and mysteriously vanished. In their to introduction to *The Anthology of Colonial Australian Gothic Fiction* (2007), Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver

[108] Mark Gregory, "Australian Working Songs and Poems: A Rebel Heritage," 97.
[109] John Meredith and Rex Whalan, *Frank the Poet: the Life and Works of Francis MacNamara*, 62.

describe how "for the colonial Australian Gothic, the bush is invariably a place of settler disorientation and death, as if the promise of settlement can never be fully realised" (5). This failure to "fully realise" is key; as with the American Rural Gothic, the genre mobilizes a bleak vision of settler failure that, ironically, is essential for the continuation of the settler project. The Gothic teaches colonists who and what are threats to the continued unrealizable, utopic dream of settlement and how and why to fear them.

Many early Tasmanian Gothic writers were motivated by anti-transportation sentiments. Unlike MacNamara, who wrote critically of the penal system itself for a convict audience, these anti-transportationists focused a morbid attention on the "corruption" of the convicts themselves. Although transportation had begun as a method of carceral reform, by the mid-nineteenth century, a significant contingent of anti-transportation campaigners had come to regard the expansive convict system of the British colonies as a network of horrors. They saw Van Diemen's Land as the system's dark heart. For both religious and secular activists, transportation was in clear conflict with the move away from mere corporal control to reform methods designed for the internal, moral transformation of the criminal.[110] In *Empire of Hell: Religion and the Campaign to End Convict Transportation in the British Empire, 1788-1875* (2019), Hilary M. Carey argues that anti-transportationist rhetoric relied heavily on what she terms the "Convict Gothic," a subgenre marked by "the inverted landscape of hell with its sexual deviance, lurid tortures, narrow escapes and salutary lessons" (9). According to Carey, the Convict Gothic was contradicted by the reality of life for the majority of convicts, as indeed "transportation to Australia appears to have led to

[110]Jeremy Bentham was an especially avid opponent of transportation, which he critiqued in a series of privately printed and circulated letters published under the title *Panopticon versus New South Wales* (1812). As Van Diemonian colonial officials attempted to respond to critiques, they increasingly relied on prison designs modeled on Bentham's Panopticon.

enhanced social outcomes for convicts and their children when compared with long-term incarceration in home-based penitentiaries under conditions of penal servitude in Britain and Ireland" (309). While Carey is cautious to avoid painting a rosy picture of the convict experience, she argues that modern historians' investment in the brutality of the convict past has been shaped by an uncritical inheritance of anti-transportationist propaganda.

Although the anti-transportationist movement identified as a progressive campaign, its activists were not motivated solely, or often even primarily, by humanitarianism. Among free Vandiemonian settlers, there was a pervasive view that the continuing influx of convicts, while initially essential to the formation of the colony, could pose a threat to the colony's wealth and reputation on the global stage. While settlers had largely supported the assignment system, the subsequent probation system initiated in 1839 limited the supply of convict servants. Coupled with an economic crisis in the mid-1840s that put male convicts in competition for employment with free laborers, this alteration in the convict system led to a sea-change in public opinion.[111]

Borrowing heavily from American abolitionist writers, anti-transportationists depicted Australian penal colonies with graphic violence and sexuality, provocatively positioning Van Diemen's Land in particular as a hellish place of bodily excess. The "sexual deviance" that Carey alludes to was perhaps the most influential component of the convict imaginary in Van Diemen's Land. This trope, built on an already existing understanding of the convict as inherently prone to non-normative sexual behavior, underlined a tendency which anti-transportationists argued was exacerbated by life in penal colonies. Unequal gender ratios in early settler colonial states were another common cause of moral panics over homosexuality

[111] Michael Sprod, "Probation System," *The Companion to Tasmanian History*.

and prostitution. Transportation brought convict men into tight physical proximity, first on ships and then in probation gangs, and this promiscuity had been a source sexual anxiety from the earliest days of their settler project there. However, the same could be said of many gender segregated areas of nineteenth-century British society. Sir John Eardley-Wilmot, Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, readily referenced this similarity in a letter sent to Lord Stanley, British Secretary of State for the Colonies, on March 17, 1846:

> That *** does exist to a certain extent, there can be no doubt, and that disease in consequence results from such horrible practices is equally certain...In all large assemblies of the male sex, whether in the army, Navy, or among prisoners, I believe it is acknowledged that *** does more or less prevail; and that though its recurrence may be lessened, yet it is impossible wholly to prevent it.[112]

This clear reference to sodomy, "***," and the unnamed "disease," "***," transmitted by this act, which was typically only alluded to in the press and censored even in official documents such as this, illustrates how male homosexual sex was simultaneously a grave taboo and an acknowledged aspect of the British colonial system. Ironically, the very act of censorship in these documents relies on the fact that the reader is already familiar with the content at hand. Eardley-Wilmot's letter was part of a series that he sent to Stanley over the course of February and March 1846 to report on the acceleration of anti-transportationist propaganda about convict sodomy. Eardley-Wilmot laid much of the fault for this bad press at the feet of Scottish solicitor Robert Pitcairn, an early free settler in Van Diemen's Land who had devoted himself to the abolition of transportation. Tasked with conveying a letter from Pitcairn to Stanley, an exasperated Eardley-Wilmot characterized "the facts as represented by Mr. Pitcairn" as "greatly exaggerated," adding that:

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[112] "Copy of a DESPATCH from Lieutenant-Governor Sir E. Eardley Wilmot, Bart., to Lord Stanley. March 17, 1846, Government House, Van Diemen's Land." *Convict Discipline and Transportation: Correspondence on the Subject of Convict Discipline and Transportation: Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons, Volume 1*, 46.

> separation and surveillance, by which alone these crimes can be prevented, have been and are carried out to the fullest extent possible…I am authorized by Mr. Champ, the Provisional Comptroller-General, to say, that six weeks ago he had every prisoner at Port Arthur examined by the medical officer in charge, and that out of 1200 prisoners, only one was found to be diseased (34).

Eardley-Wilmot would later order routine rectal examinations of convicts in all probation gangs for signs of sodomy.[113] Influenced by the ideas of Jeremy Bentham, Eardley-Wilmot would also continue his ongoing effort to separate those convicts housed in penal institutions into individual cells. This practice was intended to aid internal reflection and reform while having the added, and in this case possibly primary, benefit of preventing sexual contact between convicts.

Despite Eardley-Wilmot's efforts and his criticism of the "ill directed zeal [that] should encourage a public discussion on a subject which ought not to be mentioned among men," anti-transportationists continued to publish sensationalist accounts of convict sodomy in the media (42). Pitcairn's letter to Stanley utilized the histrionic tone and religious imagery that characterizes much of anti-transportationist rhetoric about sodomy:

> In the name of heaven when is this to end? How long is humanity to be thus outraged? Are human beings to be still herded together like beasts? And, while those appetites which nature has given them are stimulated by the climates to which you send them, are they to be forced to become like those who were destroyed by fire from above?[114]

Along with his letter, Pitcairn included an excerpt from a recent article in the *Launceston Examiner*, published under the anonymous penname "Cato":

> No counteracting influence has checked corruption, and the appalling fact has at length forced itself upon the attention of all, that the progress in demoralization is uniform, rapid, and extreme. It is impossible to describe in language sufficiently plain not to be revolting, the degradation that exists at penal stations. Large masses of

[113] Kirsty Reid*, Gender, Crime and Empire: Convicts, Settlers and the State in Early Colonial Australia,* 206.
[114]Extract of a LETTER from Robert Pitcairn, Esq., to Lord Stanley, February 4, 1846, Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land. *Convict Discipline and Transportation: Correspondence on the Subject of Convict Discipline and Transportation: Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons, Volume 1*. 39.

> males collected together contaminate each other. A disease till now unknown to medical experience has become common; and when the subjects of this discipline are let loose on society, their guilty connections are not confined. But indistinct illusion can only be permitted: the detail is too disgusting to appear in the columns of a newspaper.[115]

This "disease till now unknown to medical experience" was the catalyst for the medical examinations initiated by Eardley-Wilmot. The exact nature of this new "disease" is unclear in the official record, a result of the requisite censorship in discussions of sodomy. Despite this lack of clarity, there were a number of alleged physical symptoms of sodomy that the field of medical forensics was in the process of inventing during this period.

Given the invasive and intimate nature of the medical exams forced on convicts, who not infrequently resisted them, this "disease" likely resembled one or more of the "six signs" later established the French doctor Auguste Ambroise Tardieu.[116] In 1857, Tardieu published the widely-read diagnostic guide *Etude médico-légale sur les attentats aux moeurs* (*Forensic Study of Assaults against Decency*). Having conducted a study of over a thousand subjects, Tardieu contended that there were "six signs" that revealed the "passive sodomite": "the excessive development of the buttocks; the funnel-shaped deformation of the anus; the relaxation of the sphincter; the effacement of the folds, the crests, and the wattles at the circumference of the anus; the extreme dilation of the anal orifice; and ulcerations, hemorrhoids, fistules" (142-43). In *For the Record : On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive*

[115] Extract from the "Launceston Examiner" of January 31, 1846, to Joseph Hume, Esq., signed "Cato." *Convict Discipline and Transportation: Correspondence on the Subject of Convict Discipline and Transportation: Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons, Volume 1*. 46.

[116] According to Reid, ironically, the sodomy panic "crushed what little space there was for same-sex practices and relationships to flourish" (214). In the article "Space, Sexuality and Convict Resistance in Van Diemen's Land: The Limits of Repression?", Catie Gilchrist documents instances in which male convicts found ways to circumvent the boundaries imposed between them, arguing that "male prisoners resisted the 'preventive measures' and the surveillance techniques exercised over them, and disrupting 'hegemonic ideas about that space' was certainly an important expression of resistance... resistance to the dormitory rules was one means of rejecting the power inscribed in the penal system. It reveals a further dimension to the interactions of space and the sexual meanings inscribed within it" (1).

*in India* (2009), Anjali R. Arondekar discusses the influential 1884 case of *Queen Empress V. Khairati*. Khairati, who was "initially arrested for 'singing in women's clothes,'" was convicted under section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized sex "against the order of nature" (68). Prosecutors accused Khairati of possessing a "distortion of the orifice of the anus into the shape of a trumpet" (68). The ruling would stand as influential case law for years to come. At the same time, Arondekar points towards how the case illustrates "the incoherencies of colonial rule…Within such manipulations, the category of sodomy complexly widens from a narrow and tightly marked understanding of criminal sexual behavior to a crisis of legal translation" (76). In *Outrages: Sex, Censorship, and the Criminalization of Love* (2020), Naomi Wolf also traces how this manual reflected a larger crisis in the medical profession's authority. According to Wolf, the creation of new ways of reading sexuality on the body led to an increased need for venereologists as expert witnesses in colonial courts; as a result, the wider understanding of non-normative sex was changing.

Foucault outlined this epistemological shift in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*.[117] As Foucault writes, in "the nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood…with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" (42). This is the moment in which sodomy moves from an act to a category: "the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (42). At this early juncture, before psychological schemas of homosexuality took hold, the study of this unnatural "species" was dominated by approaches targeting hidden "anatomy" and "physiology." Despite the apparent contradiction, such physical symptoms of non-normative

[117] Intriguingly, Foucault also wrote extensively about how a different work by Tardieu showed the development of ideas about sexuality and gender during the late nineteenth century. It was Tardieu who documented the life of Herculine Barbin, an intersex person, and preserved her autobiography.

sex were understood as simultaneously congenital and contagious. Pitcairn remarks of convict sodomites that "those appetites which nature has given them are stimulated by the climates to which you send them"; here, it appears that convicts harbor a latent tendency towards deviance that may then be activated under certain circumstances, such as the exposure to non-European environments. Yet Cato expresses the fear that "when the subjects of this discipline are let loose on society, their guilty connections are not confined." Cato implies the possibility that convict sodomy is not contained to those already biologically susceptible to corruption, and that their ability to "contaminate" could extend to the free settler population. This fluidity reflects how broad and encompassing such early medical theories of non-normative sexuality were. Tardieu observed that his "six signs" were also applicable in the identification of prostitutes and "pederasts." He took a particular, and uncommon for the period, interest in identifying instances of incest and child sexual abuse through the use of his diagnostic schema. The categories of non-normative sexuality would be distinguished further from each other as *scientia sexualis* developed, but, in this moment, it was arguable that the convict predilection towards sodomy might result in the spread of a wide variety of sexual deviancies throughout Vandiemonian society, affecting the healthy population on both a social and genetic level. Queer sexuality, prostitution, and incest equally could lead to the disintegration of the family units on which the Vandiemonian settler state especially relied.

As anti-transportationists mobilized these sexual fears, positioning themselves as progressives drawing on the newest scientific theories, these crusaders received some criticism from those who continued to view transportation as a social and economic good. In the widely circulated "A Letter to the Householders of Hobarton: On the Effects of

Transportation, Upon the Morals and Moral Conditions of the Colony" (1847), Henry Phibbs Fry challenged the anti-transportationists' central premise that the continued influx of convicts was a moral concern, writing that " if any man is disposed to reject the introduction of Convicts among us from apprehension of actual injury to our moral habits, his opinion is entitled to respect; but if his object be only to escape from a stigma and reproach, he acts unworthily in calling upon us to incur hazards, and forfeit advantages for the sake of a nominal reputation" (11).

Yet Fry and his allies' pleas were out of step with the Vandiemonian public. By April 1846, Lieutenant-Governor Eardley-Wilmot had been recalled by the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, William Gladstone, for not taking appropriate action in "the moral interests involved in the system of convict discipline."[118] Rumors circulated that Eardley-Wilmot's recall was the result of a private sexual scandal, an affair with a female guest staying at the "government house." The decisive context of Eardley-Wilmot's removal was that of increasing political outrage over the perceived failure to regulate male convict sexuality.

The momentum behind the anti-transportation crusade would continue to build, with its fire and brimstone rhetoric always at hand. In 1852, one anti-transportationist activist received applause from the British House of Commons when he stated that the economic benefits of convict labor in Van Diemen's Land were but "the glitter of a cess pool."[119] Later that year, the colonial government moved to begin the cessation of transportation. On August 10, 1853, the day of the formal abolition of transportation to Van Diemen's Land, anti-transportationist revelers in Launceston sang that they had "washed out the hated stain,"

[118] Catie Gilchrist, "'The Victim of His Own Temerity'? Silence, Scandal and the Recall of Sir John Eardley-Wilmot," 151.
[119] "On the Subject of Convict Discipline and Transportation," *Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons, Volume 45*, 85.

cleansing the island's past of deviant sexuality.[120] However, this celebration was premature. The popular association of the colony with sodomy that anti-transportationists had created would endure—and thrive—long past the end of the convict system. Three years later, the colony would be rechristened Tasmania, after explorer Abel Tasman, as part of an attempt to transition the island away from its immoral international image as an immoral "Land of Buggers." Van Diemen's Land, with its echoing similarity to "demon's land," had been tainted beyond bleaching, not simply because of its association with the convict past, but because of the colony's sexual infamy.

The Tasmanian Gothic, now a recognized genre in Britain and across the colonies as a result of the anti-transportationists' rhetoric, would linger on past its initial usefulness for anti-transportationists. The fire-and-brimstone, chains, and murky dungeons that the British public had been frightened and entertained by newsprint and other forms of modern media had provoked a continued demand for stories of this dark place, Sodom's colony at the edge of the globe. Just as local color writing would expose a mythical Appalachia only a few decades later, Tasmania was in the process of being "discovered" by the wider world. As Reid argues, "the salacious, voyeuristic, and even titillating potential of the abolitionist case" was a strong selling point in the nineteenth-century British market for "sensationalist and scandalous literature" (216). Reynolds adds that "the very vagueness of the [anti-transportationist] claims added to the anxiety and was accompanied by a fearful frisson."[121] Following the abolition of transportation to Van Diemen's Land, there remained, more than ever, a widespread desire to peer behind the anti-transportationists' tactical ellipses. From the late 1850s to the early 1890s, the Tasmanian Gothic continued to rise in global popularity.

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[120] Maeve McKenna, "Jubilee Festival in 1853 signals end of convict transportation," 1.
[121] Henry Reynolds, *A History of Tasmania,* 144.

Kay Daniels has called this "the period of transition in Tasmanian history from penal settlement to 'civilized' society," during which the island first experienced a "free community, increasingly dominated by the values of the middle class."[122] Much if not most of this period's literature continued to focus on the recent convict past. In 1859, under the pseudonym Oliné Keese, Caroline Leakey, an English woman who had spent six years living with family in Hobart, published *The Broad Arrow: Being Passages from the History of Maida Gwynnham, a Lifer.* The novel told the story of Maida Gwynnham, a young middle-class woman tricked into committing forgery by her cruel lover and then wrongly convicted of infanticide. Leakey's portrayal of Gwynnham's subsequent transportation to Van Diemen's Land and experience of the convict system's brutalities drew heavily on anti-transportationist imagery. The novel's use of the "fallen woman" archetype, which feminizes and sexualizes Gwynham through her victimhood, would become a key characteristic of the Convict Gothic. *The Broad Arrow* would serve as a source and inspiration for the text which a decade later would confirm the Tasmanian Gothic's enduring legacy, and, though the figure of a "fallen man, cement the central presence of queer sexuality within it: Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*.[123]

## "As he flogged, he blushed": Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*

> As he flogged, he blushed; and when he flung down the cat and stripped his own back for punishment, he felt a fierce joy in the thought that his baseness would be atoned for in his own blood.

[122] Kay Daniels, "Prostitution in Tasmania During the Transition from Penal Settlement to 'Civilized' Society," 49.
[123] "By the end of the nineteenth-century, when *The Broad Arrow* was published by J. Walch and Sons in Hobart as 'A Female Companion to Marcus Clarke's Novel'…in the Publisher's Note to this later edition the author is identified as 'a lady long resident in Hobart, who from her position, had access to sources of information from which others were debarred, and who, therefore, has been able to weave into her story facts as startling and terrible as any creations of fiction.'" Jenna Mead, "Biodiscourse: Oliné Keese and Caroline Leakey," 68.

Few texts can be said to capture the erotically charged imaginary of the convict as richly as Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*. The novel was first published serially in *The Australian Journal* between 1870 and 1872, then edited and released as a novel in 1874. *For the Term of His Natural Life* centers on an unlikely convict, a young English aristocrat named Richard Devine. The narrative begins with his mother's confession to her family that Richard is not the biological son of her shipbuilding magnate husband, Sir Richard Devine, but the product of an affair with her cousin, Lord Bellasis. Sir Devine disowns Richard and orders him to leave London, but before he can, Richard stumbles on the corpse of Lord Bellasis. Richard witnesses Sir Devine walking away from the murder scene. When Richard is himself arrested for the crime, he chooses to give a false confession under an alias to spare his mother from the scandal of having her affair exposed. Following his conviction, Richard, referred to as Rufus Dawes for the remainder of the novel, is sentenced to transportation to Van Diemen's Land "for the term of his natural life." Thus begins the series of ever-more violent and often sexually charged horrors that Dawes experiences, from an attempted mutiny during his transportation to his eventual remand to the infamously cruel Macquarie Harbor Penal Station.

Clarke himself was born in London in 1846, the son of a lawyer and grandson of an English colonist and slave-owner with a "large estate" in Trinidad.[124] Clarke's father lost the family fortune and died when Clarke was seventeen. With few prospects in England, on the advice of his cousin, Clarke immigrated to Australia in 1863. He settled in Melbourne where

[124] "Dr. Andrew Clarke," *Encyclopedia of British Slave-Ownership*, Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, University College London, 1.

he would eventually begin a career in journalism. Clarke's writing career was unstable and—like him—short-lived. His death of uncertain causes in 1881 at the age of thirty-five was believed to have been the result of the stress of his significant debts.[125] However, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, Clarke's only novel, would ensure his legacy in the Tasmanian Gothic canon. Well-reviewed in its time, the novel continued to grow in popularity in the decades following Clarke's death. Two competing stage adaptations debuted in 1886, and in 1908, Clarke's novel served as inspiration for *For the Term of His Natural Life*, the fourth feature film to be produced in Australia.[126] Following this film's box office success, two other silent films followed, *The Life of Rufus Dawes* in 1911 and the full-length *For the Term of His Natural Life* in 1927, the most expensive Australian film of the silent era.[127] Despite his reputation as an authority on the island's melancholy past, Clarke only briefly visited Tasmania in 1870 at the request of Melbourne's daily paper, *The Argus*. During this time, the young journalist wrote a series of articles about the colony's convict period.[128] These historical articles, later published together in the collection *Old Tales of a Young Country* (1871), reflected the violent and sexual themes that Clarke would soon explore in *His Natural Life*.

Due to his limited personal experience of Tasmania, Clarke drew heavily on anti-transportationist literature about the island, still readily available as he wrote his novel. *His Natural Life* was itself intended itself to be an explicitly anti-transportationist text. In the novel's dedication to Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, an Irish nationalist turned Australian liberal politician, Clarke insisted:

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[125] Brian Elliot., "Clarke, Andrew Marcus (1846-1881)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 1.
[126] Ross Cooper and Andrew Pike, *Australian Film 1900–1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production,* 9.
[127] Ross Cooper and Andrew Pike, *Australian Film 1900–1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production,* 138.
[128] Peter Pierce, "Marcus Clarke," 1.

> I have endeavoured in 'His Natural Life' to set forth the workings and the results of an English system of transportation carefully considered and carried out under official provision; and to illustrate in the manner best calculated, as I think, to attract general attention, the inexpediency of how again allowing offenders against the law to be herded together in places remove from the wholesome influence of public opinion. (3)

Clarke goes on to state his opposition to the formation of new penal colonies in India and Canada. He had originally considered titling the novel *For the Term of His Unnatural Life* to emphasize what he saw as the inherently degrading nature of the transportation system.[129] Protagonist Richard Devine's internal struggle against his total transformation into the isolated, dehumanized Rufus Dawes is the novel's central conflict. Clarke's thesis was that the treatment of transported convicts was not rehabilitative but corruptive; even a man of Devine's class and pedigree would be challenged to maintain his morality and, perhaps most important, his masculinity. For Clarke, as for the anti-transportationists before him, to be transported was to become not only less than human, but less than a man.

Even as *His Natural Life* condemns the debauchery of the transportation system, Clarke's choice to graphically depict convict homoeroticism took anti-transportationist rhetoric a step further than many in his time felt was permissible. In 1875, one critic protested in London's *Saturday Review* that "If [Clarke] thought that the former existence of the abominations which he describes or hints at called for some record as a matter of warning, he should have embodied their history in anything rather than the pages of a novel."[130] Clarke's refusal of the tasteful omission marked by asterisks to denote the unspeakable in discussions of sodomy risked exposing non-elite readers to the subject, or worse—exposing the fact that elites could not effectively control public awareness of non-

[129] Laurie Hergenhan, "A New Biography of Marcus Clarke," 23.
[130] Laurie Hergenhan. "The Contemporary Reception of *His Natural Life*." 53.

normative sex. In the years after its publication, *His Natural Life* would become so well-known for its depiction of sodomy that it became a useful shorthand for other writers who wished to more subtly allude to the sexual act. The novel's powerful, often erotically charged bonds between convict men, while outwardly reinforcing the idea that the convict system encouraged such relationships, are presented with surprising candor. Clarke's direct representation of the "unspeakable" thereby creates a set of apparent contradictions in the novel. Even as *His Natural Life* positions male homosexual penetrative sex as inherently violent, diseased, and infectious, it is simultaneously presented as alluring, erotic, and the foundation of close male relationships. This dichotomy does not in fact contradict anti-transportationist rhetoric, which also relied on the idea of sodomy's dark glamor. Yet Clarke's lingering focus on non-normative sexual desire in his novel elevates it from a subtext to a central theme of the novel in ways that lay bare the Tasmanian Gothic's carnal imaginary. This extended engagement with taboo draws a clear line of descent from the queer Van Diemonian convict to the contemporary Tasmanian inbred grotesque.

Clarke introduces his readers to Van Diemen's Land of the 1820s with a breathless, Boschian flair:

> Of the social condition of these people at this time it is impossible to speak without astonishment. According to the recorded testimony of many respectable persons—Government officials, military officers, and free settlers—the profligacy of the settlers was notorious. Drunkenness was a prevailing vice. Even children were to be seen in the streets intoxicated. On Sundays, men and women might be observed standing around the public house doors, waiting for the expiration of the hours of public worship, in order to continue their carousing. As for the condition of the prisoner population, that, indeed, is indescribable. Notwithstanding the severe punishment for sly grog selling, it was carried on to a large extent. Men and women were found intoxicated together, and a bottle of brandy was considered to be cheaply bought at the price of 20 lashes. In the factory—a prison for females—the vilest abuses were committed, while the infamies current, as matters of course, in chain gangs and penal settlements, were of too horrible a nature to be more than hinted at here. All that the vilest and most bestial of human creatures could invent and practise,

> was in this unhappy country invented and practised without restraint and without shame. (81)

This passage's graphic descriptions clash humorously with Clarke's unfulfilled pledge that "infamies…[will] be no more than hinted at." A large part of the horror that Clarke harnesses is derived from the breakdown of gender and age categories. Both men and women, adults and children, engage publicly in vice, with no clear family connections to hinder them. What close relationships do exist in *his Natural Life* are same-sex, a depiction that of course contradicts the British authorities' formal policy of encouraging marriage in the colony. The island is subject to a carnivalistic cultural contagion that has infected the free settlers as well as convicts. As Clarke makes clear in his description of Dawes' journey to Van Diemen's Land, the source of this corruption moves from the bottom up.

Dawes is transported in the hull of the *Malabar*, an actual British convict transit ship that made several trips to Van Diemen's Land in the early nineteenth century. Again, Clarke deviates from the historical record of what, in comparison to slave ships of the period, were relatively humane conditions for convicts during transit. The near silent "prison of the 'tween decks" on the *Malabar* is overcrowded, damp, and "pregnant" with "darkness" (35). Sight and hearing, the "higher" socially valued senses, notably most relied upon to determine the gender of others, have been abandoned in favor of touch and smell. Clarke's musky, moist description of the hull echoes earlier rhetoric of the convict system as a "cess pool" or "moral lava":

> As the eye became accustomed to the foetid duskiness of the prison, a strange picture presented itself. Groups of men, in all imaginable attitudes, were lying, standing, sitting, or pacing up and down… it is impossible to convey, in words, any idea of the hideous phantasmagoria of shifting limbs and faces which moved through the evil-smelling twilight of this terrible prison-house. Callot might have drawn it, Dante might have suggested it, but a minute attempt to describe its horrors would but

> disgust. There are depths in humanity which one cannot explore, as there are mephitic caverns into which one dare not penetrate. (36)

This close entanglement of men's bodies "into which one dare not penetrate" is richly sensual and suggestive at the same time that it reduces the reader's senses. The hull is "foetid, "evil-smelling," and "mephitic"; this "hull" hole disgusts, but at the same time its olfactory powers "penetrate" any who come into contact with it. This emphasis on smell serves as a reminder of the frightening porousness of the body. Such "mephitic caverns" echo the stinking, liquid swamps and unclean, overcrowded cabins in which the hillbilly is located across time and place, environs where the preservation of the physical boundaries between self, others, and the natural world is impossible.

In a rare study of sexuality in the novel, "Oh, You're Cutting My Bowels Out!": Sexual Unspeakability in Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life*," Damien Barlow describes this description of the hull as conjuring "unspeakable interiors of anality" (36). Barlow's "queer close reading" (36) of *His Natural Life* explores how, throughout the narrative, Dawes' central struggle is to resist the siren pull of such "interiors," and, when he cannot, to find ways of still internally affirming his masculinity and class. As Barlow argues, there are moments of "queer slippage" (46) when Dawes not only succumbs to bodily subordination, but revels in it, playing with and upending "the heterosexual conventions of the Victorian romance novel" (46). To further consider Dawes' simultaneous resistance to and delight in both metaphoric and real penetration, instruction may be found in Leo Bersani's influential 1987 essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?". Bersani argues that in the realm of the sexual symbolic, "to be penetrated is to abdicate power" (212), inviting a destruction or at least temporary abandonment of the self. As such, "the rectum" can be read as "a grave in which the masculine ideal…of proud subjectivity is buried" (222). For Bersani, it is the immense

appeal and disruptive potential of this sexual surrender that leads penetration, both among women and gay men, to be pathologized.

Dawes' seduction takes place only gradually as his connections to his past family and friends fade and he is thrust into relations with his fellow convicts. This process begins on board the *Malabar*, where a number of important convict characters are first introduced into the narrative. Unlike Dawes, these men are proud members of the British criminal class. In the hull, "the more guilty boasted of their superiority in vice; the petty criminal swore that their guilt was blacker than it appeared" (17). A hierarchy forms among the men based on their capacity for violence; this ranking also coincides intriguingly with their adherence to norms of masculinity. Near the bottom is the "slimly-made, effeminate Crow" who "made up for his flaccid muscles and nerveless frame by a cat-like cunning, and a spirit of devilish volatility that nothing could subdue" (50). Crow's "master" (50), the forger John Rex, is an outwardly normal, even handsome man—in most aspects: "He had broad shoulders, sinewy limbs, and small hands and feet. His head was round, and well-shaped, but it bulged a little over the ears which were singularly small and lay close to his head" (176). These "small hands and feet" and phrenologically curious skull hint to the reader that Rex's outward masculine normality may be deceiving.[131]

The "chief" (60) reigning above all of the *Malabar*'s convicts is the giant Gabbett, "a returned convict, now on his way to undergo a second sentence for burglary" (50). Gabbett's butch masculinity is a monstrous parody; he threatens and abuses the other men and has no regard for or interest in women. Gabbett is above all notable for his appetite, a ravenous

[131] Late in the novel, it is revealed that John Rex and Rufus Dawes, who closely resemble each other, are both the illegitimate sons of Lord Bellasis. However, in a eugenic twist that anticipates the Kallikak Family study of 1912, Dawes inherits the noble traits of his aristocratic mother, while the deviant Rex is the son of a female servant in Bellasis' household.

hunger for both food and violence that is never sated. All Gabbett's desires are continuously sexually coded, and even within the distinctly homoerotic atmosphere of the *Malabar*, Gabbett stands out as a singularly queer figure. This distinction echoes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reading of another tale of high seas mutiny in the chapter "Billy Budd: After the Homosexual" from *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). Sedgwick uses Herman Melville's posthumously published novella to contend that the conflict in queer theory between "*universalizing* and *minoritizing* accounts of the relation of homosexual desires or persons" neglects how constant movement across this binary has been essential to the modern understanding of queer sexuality (91). Marcus Clarke himself was notably an avid fan of Melville's work, recommending *Moby-Dick* (1851) to friends and alluding to the novel in his 1872 short story "Noah's Ark." [132] Gabbett's cruelty and alienation resembles that of Billy Budd's brutal master-at-arms Claggart, whom Sedgwick reads as a prototype for the modern imaginary of gay men; however, unlike the repressed, solitary Claggart, Gabbett's homosexual desire is remarkably open and relational. When Gabbett and his cronies attempt a mutiny onboard the *Malabar*, he takes the lead, becoming the center of an orgy of violence:

> Each time that an assailant came within reach of the swinging cutlass, the ruffian's form dilated with a fresh access of passion. At one moment bunched with clinging adversaries—his arms, legs, and shoulder a hanging mass of human bodies—at the next, free, desperate, alone in the midst of his foes, his hideous countenance contorted with hate and rage, the giant seemed less a man than a demon, or one of those monstrous and savage apes which haunt the solitudes of the African forests (68).

Strangely racialized yet white, Gabbett is simultaneously Othered and defined by his yearning for fleshly connection. Here, Gabbett's oversized, hideous body dramatically embodies an early stage of the inbred grotesque. His massive, "savage" body at once

[132]According to Kevin J. Hayes in "Marcus Clarke and the Melville Revival," Clarke was recorded as having owned four of Melville's novels when he was forced to sell his private library during the bankruptcy that immediately preceded his death in 1881 (263).

"hideous" and erotic, unsettles the reader through his constant physical contact with uncorrupted settlers.

The mutiny on the *Malabar* is abetted by John Rex's secret paramour, Sarah Purfoy, an attractive prostitute who has managed to board the ship by becoming employed as a maid. Sarah is a central villain of the novel, and her fierce sexual pursuit of Rex, despite his continued lack of romantic interest in her, endures over the multiple decade span of the narrative. As a sex worker and later successful brothel owner, Sarah, while a free woman, conforms to many of the tropes of Van Diemonian female convicts. In *Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land* (1832), Captain John Henderson made extensive observation on the Van Diemonian female convict, whom he considered to be "the most thoroughly depraved of her sex to be found in any country" (16). This was a perception shared by many during the period, often stemming from the concern that gender ratios in the colony had incentivized sex work. As a self-made, wealthy woman who eventually blackmails Rex into a relationship with her as a kept man, Sarah herself aggressively violates gender and sexual norms. Reverend North, a sympathetic figure who aids Dawes later in the novel, comments upon meeting Sarah that "Women had no business with a brain like hers—that is, if they wish to be women and not sexual monsters" (304).

Sarah's name anticipates the eventual destination of Gabbett's crew following the failure of their mutiny: Sarah Island. It is here that Dawes, framed once again, this time as the mutiny's ringleader, discovers the true extent of the physical and moral degradation of the colony. Sarah Island was the real home of Macquarie Harbour Penal Station, a site of secondary punishment for reoffenders and absconders. While in reality the island was a functioning shipyard with rates of flogging only somewhat higher than other locations, over

time this isolated enterprise on Van Diemen's Land's rugged western coast gained a "fearful reputation" for its unrepentant convicts and cruel punishments.[133] Clarke describes Macquarie Harbour as home to "the refuse of this refuse—the murderers, bandits, and villains, whom neither chain nor lash could tame. They were regarded as socially dead" (81). Yet however "socially dead" the novel's Sarah Island convicts may be to the wider colony, their social connections thrive within the penal station. Rex and Gabbett each develop separate escape conspiracies with their comrades, who eat, work, and when able, drink together. Dawes, meanwhile, is separated from other convicts and kept chained on a nearby rocky cliff. While Dawes suffers in solitary confinement, his removal from the "unutterably loathsome life" of the convict masses prevents him from succumbing to their "depth of personal abasement" (95). As Reid has argued, prevailing anti-transportationist thought held that forced labor led convicts to suffer from a "morally debilitating dependence" (Reid 169). Rather than promoting the settlement's original goal of inculcating "independent self-disciplined and thus morally virtuous colonial masculinity," anti-transportationists viewed hard physical work and flogging as reinforcing the tendences of the "disordered, dependent, licentious convict body" (Reid 19). Such "extreme pain enabled the body to conquer the mind and strengthened rather than undermined the rule of the passions. It reduced men to their bodies alone, made them," in Reid's words, "slaves to instinct" (Reid 172).

As the years pass, Dawes is eventually drawn into the social and sexual life of the penal colony, a process that becomes clear during the most infamous and graphic sequence of the novel. Here, the homoerotic subtext previously, albeit broadly, "hinted" at comes to the unabashed surface. The sympathetic object of this episode is Kirkland, "a young man of

[133] Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "Macquarie Harbour Penal Station," 1.

about twenty years of age, thin, fair, and delicate" who, like Dawes, may have been wrongly convicted (226). The emphasis on Kirkland's youth, frailty, and pale skin resembles a similar trend in anti-transportationist rhetoric. On returning to England in 1856 after twenty years as a convict in Van Diemen's Land, the former political prisoner turned anti-transportationist, John Frost, began a lecture tour in which he gave accounts of the debauchery he claimed to have encountered in the colony. In these lectures, he frequently alluded to the "crime of Gomorrah" that was commonplace among convicts (*The Horrors of Convict Life* 14). According to Frost:

> it was almost impossible for a good-looking youth to be sent to any of these places without falling a victim to the hellish system, for if other means failed he would be forced. A youth was sent to the coal mines, in which were so many diseased men. He resisted all attempts on his person. One day, in the mines, six men lay hold of him, threw him down, and four held him while two violated his person. (17)

Much like Frost's "good-looking youths," the sensitive former bank-clerk Kirkland is sent to the "yard…'to take the starch'" out of him after he dares to "raise his hands to his ears" while Commandant Burgess is blaspheming (226). Witnessing this, "Rufus Dawes, among whose sinister memories this yard was numbered, sighed. So fierce was the glamour of the place, however, that when locked into his cell, he felt ashamed for that sigh, and strove to erase the memory of it" (226). The nature of this "fierce…glamour" that is the cause of Dawes' conflicted sigh becomes evident the next morning when "Kirkland, ghastly pale, bleeding, with his woolen shirt torn, and his blue eyes wide open with terror" begs to be let out (227). Reverend North pleads with the Commandant to take pity on Kirkland: "'You know the character of the men in that ward. You can guess what that unhappy boy has suffered.' 'Impertinent young beggar!' said Burgess. 'Do him good, curse him!'" (227).

If the reader has not already guessed what "'that unhappy boy has suffered,'" it becomes clear when Kirkland, Gabbett, and Dawes are later shackled together on the chain-gang. A now "greenish" Kirkland asks Dawes if he and the guards know what "'goes on in there'" (228). Dawes nods. A moment later, Gabbett sees Kirkland struggling with his chain and offers help: "'Hold on to me, Miss Nancy,' said the giant, 'I'm big enough to carry double.' Something in the tone or manner of the speaker affected Kirkland to disgust, for, spurning the offered hand, he uttered a cry and then, holding up his irons with his hands, he started to run for the water" (228). Barlow, who traces how one "major historical source for Clarke's novel was the influential final report of the 'Molesworth' British Parliamentary Select Committee on Transportation (1837)" (35), found that Clarke took likely inspiration from the Committee finding that "the name 'Miss Nancy' was…a convict slang term for a male 'wife'" (39). Gabbett's interaction with Kirkland here is intriguing in its gentleness. Despite the by now heavy-handed implication that he has raped Kirkland the night before, Gabbett's offer to help is the only moment in the novel in which he seemingly acts without self-interest. Perhaps it is a real affection in the "tone or manner of the speaker," the offer to "'hold on'" revealing a greater offer of kinship, that is implied to provoke Kirkland's, and by extension the reader's, suicidal "disgust." As this interaction shows, while Kirkland's experience of rape traumatizes him, it is queer companionship that he considers to be itself a kind of death worse than death.

Much like his later, equally innocent and blond counterpart Billy Budd, Kirkland's attempt to escape his own Claggart results in a sentence of capital punishment.[134] Kirkland's flogging is detailed in a vivid, blow-by-blow account that operates as a sado-masochistic

[134] Protagonist of the novella "Billy Budd," conceived by Melville in 1891 but published posthumously in 1924.

substitute for the looming absence of description of the earlier rape. Bound with his legs spread apart on a wooden triangle, Kirkland's pain is highly eroticized: his pure "white back" (236) is quickly "swollen into a lump" with "the appearance of a ripe peach which a wilful child had scored with a pin" (237). It is Dawes who is forced to perform the flogging. Later, lost in a dreamlike remembrance of the scene, Dawes reflects that "he had miscalculated his own capacity for evil. As he flogged, he blushed; and when he flung down the cat and stripped his own back for punishment, he felt a fierce joy in the thought that his baseness would be atoned for in his own blood" (249). Dawes' blush, with its suggestion of violated modesty, is counterpoint to his "fierce joy" after, having refused to flog the dying Kirkland further, he is himself sentenced by Commandant Burgess to a hundred lashes from Gabbett. It comes as little surprise that "Gabbett liked flogging. It was his boast that he could flog a man to death on a place no bigger than the palm of his hand" (238). Gabbett's unashamed pleasure serves as counterpoint to Dawes' "boiling passion" as he is flogged (238). The point of view for the remainder of the scene moves to Reverend North, who "palsied with horror" while "the passions of hell raged around him," is frozen by his own "horrible fascination" (238).

This shared public, erotic spectacle of bodily excess is above all a scene of deep connection and even psychic transcendence experienced between and among these men, the flogged, the floggers, and the watchers. For the anti-transportationist crusader, all queer sex between men was inherently physically cruel and coercive; however, this violent imaginary itself closely mirrors the most popular erotic tropes in pornography of the time. In "A Child is Being Beaten," the final chapter of *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (1966), Steven Marcus argues that during the Victorian period, "Sado-masochistic literature, in particular the literature of passive

flagellation, was produced in great quantities, and that therefore the fantasies represented in this writing, if not the activities themselves, were widely distributed" (262). Marcus qualifies this "immense literature of flagellation" as inherently homosexual as a result of its characteristic blurring and confusion of sexual and gender roles (261). According to Marcus:

> …the literature of flagellation represented a reversal of Victorian ideal personal standards for men. The striking features of this literature are its childishness, extreme incoherence, absence of focus, confusion of sexual identity, and impulse toward play acting or role-playing. These qualities stand in marked contrast to the Victorian ideals of manliness, solidity, certitude of self, straightforwardness, sincerity and singleness of being (263).

This surrender closely mirrors Bersani's identification of the rectum as the "grave" of the "masculine ideal…of proud subjectivity" (222). In *His Natural Life*, the penetration of all of the parts of the body by the "cat" exaggerates this metaphoric death, even literalizing it in the case of Kirkland (237). All men who participate in or even witness the flogging become implicated in a network of homoerotic connections, experiencing a forced loss of masculine ego that returns them to a state of open "childishness." Kirkland himself closely resembles the blandly innocent objects of Victorian sadomasochistic erotica, whom Marcus claims are always defined by an "ambiguity of gender identity" (259).

As a representative of the state, Commandant Burgess' presence in this process of group emasculation is intriguing in its implication of incest. As the would-be adoptive father, rather than encouraging settler subjectivity, Burgess is shown as facilitating the physical and moral degradation of his wards. Clarke's novel does not necessarily challenge the settler state's right to paternal authority, but instead, depicts a version of the state as incestuous father. As the would-be Victorian man par excellence, Dawes' experience of this sexually-charged state-mandated abuse is understood to be an exceptional case. Dawes' simultaneous discomfort and delighted surrender in the flagellation scene mark a transition during which

he realizes that a return to his past life will now be impossible. His body, previously the muscular normative male ideal, is permanently, shamefully marked by his participation in what is at its core group male sexual activity. In this way, *His Natural Life* begins to conflate queer sex and incestuous sex by assigning both to the category of disabling, anti-reproductive, and nonconsensual.

*His Natural* Life's depictions of the corporeal effects of non-normative sexuality are not limited to flagellation, nor is this even the most dramatic link drawn between queer connectivity and violence. Once again, Gabbett is the oversized, oversexed center of this aspect of the novel. On three occasions, Gabbett escapes from Sarah Island in the company of other convicts. Facing starvation in the wilderness, Gabbett is forced to return after the first two attempts, although his fellow escapees are never found. At first, their fate is only implied via the description of Gabbett on his return from the second escape:

> As he sat there gloomily chewing, he was a spectacle to shudder at. Not so much on account of his natural hideousness, increased a thousand-fold by the tattered and filthy rags which barely covered him. Not so much on account of his unshaven jaws, his hare-lip, his torn and bleeding feet, his haggard cheeks, and his huge, wasted frame. Not only because, looking at the animal, as he crouched, with one foot curled round the other, and one hairy arm pendant between his knees, he was so horribly unhuman, that one shuddered to think that tender women and fair children must, of necessity, confess to fellowship of kind with such a monster. But also because, in his slavering mouth, his slowly grinding jaws, his restless fingers, and his bloodshot, wandering eyes, there lurked a hint of some terror more awful than the terror of starvation—a memory of a tragedy played out in the gloomy depths of that forest which had vomited him forth again; and the shadow of this unknown horror, clinging to him, repelled and disgusted, as though he bore with him the reek of the shambles. (89)

Gabbett growls that if he "'ha' had three more'" companions, he would have successfully made it off the island (89). His meaning is left unstated, but for a readership already primed with the story of Alexander Pearce, the logic behind this statement is evident: Gabbett, like his by then infamous historical counterpart, has survived by cannibalizing his companions.

Gabbett's anthropophagy is made explicit during the giant's third escape attempt. Like Pearce, Gabbett recruits seven other convicts who, while working on the mainland, overwhelm their guard in order to escape into the bush. In a crucial detail, one of Gabbett's fellow escapees is named Greenhill, the same name as the convict Pearce claimed was the first to propose cannibalism during their escape. According to Pearce, it was the former sailor Greenhill who informed the group of the "custom of the sea": the maritime practice of "drawing lots in situations of starvation to see who would be sacrificed to save others" (Collins 136). Throughout Pearce's confession, Greenhill is positioned as the escapee's ringleader, with part of his power deriving from his close alliance with another escapee, Travers. Greenhill and Travers had worked as shepherds together before their sentence to Sarah Island, and in Pearce's words, "they 'had a respect for each other which they often showed to each other in many ways,'" a statement that was subsequently construed to allude to a homosexual relationship (Collins 153). Regardless of the intent behind Pearce's comment and the reality of Greenhill and Travers' relationship, the popular version of their cannibalism narrative has been haunted by this incriminating implication of appetitive queerness.

Such a connection between anthropophagy and non-normative sexuality is a common trope of cannibalism literature. In *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (2013), Jennifer Brown writes that "food manners dictate inclusion in or exclusion from familial, social, religious, and national groups" (3). Taboos that involve the violation of eating norms in many ways resemble those surrounding sexuality. Seemingly motivated by powerful inhuman desires, operating as reminders of the body's terrible fragility, these prohibitions call into question the fundamental rules governing human relationality. From the earliest accounts of

"clay eaters" among the lubbers, the inbred grotesque has been connected to inappropriate appetites. Gabbett and Greenhill's gustatory pleasure as they consume their fellow escapees both racializes and queers them in ways that are present just below the surface. Cannibalism, a part of European depictions of Indigenous peoples that predates even the settler project, is the inevitable final outcome of this rhetoric. In the Van Diemonian settler imaginary of the island's forests as inhospitable, anthropophagy must surely be a necessity for any humans navigating such a harsh wilderness. While attempting to convince the other convicts to draw straws, Greenhill makes an appeal not simply to survival, but to the pleasure of eating human flesh, claiming "I have seen the same done before, boys, and it tasted like pork" (298). After they claim their first victim, "No one but Gabbett and Greenhill would eat that night. That savage pair, however, make a fire, fling ghastly fragments on the embers, and eat the broil before it is right warm" (298). This final remark, that the human flesh is only barely warmed, builds food taboo upon food taboo, emphasizing both the savagery and sensuality of this carnal scene. Underneath the eroticized horror of the scene is an act of kinship creation: by breaking bread together, albeit during a meal of the most forbidden kind, Gabbett and Greenhill cement their connection with one another. These men having eaten the same man enter into a relationship of mutual trust and reliance. This thematic connection linking cannibalism, settler rhetoric of indigeneity, and queer kinship rises to the fore in subsequent chapters. The inbred grotesque would become only more closely linked to cannibalism as it evolved through various mediums through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

In 1846, Dennis Prendergast, a convict who had been sentenced to hang for his participation in the Cooking Pots Riots, an uprising against new restrictions intended to inhibit same-sex convict homemaking, wrote a letter to his lover:

> I hope you wont forget me when I am far away and all my bones is moldered away I have not closed an eye since I lost sight of you your precious sight was always a welcome and loving charming spectacle. Dear Jack I value Death nothing but it is in leaving you my dear behind and no one to look after you….The only thing that grieves me love is when I think of the pleasant nights we have had together. I hope you wont fall in love with no other man when I am dead and I remain your True and loving affectionate Lover.[135]

This letter was intercepted before it reached its intended reader and sent to London to be used by anti-transportationists as evidence of convict homosexuality. In this century, the love shared between these two men offers a glimpse into the lived reality of queer convict life in nineteenth-century Van Diemen's Land during this period of state hypervigilance. The public perception of Tasmania as a uniquely queer space did not wane with the end of transportation and the state's name change, as the island's internal policing of homosexuality would continue long into the twentieth century. It is no coincidence that, as Henry Reynolds writes, "Tasmania hung a man for sodomy in 1867, the last time this happened in the empire. During the early years of the twentieth century, Tasmania had an unusually high incidence of imprisonment for consenting homosexual practice."[136] Homosexual sex was decriminalized in 1997 after a long, hostile public debate.[137]

The enduring effects of anti-transportationist rhetoric continue to be experienced by LGBTQ+ Tasmanians. As the former convict population declined, those of their descendants who were subsumed into the rural working class of the island continued to bear the "hated stain." These communities were subject to increased state surveillance to ensure that the sexual and physical deviance of their forbearers did not reappear, a fear that confirmed the

[135] Rodney Croome, "Homosexuality." *The Companion to Tasmanian History*.
[136] Henry Reynolds, *A History of Tasmania*, 283.
[137] In their 2018 stand-up special *Nanette*, genderqueer comedian Hannah Gadsby explores their experience of homophobia while growing up in north-west Tasmania between 1989 and 1997, the period during which the state was debating whether to decriminalize homosexuality. Gadsby discusses anti-gay street violence they experienced during this period that they link to the intensified acrimony during this referendum (0:59:30).

residual forces of mainland beliefs in the heritable. In the 1910s, Tasmania became a stronghold of the Australian eugenics movement. Officials favored a policy of segregation and control over sterilization, although there was considerable public support for the latter approach. The state's Mental Deficiency Act (1920) created a Mental Defectives Board that examined children and, if they found them to be "subnormal," committed them into state care.[138] As in the American eugenics movement, cacogenics (sex between inferior genetic stock) was theorized to be one common source of such "subnormal" children. It is no coincidence that critics generally date the origin of Black Bobs legend to the 1930s, roughly a decade after the first Australian media accounts isolated rural and incestuous communities comprised by white Tasmanians. The legend also formed during a period of local hostility in Black Bobs to the River Derwent hydropower scheme, which brought major environmental disruptions amid an influx of outside labor. The construction of nearby Tarraleah Power Station, which began in 1934, focused attention on Black Bobs and other small rural communities in the area, forming a contrast between the new, industrial future of the island and its less desirable past.

Despite the increase in public sympathy towards convicts in the late twentieth century, with former penal colonies becoming recognized as heritage sights and a surge of interest in genealogy, the inbred grotesque remains entwined into the popular imaginary of Tasmania. As time would show, the inbred grotesque would continue to be a defining aspect of the Tasmanian Gothic, taking new forms that increasingly elaborated on the disabling, unsettling effects of non-normative sex and kinship.

[138] Grant Rodwell, "'If the Feeble-Minded Are to Be Preserved ...': Special Education and Eugenics in Tasmania 1900-1930."

## Chapter Three

## Eating Their Young: Postmodern Hillbillies and the Inbred Child

> A passionate lover of freedom that was licentious, he was resolved to avoid even the mildest limitations on his liberty required by any kind of organized society. Any manifestation of government was abhorrent to his lawless soul. Far from seeing the frontier as a galling time of hardship and privation, he viewed it as *a golden age* which he lusted to retain.
>
> Harry M. Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* (1963)

As the hillbilly entered the mid to late twentieth century, they continued to gain ground as a subject of popular media. In the United States, with *Lil' Abner*'s Yokum family in the funny pages from 1934 to 1977 and *The Beverly Hillbillies* on air from 1961 to 1971, the figure was more than ever a comic staple. In Australia, even as British and American cultural imports frequently crowded out local television productions, convict dramas continued to be given the greenlight. Original shows like *Rush* (1974-76), set in a gritty fictional 1850s gold field, were produced alongside competing miniseries adaptations of *For The Term of His Natural Life* (1983) and *The Eureka Stockade* (1984). Amid social upheaval and changing views of race, gender, and sexuality, the hillbilly remained steadily, and perhaps for many viewers, comfortingly the same, untouched by the passage of time. This timelessness has of course always been a key facet of the figure, their resistance to progress marking them as eternally on the fringe of modern settler culture.

The hillbilly remained the lighthearted subject of comedy and melodrama until the Great Depression, when they began to be cast in the more serious role of star of Social Realist literature. This transformation accelerated following World War II as a new wave of experimental novelists took a more critical approach to the figure. While the hillbilly's low

brow had previously relegated them to corresponding media, explorative literary works began to place recognizable types at the center of modern existential meditations. The Nobel Prize-winning Australian novelist Patrick White centered poor rural white Australians in novels like *Voss* (1957) and the Tasmania-set *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), works which were praised for their innovation and for closely following hillbilly-types through the use of stream-of-consciousness narrative. In the U.S., the Southern Gothic was growing in status, with Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers among the many writers whose hillbilly-coded characters confronted questions of religion, identity, and ethics.

Some of these philosophical hillbillies undoubtedly added a degree of humanized nuance to the figure or even questioned the inbred grotesque directly. At the same time, the hillbilly's transition from the mainstream to "high culture" more than ever before situated the figure as legitimate: the natural subject of sophisticated fiction that explored the gritty lived reality of those on society's fringe. The American author Erskine Caldwell was among the first to transition hillbillies from the realm of popular entertainment to that of socially-critical "art." While *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* and *For the Term of His Natural Life* had been deeply influenced by and, more subtly, influential on the politics and prevailing scientific ideas of their moment, Caldwell consciously eschewed the label of popular or "pulp" writer that John Fox Jr. and Marcus Clarke had received in favor of a more glamourous title: Social Realist. In the 1930s, writers in the emerging genre of Social Realism aimed to expose the deplorable conditions of the poor, advocating for government intervention during a period of global economic crisis. While he published over sixty books in his lifetime, Caldwell is best remembered for two of his Social Realist novels of the Georgia backwoods, *Tobacco Road*

(1932) and *God's Little Acre* (1933). These novels focused on hillbilly families' struggles to survive poverty and eventually starvation during the Great Depression.

As quickly becomes apparent to any reader of Caldwell, a literary commitment to Social Realism did not necessarily require writers to sympathize with their oppressed subjects. As Sylvia Jenkins Cook writes in *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, the Lester family of *Tobacco Road* are "so intellectually debased and emotionally brutalized that we scarcely recognize them as being of our own species" (68). The Lesters are deformed, debauched, and as a whole profoundly unlikeable. Their surname jokingly anticipates the patriarch's regular sexual harassment of his daughters, who themselves pursue men with a relentless, uninhibited desire. The Lesters are only ever kept in check by their mindless submission to the local church, which encourages the malnourished family to continue having children and keeps them unconscious of their own oppression. As Cook summarized, "the moral force of Caldwell's fury was dissipated by Caldwell's own obvious fear that his subjects might already be beyond redemption and fit only for ironic and recriminating display" (158). As Ralph Ellison wrote in a review of the successful 1933 theatrical adaptation of the novel, "Caldwell appears to have taken a carefully screened assemblage of anti-Negro stereotypes and turned them against the very class in which they found their most fervent proponents."[139] Yet despite controversy at the time of publication, Caldwell would come to be "hailed as America's premiere proletarian novelist," to cite a complimentary 1982 *New York Times* profile.[140] In the same article, the novelist Calder Willingham is quoted as claiming that a:

good case can be made that the inventor of *Tobacco Road*—far more than William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren,

[139] Ralph Ellison, "An Extravagance of Laughter," (181).
[140] Edwin McDowell, "For Erskine Caldwell, 50 Years of Successes," 25.

or any other Southern writer one can think of—is the true mythmaker of post-bellum Southern literature. (25)

Caldwell's commitment to the inbred grotesque as part of his social crusade affirmed this mythos-driven vision of the hillbilly for both conservative and progressive readers alike.

From the 1930s through the 1950s, the hillbilly's popularity in both Social Realist drama and slapstick comedy resulted in a paradox: was this figure mundanely real, or extraordinarily outside the norm? Flannery O'Connor—who was labeled by critics a "talented female Erskine Caldwell"—sought to unsettle this paradox and clarify her own purportedly self-aware, metaphorical use of hillbilly tropes in her 1960 essay, "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction."[141] O'Connor introduces the topic by voicing her frustration at being placed within "The School of Southern Degeneracy" (1). She defines this branch of purportedly realist Southern literature as "entirely concerned with the social or economic or psychological forces that they will by necessity exhibit" as a result of the "dreary blight on the public approach to fiction" caused by the social sciences (1). O'Connor contends that this literary form with its claim to the hyper-real is more naïve than even the most simplistic romantic or moral novels that proceeded it. O'Connor claims it is a fundamental misunderstanding to conflate the Social Realist approach with her own use of the grotesque style to explore existential questions. According to O'Connor, her poor rural white subjects confront moral and physical challenges outside of the normative realm of human experience, facing problems "which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life. O'Connor's stated goal wass to open a door for the exploration of metaphysical themes rather the presentation of a realistic portrait of hillbilly "degeneracy" (6). For

[141] Preston M. Browning, *Flannery O'Connor: The Coincidence of the Holy and the Demonic in O'Connor's Fiction*, i.

O'Connor, "the men in the gray-flannel suits," with their obsession with the "social framework," are "even greater freaks" than those who populate her writing (6). But while O'Connor may have intended to harness the inbred grotesque for higher literary and moral purposes, in the process exposing the narcissism of those who had created the hillbilly, her oppositional depictions of the inbred grotesque were cited just as often as Caldwell's malformed creatures. These literary characters peopled an imaginary used by those invested in proving that hillbillies were not simply the subjects of fiction, but a flesh and blood reality.

This chapter explores two Rural Gothic texts that exemplify how, even in the wake of increasing critique, the inbred grotesque saw a surge in simultaneous artistic and social legitimacy in the mid to late twentieth century. Cormac McCarthy's Appalachia-set novel *Outer Dark* (1968) and Louis Nowra's Tasmania-set play *The Golden Age* (1985) are both outwardly concerned with the existential questions facing their settler societies as they entered the postmodern era. McCarthy and Nowra's works share key anxieties: the ascent of epistemological and moral relativism, the subsequent loss of grand narratives of meaning, and the decay of the family unit. In their explorations of these fears for settler-humanity's future, *Outer Dark* and *The Golden Age* rely on a shared motif: incest among the white rural poor. Much like Caldwell and O'Connor, albeit with varying degrees of sincerity, McCarthy and Nowra position their hillbillies as underdog protagonists who struggle within vast social and historical systems beyond their control. Yet rather than a critical reevaluation of the hillbilly, this nostalgic return to a figure who is always already located in the settler past signals these writers' reactionary stance. For McCarthy and Nowra, the hillbilly offers an opportunity to return to an idealized moment in the history of settlement that, if only in the settler imagination, predates critique of the logic of racial, gender, and sexual identity

categories. Simultaneously, the inbred grotesque provides a narrative framework for exploring the corrosion of the nuclear family that these writers position as a direct result of the postmodern ontological shift.

McCarthy and Nowra deviate from the well-established script of the inbred grotesque in a way that at first appears to flip this concept's fundamental premise. The hillbilly families of *Outer Dark* and *The Golden Age*, physically degraded and sexually debauched as they may be, are in fact models of normative heteropatriarchal kinship in contrast to the more progressive, "evolved" postmodern families around them. Paradoxically, these works feature masculine, individualistic hillbilly men remain invested in the pursuit of grand narratives of meaning, while the feminine hillbilly women revel their own submissive, supportive roles as sexual companions and nurturing caregivers. Incest remains a consistent presence within these hillbilly families, often as a practice rendered much more visible than in past versions of the inbred grotesque. Notable in its normativity, for these hillbillies, consanguine sex is heterosexual, consensual and, above all, reproductive. As this strangely normalizing framing shows, McCarthy and Nowra's adaptation of the incest motif fits clearly within a broader Gothic legacy, in which the use of incest as "veiled" fantasy is accompanied by an unexpected but profound habituation of intrafamilial sexual abuse.

In each text, hillbillies' investment in the creation of children is juxtaposed with the postmodern families' loss of interest in their own genetic futures, a procreative failure that McCarthy and Nowra each present as a crisis for the settler state. Their narratives hypothesize that if the normative settler has abandoned the logic of reproductive futurism, the hillbilly will step into their vacated place. However, while the hillbilly is permitted to assimilate to the settler kinship model, even becoming an idealized version of it, their innate

biological defects continue to haunt them and their progeny. The cherished hillbilly children at the center of these texts fail to thrive and, most often, do not survive. Ultimately, the hillbillies of McCarthy's *Outer Dark* and Nowra's *The Golden Age* serve as a warning to healthy settlers: if the normative white Child is not invested in and protected at all costs, they will be replaced by a faulty hillbilly facsimile, the cuckoo in the nest that will lead to settler society's fall.

**The "Veiled" Fantasy of Incest, Reproductive Futurism, and the Mid-Century Crisis of the Settler Family**

> The theme of brother-sister incest haunts the early American novel on its lower levels of literacy as well as on the higher—a nightmare from which our writers do not choose to awake too soon, since it is one their readers are willing to pay to share.
>
> Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960)

To examine how McCarthy and Nowra reach their similar hillbilly visions, it is useful to first return to the cultural work of taboos in the Gothic. As Leslie Fiedler notes in *Love and Death in the American Novel,* the frequent presence of incest in American literature and media reveals a genuine, if veiled, fascination. This pattern coheres with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reading of the use of symbolic veils in "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel" (1981). In this article, Sedgwick traces how early Gothic writers relied on a common trope of literal and metaphoric veils throughout their writing to explore how sexual prohibitions heighten attraction. As Sedgwick writes, "the veil that conceals and inhibits sexuality comes by the same gesture to represent it, both as a metonym of the thing covered and as a metaphor for the system of prohibitions by which sexual desire is enhanced and specified" (256). For instance, in Gothic novels, the sexual violation of a virgin or nun, characters who are

themselves bounded off by veils, intensified an erotic frisson for the reader. For Sedgwick, the veil motif reveals how the Gothic genre introduces the sensuality of taboo sex by exposing the underlying social and scientific systems that regulate and subsequently "enhance" desire. In the case of the inbred grotesque, we see this manifest in how the aesthetic is marked as much marked by its ability to repel and prohibit as it is by its countervailing ability to attract.

While pioneered by eighteenth-century Gothic novelists, this use of the symbolic "veil" is found today in many areas of contemporary popular culture. For instance, James R. Kincaid's *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (1998), a critical evaluation of American talk shows' preoccupation with "veiled" accounts of childhood sexual abuse. Drawing an extended comparison between1990s media and Gothic literature, Kincaid contends that "our story of child molesting is a story of nightmare, the literary territory of the Gothic" (3). Kincaid interprets the Gothic as a fundamentally reactionary genre in which a focus on the veiled taboo, and the dramatic removal of the veil—the genre's archetypical climax—plays into our desire to excise discomfort through projection onto the Other. According to Kincaid, this unveiling leads to violent consequences: "The Gothic assumes and creates a terror so urgent it excuses the most brutal appeals. In *Dracula*, the champions of virtue pound a stake slowly through the heart of a beautiful, writhing woman (albeit a vampire), then decapitate her—and we cheer" (10). Gothic narratives continue to serve as an outlet for and even a source of anti-social sexual desires, allowing a culture to simultaneously uphold a taboo and exhibit a heightened interest in its subject.

As Kincaid's analysis attests, the Gothic's ability to reveal the social mechanisms behind sexuality does not by default lead the genre to a critique of these hidden mechanics. Instead, as in the case of the inbred grotesque, this exposure may operate to affirm such systems of sexual

regulation. In the Rural Gothic, incest is perceived as an erotic act that, when perpetrated by hillbilly characters, challenges both sexual norms and the authority of the settler state. At the same time, the inbred grotesque supports the state's role in shaping settler sexuality by depicting the grotesque outcomes of those who choose to violate the norm. Perhaps as important, if less visibly, the inbred grotesque affirms the state through its creation of a "veiled" fantasy of incest. In the Rural Gothic, incest is the lurid domain of the cacogenic, irreparably failed hillbilly who lacks the moral strength to resist the pull of the proximate. Yet this depiction of hillbilly incest as the result of a failure to abstain reveals the hidden premise on which the inbred grotesque is constructed: the fact that this nightmare of sexuality began life as a daydream shared by "healthy" settler subjects. Through this process, the inbred grotesque normalizes incestuous desire in equal measure to pathologizing such forbidden attraction. According to the logic of this aesthetic construction, incest is the exclusive domain of the Other, and thus a taboo that can be violated without consequence by the normative settler precisely because it is unimaginable that he would ever do so.

The irony of how the very act of voicing such sexual prohibitions can give those in societal positions of power implicit social permission to be violate them has been observed. Feminist scholars have long argued that the taboo nature of incest has caused actual instances of abuse to be ignored. In *Unspeakable: Father-Daughter Incest in American History* (2009), Lynn Sacco traces how this "unspeakability" led American media and medical professionals to overlook the obvious signs of intrafamilial child sexual abuse during an epidemic of gonorrhea among white, wealthy pre-pubescent girls at the turn of the twentieth century. Sacco writes that "as the evidence increasingly pointed to men from their own class and threatened white professionals' ideology about their racial and national superiority, doctors

refused even to consider the possibility that a respectable white American man, even one who was infected with gonorrhea at the same time as his daughter, could have spread his infection to a child in 'the usual manner'" (7). White middle- and upper-class patriarchs were not "easily identifiable outcasts, like the supposedly backward and vicious men of the southern Appalachians or Missouri Ozarks" (2). Despite voiced concerns from mothers, such self-protective disbelief among doctors would eventually lead to the temporary declassification of gonorrhea as a venereal disease.

As this example demonstrates, intrafamilial sexual abuse in settler households has historically been simultaneously obscured and normalized by the state. In *Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault, and the Law* (1993), Vikki Bell offers an explanation of the power dynamics of white heteronormative kinship that permit and even encourage incest. Bell contends that the presence of incestuous abuse in patriarchal systems is "unsurprising" (3). While "sociologists and anthropologists have traditionally regarded incest as disruptive of the family and as therefore disruptive of social order…feminism has suggested that, paradoxical as it may seem, incest is actually produced and maintained by social order: the order of a male dominated society" (57). Bell interprets intrafamilial sexual violence as a disciplinary mechanism that enforces gender and sexual roles for young girls that coheres with Foucault's analysis of state power networks. According to Bell, via incest:

> the bodies of the Daughters are caught within a power network… the spaces within the home that were once thought of by the Daughters as private (such as bathrooms or bedrooms) become spaces in which they can be watched so that they have to be constantly alert, just as the inmates of the Panopticon. (64)

Like the Panopticon's inmates, through systems of surveillance, the daughter is forced not just to outwardly conform, but to internalize her sexual and gender roles In many traditional therapeutic approaches to intrafamilial sexual abuse, "the daughter was seen to play a

complying role in the incest behavior." [142] Such compliance was most frequently interpreted not as an intentional outcome of abuse, but the fault of the mother for not conforming to her own familial role. Through these readings, incestuous abuse can be understood as a direct outcome of state hierarchies positioning—indeed deputizing— the father the representative of the state, guardian of the family. His family is his property. By violating the incest taboo without consequence, the father demonstrates and affirms the biopolitical power of the state itself.

Within this paradox of taboo, it is important to consider the role of the "Child," the symbolic figure for whom and around whom the settler family is presumably constructed. In the inbred grotesque, the horror of incest derives partially from its direct harm to the Child. In early examples of the inbred grotesque, whether the Child is abused directly or is the product of incest, the hillbilly prioritizes their impulsive, non-normative sexual desires over their reproductive future. Throughout the Rural Gothic, fictional hillbilly children are often harmed, neglected, and regarded as extraneous if not an outright inconvenience to their parents. This disregard is a direct affront to the principle of reproductive futurism that Lee Edelman first outlined in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). Reproductive futurism refers to the shared belief that the ultimate purpose of humanity is to reproduce, and that political and cultural projects should look linearly towards improving the living conditions of future generations rather than succumbing to present circumstances. The hillbilly's failure to sacrifice their immediate erotic pleasures for the future happiness of their children marks them as one of reproductive futurism's queer scapegoats: those who fall prey to "the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of

[142] Joseph E. Davis, *Accounts of Innocence: Sexual Abuse, Trauma, and the Self*, 51.

meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself" (Edelman 13). Reproductive futurism relies on a steady reserve of such scapegoats. Since the end point of this collective dream is by nature unrealizable and "continuously deferred," the Child must be imagined to be always in danger so as to persist in "[eliciting] our compassionate intervention" (114). Reproductive futurist rhetoric is yet another biopolitical tool used by settler states, one that ironically exists alongside such states' permission of intrafamilial sexual abuse. The white settler Child is at once the most revered, untouchable subject within the settler state, and, as the patriarch's symbolic future, a dependent that may be shaped into the correct settler form through authorized intrafamilial sexual abuse.

As Australia and the U.S. entered the 1960s, both countries saw the rise of countercultural, civil rights, and anti-war movements. Reproductive futurist rhetoric provided a strategy for combatting this new social upheaval: according to the state, these protestors were anti-social participants in a "war on the family." In both countries, even as a majority of young people retained a desire to marry and have children, the idealized model of nuclear family was understood to be in crisis. In Australia, conservative social critics in the media gestured toward how the age at first marriage was rising, the percentage of marriages ending in divorce was growing, women were increasingly opting to enter and stay in the labor force, and children had a higher chance of being raised in single-parent households.[143] A wave of immigration from southern and eastern Europe, as well as increased collaboration with Southeast Asia via initiatives like the Colombo Plan, additionally bolstered concerns that the racial and cultural character of the Australian family was shifting.[144] The Australian Liberal

[143] P. McDonald, "Families in the future: the pursuit of personal autonomy," 40.
[144] "A Life Changing Experience: The Colombo Plan Produces the First Female Graduates in Engineering," 1.

Party began to argue that government assistance was encouraging single mothers to abuse the welfare system by having "babies for profit."[145]

In the U.S., the single mother was similarly blamed for this family "crisis." The 1965 Moynihan Report invigorated longstanding stereotypes about Black single-mother families, referring to the Black American community as a "tangle of pathology" that had been exacerbated by welfare programs.[146] President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, for which the Moynihan Report was written as a research paper, focused significant attention on poor white Appalachians. This effort was itself spurred on by Henry Caudill's influential 1963 study, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*. Caudill claimed that existing welfare programs were encouraging pre-marital sex among easily corruptible young Appalachian women:

> Fertile and amoral females resided in every camp and on every creek. Illegitimate pregnancies increased at an ominous rate. The new unwed mothers promptly appeared in the Welfare offices end applied for their monthly assistance checks. In due course, and in all too many instances, the first 'mistake' was followed by another, and the monthly stipend grew. Some of these uninhibited women have blessed the state with a half-dozen new citizens, all of them supported by the nation's taxpayers. (287)

These "new citizens" that Caudill sarcastically accused these women of having "blessed the state" were not to be confused with those settler children who were the state's ideal future. This divide between the Child and hillbilly children was a direct outcome of reproductive futurist logic. In a culture obsessed with the purity of children, the inbred child is the necessary antithesis. Like the "bastard," without a father to mold them, the inbred child is born already corrupted by non-normative sexuality, already incapable of properly serving and investing in the state.

**"It's no right child": The Inbred Child in Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark* (1968)**

[145] Gail Reekie, *Measuring Immorality: Social Inquiry & the Problem of Illegitimacy*, 63.
[146] Daniel Geary, "The Moynihan Report: An Annotated Edition."

> It howled execration upon the dim camarine world of its nativity wail on wail while he lay there gibbering with palsied jawhasps, his hands putting back the night like some witless paraclete beleaguered with all limbo's clamor.
>
> Cormac McCarthy, *Outer Dark* (1968)

Sometime around the turn of the twentieth century, in Johnson County, Tennessee, siblings Culla and Rinthy Holme quietly anticipate the birth of their child. In their shared bed, Culla is haunted by nightmares of public condemnation of their incest. When nineteen-year-old Rinthy's water breaks, Culla refuses to leave their isolated cabin and fetch the "midnight woman" to "catch" the baby for fear that the child's illicit parentage will get out (10). Following a bloody, lonely labor, Rinthy gives birth to a boy, "a beetcolored creature that looked…like a skinned squirrel" (14). After cutting the cord, Culla tells her that he does not expect the child to live; as she succumbs to her exhaustion, he walks into the woods and places the infant on a patch of "fiery nitric green" moss (16). As the child cries, Culla walks away, leaving it to die.

Cormac McCarthy's sophomore novel *Outer Dark* (1968) takes place in a dystopian Appalachian frontier where moral reason and law have been discarded by the local mountaineers. This setting is not unusual for McCarthy, whose next ten novels would frequently be located in rural spaces amid postapocalyptic settings. McCarthy was born Charles McCarthy in 1933 in Providence, Rhode Island. His father, who had graduated top of his class at Yale Law, moved the family to Knoxville, Tennessee to take a position with the Tennessee Valley Authority when Charles was four.[147] In 1936, a year before the McCarthys' arrival, the TVA had completed one of their most controversial projects, the construction of

[147] John Shearer, "Cormac McCarthy's father was his first boss at TVA," 1.

Norris Dam. The federal utility corporation had used the legal concept of eminent domain to forcibly remove locals from the Clinch River area; over the ensuing decades, the TVA would continue to cite eminent domain as the corporation pursued projects that would drive over 125,000 Tennessee Valley residents from their homes.[148] McCarthy attended Knoxville Catholic High School and, upon graduation, enrolled at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.[149] McCarthy's first four novels, published between 1965 and 1979, each take place in East Tennessee. While his later Border Trilogy, set in the Southwestern United States and Mexico, are more widely read, McCarthy's early, pre-fame works like *Child of God* (1973) and *Suttree* (1979) already demonstrate the characteristic rhythmic, poetic prose style for which he would be praised for in years to come.

The field of Cormac McCarthy studies is in large part characterized by such a tendency to praise the author. The Cormac McCarthy Society was founded in 1995 to not only "further the scholarship" but the "general appreciation of Cormac McCarthy's writing" among both "scholars and enthusiastic lay readers."[150] *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, the society's biannual publication and the preeminent source of criticism on the author, has published primarily admiring articles, in which critics frequently emphasize how McCarthy's work contains clear thematic and aesthetic differences from postmodern works of the same period. In "The New Naturalism: Cormac McCarthy, Frank Norris, and the Question of Postmodernism" (2014), Michael Tavel Clarke argues that McCarthy's works exemplify what he terms "new naturalism," a contemporary return to the late nineteenth-century genre that

[148] Germaine M. Reed, "Book Review, 'TVA and the Dispossessed: The Resettlement of Population in the Norris Dam Area.,'" 477.
[149] George Brosi. "Cormac McCarthy: A Rare Literary Life," 12.
[150] "About the Society." https://www.cormacmccarthysociety.com/about-the-society

offers an alternative to postmodernist trends. According to Clarke, elements of McCarthy's style that exemplify this new naturalism include:

> repetition, linear and chronological plot structures, spectatorial third-person narration, and a preoccupation with quotidian, material detail. He gravitates toward primitive, masculine adventures in the style of Jack London and Frank Norris. His stories almost always involve plots of decline. (56)

In deviating from the postmodern paradigm, McCarthy revitalizes the "masculine" pursuit of grand narratives. While Clarke's McCarthy's problematizes "beliefs of progress, human perfectibility, and the rational subject," his protagonists often fail in their "adventures." Like most McCarthy scholars, Clarke fails to note whose "perfectibility" and rationality is questioned in these texts (55). Notably, both Jack London and Frank Norris, the naturalist authors to whom Clarke likens McCarthy, were vocal advocates of eugenics who incorporated elements of eugenic theories into their fiction and nonfiction works.

A small contingent of critics have questioned whether McCarthy's Appalachian works do indeed offer a nuanced, allegorical exploration of the dark potential of humanity, or whether they instead contain a repackaging of old tropes about the inherent debasement of poor communities hovering on the settler fringe. In a 2006 article in *Slate*, Dwight Garner draws what he terms a "mildly heretical" direct connection between McCarthy's work and "the intensity of Caldwell's vision in *Tobacco Road*."[151] McCarthy's third novel, *Child of* God, hints at the truth of this influence, as the cross-dressing, necrophiliac serial killer protagonist Lester Ballard's name echoes that of the Lester family of *Tobacco Road*.

Duane R. Carr makes a powerful, albeit unheeded call for a reevaluation of McCarthy's work in his article "The Dispossessed White as Naked Ape and Stereotyped

[151] Dwight Garner, "Pulp Valentine: Erskine Caldwell's Lurid Vision of the American South," 1.

Hillbilly in the Southern Novels of Cormac McCarthy" (1998). Carr contends that McCarthy's

> 'tooth and claw' world vision is neither compassionate nor wise, but rather a warmed-over nineteenth-century Social Darwinism…many of his characterizations are neither sympathetic nor dispassionate, as has been claimed, but rather some of the most blatant stereotypes of Southern 'rednecks' in contemporary American fiction. (9)

Like Garner, Carr observes the distinctly "Caldwellian" character of McCarthy's "dispossessed rural whites" (18). He points to the dumpkeeper and his family in *Child of God* as a particularly strong example of McCarthy's disdain for his characters. Living in the junkyard that is their livelihood, the dumpkeeper and his wife "spawn" their nine daughters and name "them out of an old medical dictionary gleaned from the rubbish" (*Child of God* 26). "Urethra, Cerebella, Hernia Sue" and their sisters have sex with local men, which their father sees as his justification to beat and rape his daughters (26). So dehumanized that they are reduced to execratory body parts, the dumpkeeper's daughters' unchecked sexuality and subsequent reproduction are symptomatic of their cultural and biological degeneration. Carr contends that such depictions of the Appalachian rural poor amount to an open endorsement of the idea "that people at the lower end of the economic scale represent lingering 'bad blood' and, as such, should not be sustained by either public or private charity. They should instead be allowed to die off as a part of a natural evolutionary process" (13).

Critics who have responded to accusations of stereotyping by Carr and scant others have alleged that McCarthy is in fact playing with these Appalachian tropes, exaggerating them in order to call attention to their underlying absurdity. Gabe Rikard's *Authority and the Mountaineer in Cormac McCarthy's Appalachia* (2013) offers a history of the mountaineer figure as propaganda used to "promote the capitalist values of hard work, thrift, and efficiency" (29). Rikard believes that McCarthy's use of this figure intentionally highlights

"within his text the same processes at work behind the fantasy construction of this fictional domain—*Appalachia* itself" (20). Similarly, in "'The Wanted Stared Back': Biopolitics, Genre, and Sympathy in Cormac McCarthy's *Child of God*" (2015), Alexandra Blair asserts that *Child of God* serves as a "critique of American biopolitics" that plays with the history of Appalachian fiction's "racialist qualities" (90). Blair goes so far as to contend that "McCarthy suggests that the stereotypical violent impulses of the mountain people, exemplified in Ballard's character, belong to everyone," including the biopolitical regime of the state (105). Yet as Blair acknowledges, McCarthy's portrayals "only give his readers glimpses of the larger societal forces on the novel's margins" (105).

Violence in McCarthy's Appalachian works almost always focus on the individual, rather than the systemic, level. Sympathetic readings like those of Rikard and Blair often cite the ways in which McCarthy's poor rural protagonists are afforded a level of inner depth and agency beyond that of Caldwell's characters. Their reparative reading rings true; however, while McCarthy's hillbillies are allowed to dream of normative settler goals, they are doomed never to achieve them. The few figures of state authority whom *Outer Dark*'s protagonists encounter are sometimes cruel, sometimes kind, but uniformly have little to no power over their land or neighbors. Capitalism and the state are pointedly absent in McCarthy's hillbillyland, in which these evolutionary remnants have been left behind by contemporary society. *Outer Dark*'s hillbillies can only ape settler subjectivity, having never had the opportunity to witness any better model. McCarthy's perspective is bleak but clear: in a postmodern world in which meaning has been discarded, only the vestiges of humanity cling to the old beliefs in morality, religion, and reason.

From the beginning of *Outer Dark*, continuing in the long tradition of hillbilly name puns, the Holme siblings' surname foreshadows their quest for belonging throughout the novel. Although Culla tells her that their baby has died, Rinthy, on an instinctual rather than intellectual level, suspects that this is not true. After his grieving sister digs up their infant's false grave and finds it to be empty, Culla flees Rinthy's "silent and inarguable female invective" (33). Both siblings depart on solitary journeys: Culla, seeking to escape the memories of his sinful actions, wanders the country looking for work, while Rinthy, convinced that their child is still alive, searches for the tinker whom she suspects has found and taken the abandoned infant. Doomed to failure to progress, Culla and Rinthy are nevertheless engaged in attempts to find meaning in their harsh lives. Culla's journey sees him navigate a difficult philosophical divide between two opposing moral obligations: his duty to his family and his duty as an aspiring member of a larger Christian settler community. Meanwhile, Rinthy is driven by a singular, primal need to find her lost child. Their conflicts are sharply gendered, and, despite their apocalyptic surroundings, the brother and sister are spurred onward by conventional, even conservative desires.

For Culla, it is a nightmare that brings on his initial crisis of faith. In the dream, he observes:

> a prophet standing in the square with arms upheld in exhortation to the beggared multitude gathered there. A delegation of human ruin who attended him with blind eyes upturned and puckered stumps and leprous sores. The sun hung on the cusp of eclipse and the prophet spoke to them. This hour the sun would darken and all these souls would be cured of their afflictions before it appeared again. (5)

Struck, Culla asks if he too can be cured. The prophet answers a hesitant yes, but as the sky turns black, the diseased crowd turns on Culla. The contagion and impurity on display in this early scene are major themes of the text. Culla is plagued by the thought that he cannot be

cured of his sin. The way in which sin manifests throughout the novel as physical disease and wounds, hypervisible in the form of "puckered stumps and leprous sores," begs the question of whether Culla's sin is the result of a choice or something more innate, perhaps, "original." Interestingly, the act of incest between the two siblings is only alluded to, never directly stated. This leads the conception of the inbred child to appear to be not so much a direct result of the siblings' conscious actions as an inevitable outcome of circumstance. Culla can be read as the inbred grotesque turned self-aware: born trapped in a body and relations of kinship that he knows violate the laws of settler society. He takes various actions throughout the novel in an attempt to rectify this situation and conform to the ideal of a healthy settler. Unfortunately for Culla, he is trapped in a looping paradox: to reject the inbred grotesque, he must reject his family, but if he rejects his family, he becomes more than ever a part of the inbred grotesque.

As Culla's Biblical-inspired dream reveals, Christianity provides the moral framework through which he himself understands his abnormality. The novel's title is itself a Biblical allusion to the Gospel of Matthew, in which the recurring phrase "outer darkness" is interpreted as a reference to hell. The hillbillies who populate the novel's realm of "outer darkness" are as a whole driven by their concern with religion; as Culla and Rinthy wander the mountains, they are questioned by strangers as to whether they are "saved" (109) or "baptized" (225). The novels' dialogue, recorded with McCarthy's signature lack of quotation marks, is often inflected with the intonations of the King James Bible interwoven with the typical creative grammar and misspellings used by writers attempting to signify Appalachian dialect. Yet while Christianity is always at front of mind for these characters, the novel insinuates that the hillbillies' version of faith is a monstrous reversal of Christian beliefs.

Early in the novel, when Culla travels to the local town on a Sunday and attempts to buy food for a post-partum Rinthy, he is turned away by the storeowner with the invective "We still christians here" (26). James R. Giles observes that there is a "deliberate withholding of the uppercase *C* from 'christians'" in this exchange.[152] Later in the text, "sunday" is repeatedly also written in lowercase during a conversation Rinthy has with an "old woman" about "breakin the sabbath" (109).

In perhaps the most striking instance of juxtaposition between hillbilly religious belief and action, Culla is nearly lynched by a mob of hogdrivers incited by a parson. In this scene, Culla encounters the hogdrivers as they herd their pigs to market. One hogdriver bares "his orangecolored teeth at Holme in a grimace of lecherous idiocy" to say "that's my little brother Billy yander…Says he going to get him some poontang when we get sold but I told him he'd be long done partialed to shehogs" (216). Their casual discussion of bestiality is interrupted when the aforementioned Billy is swept up in a stampede of hogs that fall over a nearby bluff. Looking for someone to blame for Billy's death, the hogdrivers turn on Culla; when a nearby parson intercedes, he pleads with them not to hang Culla in what is in fact a covert attempt to introduce this idea to the hogdrivers. Surrounded by the preacher-provoked mob, Culla makes a close escape. The incident is a perversion of one of Jesus' miracles from the Book of Matthews, in which he drives evil spirits into a "herd of swine," which he then makes run "violently down a steep place into the sea" (*Bible*, Matt. 8.32). Here, Culla is put in the role of a Christ-figure; however, without a claim to divinity, he is simply scapegoated by this rabid religious community. In each of these incidents, the hillbillies' ungenerous, violent behavior contrasts unflatteringly with their avowed Christianity.

[152] James R. Giles, "Discovering Fourthspace in Appalachia: Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark* and *Child of God*," 26.

This divergence in belief and action is epitomized by what Markus Wierschem, in the article "'Some Witless Paraclete Beleaguered with All Limbo's Clamor': On Violent Contagion and Apocalyptic Logic in Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark*" (2015), calls a "collapse back into sacrificial violence" (195). Wierschem argues that "What is on trial in *Outer Dark* is less any particular brand of Christianity than a more fundamental failure of Christianity as such" (187). In McCarthy's Appalachia, the benevolence of the New Testament is abandoned in favor of a return to the harshness of the Old Testament—a common trope of the inbred grotesque. Bernice Murphy has observed that for communities in the Rural Gothic, "intense religious observance is not merely a matter of course but a matter of life or death," concluding that "the only thing scarier than a redneck with a chainsaw is a redneck with religion."[153] In his evaluation of *Outer Dark*'s violent Christian imaginary, Wierschem focuses primarily on how Culla's forced voyage from home, during which he is repeatedly "accused of crimes he did not commit," resembles that of the "mythical scapegoat" (190).

Even more significant for this theme of sacrifice is Culla's initial choice to kill his only son. His actions recall the Biblical story of the Binding of Isaac, in which Abraham is ordered by God to sacrifice his son. However, Culla can by nature only ever parody Christianity. In exposing his child to the elements to die a painful and lonely death, he acts not on God's order, but out of his own self-interest. His sacrifice is an attempt to join the settler social fold but ironically, in conjoining infanticide to incest, only further debases Culla, just as his subsequent "scapegoat" journey exacerbates his racialized difference. His constant wandering links him to displaced Indigenous people in the eyes of other white

[153] Bernice M. Murphy, *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness*, 81.

mountaineers. This underlying suspicion of being unrooted is made clear when he is asked directly by a stranger: "You a indian?" (200). The ongoing deterioration of his white racial status is part of Culla's punishment for his disposal of his reproductive future. By the novel's end, Culla is permanently isolated from the larger settler community and, it is implied, that he will continue his now aimless traveling for the remainder of his life. Salvation is not, nor has it ever been, a viable destination.

If Culla's journey is an attempt to discover a grand narrative by which he can live after rejecting his child, Rinthy in contrast appears certain that her life's meaning can be found in seeking that lost child. Roughly equal space is devoted in the novel to Rinthy and Culla's alternating perspectives. This equity contrasts with the majority of McCarthy's novels, which for the most part take place in male homosocial spaces. In a March 2022 interview announcing the publication of his final two novels, McCarthy seems to have either forgotten Rinthy or to reveal that he does not regard her on equal footing as a protagonist with Culla. McCarthy remarks to the reporter: "'I was planning on writing about a woman for 50 years…I will never be competent enough to do so, but at some point you have to try.'"[154] Crediting McCarthy's observation, Rinthy is admittedly an unremarkable character. In many ways he conforms to the "Mountain Europa" trope on display in John Fox Jr.'s works, with her "dead blond hair" and "smile all bland and burdenless as a child's" (53). Even Rinthy's reaction on discovering the empty infant grave is described as "bland," and it is Culla who initiates the siblings' separation (33).

Unlike Culla's metaphysical anxieties, Rinthy's concerns are simple and corporeal: finding her baby, eating, sleeping, and dealing with her bleeding "paps" (153). Six months

[154] Alexander Alter, "Sixteen Years After 'The Road,' Cormac McCarthy is Publishing Two New Novels."

after being separated from her child, Rinthy improbably continues to produce milk despite never having nursed. Graphic descriptions of her "aching breasts" are interspersed through the novel (147). Rinthy's milk exemplifies her larger roles in *Outer Dark* as both an incest fantasy of docile, obliging female domesticity and as an inverted fertility icon, who in her excessive, fluid fertility contains the threat of contagion. While Culla is tormented by guilt over the act of incest he has committed, Rinthy appears content to continue their arrangement, content in her role of an idealized, compliant immature sex object, as simultaneously "fertile," "amoral," and "uninhibited" as Caudill alleged mountain women to be. Lacking a defined personality, she is characterized almost entirely by her desire to serve her kin. Her maternal love for her child is not at all tempered by the knowledge that he is inbred. When Rinthy finally does find the tinker and meekly begs for her "chap" (191) back, she voices one of the most direct acknowledgements of the siblings' incest in the novel, informing the tinker: "It's no right child…You don't want him" (194). This sharp break in her general eroticized naïveté is only temporary.

McCarthy's narrative repeatedly emphasizes that, in the tinker's dehumanizing words, Rinthy "ain't the first slackbellied doe to go about in the woods with them big eyes" (191). On her journey, she encounters many older hillbilly women who stand as embodiments of her future. These women offer her food and a bed for the night, but just as crucially, their squalid lives warn her of her inevitable fate. Like Rinthy, these women dream of settler domesticity, catering to their husbands and children; unfortunately for them, their reproductive futures are eugenically condemned: doomed to be cut short by their genetically predetermined poor health and nonnormative sexuality. In the first family with whom Rinthy takes shelter, she encounters "an ancient crone who was without a nose" (57). This woman's "long bat's

nostrils" are reminiscent of the elderly evangelical woman preacher Sister Bessie in *Tobacco Road*. Sister Bessie, whose teenage husband immediately indicates her licentiousness to the reader, has a nasal deformity that gives her face the appearance of "looking down the end of a double-barrel shotgun" (58). That both McCarthy and Caldwell prominently feature atypical noses instead of other facial deformities in their depictions of these women is no coincidence, for the literary association between nasal deformity and sexual promiscuity dates back to the eighteenth century, when the collapse of the bridge of the nose, a relatively rare symptom of syphilis, became a common symbol of moral deterioration.[155] The incidental skull-like appearance of the face caused by "saddle nose" recurs in these works; McCarthy's "bat's nostrils" and Caldwell's "double-barrel shotgun" call back to this deliberate connection between nonnormative—promiscuous and diseased—sex and death.

This "ancient crone," unsettling as she is, does appear to have living descendants. Soon after this encounter, Rinthy encounters two other unnamed elderly women who are not so fortunate. The first of these women reluctantly accepts Rinthy into her home, and then proceeds to lament the loss of her children at length: "We raised five. All dead" (104). When this woman and her husband begin a violent fight, Rinthy flees, and soon afterward meets a widow living alone. This woman's disability and lack of clear gender markers are described in dehumanizing terms: Rinthy "could not have said to what sex belonged the stooped and hooded anthropoid that came muttering down the fence toward her" (108). When this "small bent androgyne" (112) intuits that Rinthy has recently given birth, she casually offers that Rinthy's absent baby has been "Bagged for the river trade…Yon sow there might make ye a travelin mate that's downed her hoggers save one" (112). Rinthy, named as a "sow," is

[155] Noelle Gallagher, *Itch, Clap, Pox: Venereal Disease in the Eighteenth-Century Imagination*, 161.

horrified by this allegation that she has drowned her "hoggers." Yet the widow's nonjudgmental, nonchalant delivery is indicative of how, in this dystopian vision of Appalachia, women may begin life invested in their children, their reproductive futures are predestined to become dead ends.

Rinthy's own reproductive future is soon cut short by a group of three men referred to in the novel as the "grim triune" (129). These men, whom Wierschem observes operate as a parody of the Holy Trinity, pursue Culla throughout the novel. The triune's perspective is offered in short vignettes interspersed between chapters. During these scenes, the triune wreak havoc on the mountaineers that Culla has encountered only moments before, often murdering or otherwise defiling them in gruesome ways. The triune's violence, while seemingly indiscriminate, is targeted at the few remaining figures of authority and moral principles in this backwoods society. After murdering a squire who briefly employs Culla the triune follows the wandering man to a small town, where they dig up corpses in the local graveyard while Culla, unaware, searches for more work. Later, Culla joins a crowd of shocked townspeople who observe the triune's work. In one of the freshly opened graves, a white man "shared his resting place with a negro sexton whose head had been cut half off and who clasped him in an embrace of lazarous depravity" (88). This intentional display, a violation of racial and sexual prohibitions in which the removal of the sexton's head leaves his behind body as an eroticized remainder, demonstrates the triune's taste for anti-social absurdity. When Culla finally meets the triune, they invite him to join them in eating "a pan of black and mummified meat" (171). The triune refuse to tell him what the meat is, and as he chews, it swells "in his mouth and [takes] on a pulpy feel warped and run with unassailable fibers" (172).

Culla and the triune meet a final time after they murder the tinker and take possession of the child. When Culla asks the triune "Where are you bound?", their apparent leader willfully misinterprets his question and answers "I ain't…By nothin" (233). The child of *Outer Darkness* has been mutilated: "It had a healed burn all down one side of it and the skin was paper and wrinkled like an old man's…when it turned to look up at him he saw one eyeless and angry red socket like a stokehold to a brain in flames" (232). The triune tease Culla to admit he fathered the child with his sister. After he refuses to do so, the identity of the earlier meat becomes clear:

> The man took hold of the child and lifted it up. It was watching the fire. Holme saw the blade wink in the light like a long cat's eye slant and malevolent and a dark smile erupted on the child's throat and went all broken down the front of it. The child made no sound. It hung there with its one eye glazing over like a wet stone and the black blood pumping down its naked belly. The mute one knelt forward. He was drooling and making little whimpering noises in his throat…The man handed him the child and he seized it up, looked once at Holme with witless eyes, and buried his moaning face in its throat. (236)

Culla and Rinthy's child has been consumed by postmodern hillbillies. Rinthy herself, still "delicate as any fallow doe," eventually stumbles on the camp and discovers "the little calcined ribcage" of her child (237). Both siblings accept the death of the child with a disquieting neutrality; their respective journeys have instructed them that, for people like them, there is no future in McCarthy's vision of Appalachian hell. Yet as we will see in the Tasmanian section of this reading, these isolated wanderers are far from alone in their "outer darkness."

**"The circle is burst": The Lost Tribe of Louis Nowra's *The Golden Age* (1985)**

> *Ubertas et Fidelitas* ("Fertility and Faithfulness")
> Motto on the Tasmanian Coat of Arms

It is 1939 in the remote "wilds" of South-West Tasmania. College friends Francis Morris and Peter Archer are spending their summer vacation bushwalking when they hear a woman scream. They follow the sound and stumble on the flower-bedecked corpse of a young man. As they examine the body, the stage directions read, there enters a young woman, "*dirty, and dressed in a nineteenth-century dress patched in various colours as if repaired over many years*" (12). She approaches the friends and "*bares her teeth…almost like an animal, then screams violently as if cursing*" (13).[156] She runs away, and Francis and Peter follow her to a clearing where they find five other white people dressed in Victorian hand-me-downs. Led by their elderly matriarch, Queenie Ayre, this eccentric group welcome the young men, offering them meat and fruit in chipped porcelain bowls. Francis and Peter struggle to communicate with these strangers, who speak only in an unfamiliar vernacular largely made up of nineteenth-century lower-class Cockney, Scottish, and Irish slang and obscenities. Through pantomime and song, the group gradually conveys that they are the descendants of a small community of both escaped and former convict miners who remained in the area following a gold rush. Peter and Francis embed with this "lost tribe" for several days, learning some of their customs and language. They ascertain that the small group is on the brink of dying off as a result of several generations of inbreeding that have led to deformities, disabilities, and infertility. Queenie Ayre is aware of their imminent extinction, and requests that the men bring the group back with them. As she chants that there will be "Nowt more outcastin,'" the group set forward for the capitol city, Hobart (36).

Louis Nowra's play *The Golden Age* (1985) narrates the tragic events that follow this decision to return to civilization. Since the play was first produced by Melbourne's Studio Theatre in February 1985, Nowra's period drama has been staged a dozen times throughout Australia and

[156] Following dramatic conventions, stage directions are quoted in italics, while dialogue will be quoted un-italicized.

Britain.[157] Playwright, screenwriter, and novelist Mark Doyle, better known by his stage name Louis Nowra, began his career in the early 1970s in his home city of Melbourne's alternative theater scene. The success of Nowra's third play, *Inner Voices* (1977), launched him into national awareness, but it was not until his eighth play, *Inside the Island* (1981), that Nowra turned his attention to an Australian setting.[158] *Inside the Island*, which focuses on Australian feelings of inferiority in relation to England, established the political tone of Nowra's future "Australian" works. Class and race are frequently explored in these texts; Nowra has often referenced taking inspiration from his childhood growing up in a Housing Commission estate and subsequent experience of class anxiety while an undergraduate at La Trobe University. In a 1993 interview, Nowra expressed his belief that:

> The Australian identity is that we have no identity. Our identity is made up of a skein of skin and bones that covers a void. The void at our centre, where our soul should be, is our refusal to come to terms with the fact that we conquered a race of people and confiscated their land, without understanding the immoral enormity of what we had done. Until we make amends and we white Australians acknowledge the fact that the Aborigines had a vision rooted in the landscape, then we will not be part of that landscape, and unless you understand the land you live in, then you have no soul.[159]

Statements such as these have earned Nowra the label of one of Australia's leading socially progressive playwrights, willing to deviate from what he has termed the realist, nationalistic theater of "the Australian 'baby boomer' middles class (plays about boozing men, wife-swapping, the problems of being stuck in the middle echelon of the bureaucracy and the crucial problem of a second mortgage)" (Makeham 28).

*The Golden Age*, which remains one of Nowra's most acclaimed and frequently staged plays, fits clearly within his pattern of post-colonial critique. The play has most commonly been

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[157] "The Golden Age." *AusStage: The Australian Live Performance Database*
[158] Veronica Kelly, "Introduction," *Louis Nowra,* 11.
[159] Paul Makeham, "The Black Hole in Our History: a Conversation with Louis Nowra," 29.

interpreted as a parable of contact between Aboriginal Australian people and white settler colonists. According to Nowra, *The Golden Age*'s outlandish premise may have a basis in a true story. In the preface to the play, Nowra writes that he received the inspiration for it in 1984 during a conversation with a professor from Melbourne's Monash University. This unnamed academic told him:

> the story of how two men had come across a strange group of people in the wilds of South-West Tasmania just before World War II…the men took the group back to Hobart but because they seemed to confirm Nazi theories of genetic and racial degeneration, the group was placed in New Norfolk Asylum…He [the academic] thought that the story about the group might be factual and that a friend, an historian, was trying to find out if there was, indeed, any truth to it. (x)

Nowra notes that "I don't know what he discovered, nor did I care" (x) about the accuracy of the story. Subsequent critics, including Gerry Turcotte in the introduction in the 1989 revised first edition of the play, have recounted this "grim tragedy" as the credible truth (xiii).

The progression of this "lost tribe" narrative from myth to fact recalls the evolution of the rural Tasmanian Black Bobs legend, and also bears a strong resemblance to a similar account from Appalachian Virginia. In 1923, eugenic researchers Arthur H. Estabrook and Ivan E. McDougle visited a remote region of the Blue Ridge Mountains to investigate rumors of a so-called "lost tribe." The researchers published their results in the book *Mongrel Virginians: The Win Tribe* (1926). Estabrook and McDougle alleged that the Win family, "a small group of Indian-negro-white crosses" (7), had resorted to "mating with their own folks" (148) or "matings…into poor stock mentally" as a result of their exclusion from the surrounding monoracial—white—community (150). These eugenicists additionally claimed that as a result of this cacogenic reproduction, after only a few generations, the resulting children reached adolescence at an "early age" (156). The Wins were prone to telling

"obscene and prurient stories" (156) and having "sexual relations…on a very low plane, almost that of the animal in their freedom" (157).

In their obscenity and "animal" freedom, Nowra's lost tribe in *The Golden Age* closely resembles that described and created by Estabrook and McDougle. For those members of the family who can speak (many of them have mutism as a result of developmental disorders), their coprolalic dialect substitutes "cunty" (18) for "fertile," and refers to women by their "quim" (19) and men by their "tarse" (17). Queenie Ayre explains to their visitors that the group has been "born o' cat 'n' rack 'n' goldy sow" (17). In the play's glossary, Nowra translates this as "born of a past that included both prisoners who remembered cat-o-nine-tails and the rack and the fertile gold mines" (81), an allusion to their now opaque collective memories of the punitive violence of convict life. Yet Nowra intentionally deviates from the lost tribe trope by positioning his rural inbred kin group as in many ways enlightened, at least as they stand in contrast with the play's Hobart elites. On first meeting the tribe, the initial impulse of Peter's wealthy psychologist father, William Archer, is to study them. He diagnoses the group as descendants of "'ex-convicts, escaped convicts, failed colonists, general scum…criminals, retards, the lost, the desperate,'" and then flippantly adds: "'what we have before us is the true Australian culture'" (39). While this comment begins as a joke, William and later Francis are gradually moved by the deep love and affection shared between members of the tribe, emotional connections which they find to be lacking in their own lives. The intensity of the tribe's kinship bonds leads both interloping men to question their initial assumption of the tribe's cultural inferiority.

Nowra roots their ensuing existential crisis in his stated belief that mainstream white Australian identity is a "void." The play opens with Peter's parents, Elizabeth and William,

performing Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* as a fundraiser for a school for the blind. They stage the play before a "*small, crumbling Greek Temple*" in their garden (5). Elizabeth later explains to a visitor that:

> It was built way back in eighteen forty—only Australians could say 'way back in eighteen forty'—by my grandfather. He loved Greece, Greek culture; a family trait. So he built this little Olympus…the architect, an ex-convict, unfortunately used poor materials. It took the Parthenon two thousand years to crumble; it took our temple less than a hundred…Years ago, William and I could have said those speeches in ancient Greek and most of the audience would have understood; many of them were academics and artists, of course. That was our greatest period of civilization. From then on it's been all downhill. Romans conquered the world and Mussolini takes years to conquer a few Ethiopian hill tribes. (37)

The cold intellectual elitism of Elizabeth's despondent monologue hints at how the choice of this particular Greek tragi-comedy for *The Golden Age*'s play within a play is not coincidental. [160] In *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris: A Cultural History of Euripides' Black Sea Tragedy* (2013), Edith Hall contends that the play "is very nearly a definitive text in the archive of colonial literature" (344). *Iphigenia in Tauris* reflects the Athenian belief that the Taurians, an ancient civilization of the Crimean Peninsula, were barbarians. Hall notes that:

> The individual Taurian characters…are little more than ventriloquised, animated puppets designed to make the Greeks' intelligence and emotional range appear to the best advantage. Very little effort has been put into inventing a semblance of an authentic subjectivity or interiority, into imagining events from their perspective, or into seeing them as fully formed individuals with families and pasts. (345)

Hall contrasts this with *The Golden Age*, which she calls an "extremely important response to *IT*" for its recasting of its own parallel "strange people" as "the tragic heroes" in

[160] The choice to associate the Archers with "Greeks" is given an additional strange layer by the history of Greek immigration to Australia, which began in the late nineteenth century and increased after World War II. However, Greek immigration was restricted until 1952, when Greece was released from the list of nations on the 1901 *Immigration Restriction Act*, known colloquially at the "White Australia Policy." Between 1953 and 1956, 29,344 Greek migrants entered the country (Kefallinos 238). Greek immigrants were held to strict standards of assimilation and often faced discrimination.

contrast to the moral and cultural impoverishment of its would-be Greeks (362). Gerry Turcotte performs a similar interpretation of the play's use of metadrama in "'The Circle Is Burst': Eschatological Discourse in Louis Nowra's *Sunrise* and *The Golden Age*" (1987). Turcotte identifies Nowra's thesis as "The old 'magnificent' traditions are dead or are in decay…Iphigenia and Orestes return to a crumbling empire, and their combined voices cannot spark the 'renewal of our breed'" (72). Turcotte refers to the plays' "philosophy of the end of things" that "can suggest no alternative" as quintessential "'Apocalypse Nowra'" (74).

The play's pessimism, self-conscious metatheatre, and constant mingling of high and low art would at first seem to signal that Nowra is adopting a postmodern style and perspective; yet on closer examination, the political core of Nowra's work defies such a categorization. *The Golden Age* is not an example of postmodern pastiche, but a sincere and fundamentally reactionary satire. In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Frederic Jameson defined pastiche as "the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse" (17). *The Golden Age*'s Hobartians are themselves distinctly postmodern subjects: they self-consciously wear upper-class masks, playact humorlessly in a "dead language," and perform their assigned societal roles with a dullness that calls attention to their fundamental absurdity. Elizabeth and William engage infrequently with each other; what conversations they have are often exchanges about surface signifiers, such as when they repeatedly question Francis as to why he is not wearing "tennis whites" while playing (7).

The Archers accept life with an internal "void," an absence of cultural vitality and erotic passion. The recurring symbol of the Archers' crumbling Greek temple reminds the

audience of the inevitable decay of a society that has abandoned its sense of identity. Nowra himself has diagnosed this void as a byproduct of the violence of settler colonialism. Nevertheless, Nowra claims that the void can be filled: the settler can "make amends," become "part of that landscape" and "understand the land" of settlement, if only he adopts the Aboriginal Australian "vision." Such a perspective, while seemingly critical of colonialism, reveals the disturbing logic at the heart of *The Golden Age*. In order to have any chance of surviving a crisis of its grand narratives of meaning, settler society must consume the kinship structures and uninhibited sexual energy of the hillbilly, that figure who, in the wake of an imagined total genocide, now embodies these desirable traits of indigeneity in the settler mind.

It is Francis, a young engineer from the "slums" (11) of Melbourne, whose journey exemplifies this cannibalistic strategy. Francis at first views the Archers as his role models. He aspires to marry a wealthy girl and have a successful career, often espousing his belief in the value of the material development of civilization over the frivolity of art. Aware of Francis' capitalist ambitions, Peter, who will later become his friend's rigidly bourgeois foil, wryly comments as they are bushwalking that "Once you conquered this region I'm sure you'd find huge mineral deposits" (9). Much like John Fox Jr.'s entrepreneurial protagonist and author surrogate John Hale of *Lonesome Pine*, Francis is enchanted by the charming idiosyncrasy of the lost tribe's hillbillies. The would be capitalist climber is especially taken with Betsheb, the attractive young woman who first leads them to the tribe. The couple's relationship forms a large part of *The Golden Age*'s narrative arc, and it is why Nowra refers to the play in his preface as fundamentally "a love story" (xii). Despite Nowra's emphasis on their romance, Francis and Betsheb are separated for most of *The Golden Age* while Francis

serves in World War II. His experience as a soldier brings on a crisis during which he loses his sense of meaning and purpose. As he explains to Peter, he stops sending letters to Betsheb because:

> What could I write to her about? How could I describe what I was seeing? Civilizations perfecting death. Bombs, fighter planes, slaughtered soldiers, extermination camps, rape, bloodlust. I couldn't pretend the war would end and I would return because every morning I thought I would die that day. I couldn't write any more gentle letters because I have nothing of that left inside me anymore… It's as if this century has imagined a monster, concocted it from the deepest underworld of its brain and now it has escaped and is devouring everything. Nothing makes sense. (72-73)

Francis' personal breakdown, defined by his feeling that "nothing makes sense," is implied to mirror the perspective of Australia as a whole in the wake of World War II. While Peter encourages his friend to attempt to forget his experience of war and accept his lack of control in an inevitably chaotic word, Francis refuses to abandon his search for a greater purpose, which he believes only Betsheb can provide.

Betsheb has as an equal need for Francis, although for biological rather than metaphysical reasons. Betsheb is the only member of the lost tribe whose potential fertility is never questioned. Unfortunately for her, the sole remaining young man in the tribe, Mac, has a genital difference that, despite Betsheb's repeated, aggressive attempts to seduce him, prevents him from having penetrative sex. The final child the group is able to bear, Stef, is described as "*autistic*" (22). The stage directions note "*it is hard to tell his exact age because his behaviour is so infantile. His limbs seem spastic. His gaze is distant*" (13). Betsheb, while occasionally physically abusive toward him, dotes on Stef, caring for him in the place of his intellectually disabled mother. Stef's disabilities are showcased as comic relief in various moments of the play when he disrupts the routines of the Archers after the tribe initially comes to live with the family.

It is Stef's unchecked physicality during a visit from George Ross, a member of Parliament, that leads to the institutionalization of the tribe at New Norfolk Asylum. After observing the inbred child, George explains to the Archers that:

> In Germany, Stef would have been put to death a long time ago. The basis of Nazism is that there is a pure Aryan race and it must be kept free from impure bloodlines or genetic faults… imagine the glee with which the Germans would greet the news that it only took three generations to result in someone like Stef. What a coup for Nazi propaganda. They would be proved right. (45)

George's statement that the tribe could be used to prove Nazi beliefs exposes a significant thematic paradox in the narrative. From one point of view, the tribe exists as a satire of the inbred grotesque, as the Hobartians' focus on the tribe's perceived deficits misdirects them from their positive qualities. Through this lens, the tribe's subsequent institutionalization, during which they slowly die off until only Betsheb remains, is understood to be a cruel injustice. William and Francis gradually come to appreciate the tribe's unique language and abilities, with William concluding that "their culture is more authentic than ours. We Australians have assumed the garb of a hand me down culture…For their appalling ignorance and pathetic beliefs, they at least have a real core" (57). In a brief moment while Francis' back is turned, Betsheb moves several objects using "*telekinesis*," an isolated instance of magical realism that introduces the possibility that the tribe may possess secret powers (35).

Betsheb's abilities are not further explored; instead, Nowra consistently redirects the audience's gaze to the tribe's grotesque physicality. They are described with animalistic language: "*stalking*" George (43), behaving "*like a dog*" (44), and urinating and defecating "*unselfconsciously*" (46) in front of others. The repeated focus on Mac's "malformed" (40) genitals concludes with a bloody scene in which, as a result of his shame at being unable to sire children for the tribe, he castrates himself. Queenie Ayre desperately attempts to relay

their history and culture to Betsheb in her final days in the Asylum, yet it is clear that with her death, the tribe will in large part lose the final remnants of their humanity: their identity and ability to communicate. William records and translates Queenie Ayre's last words, in which she mourns that their "dream time in the green stomach of heaven" ended after "something happened: there were hare lips, soft brains and children in pain. A darkness of sterile girls and boys. The circle is burst. Broken" (69).[161] Desperate to reproduce to continue the "circle" but without the biological ability, the tribe's collective reproductive future is doomed. Even as the narrative suggests that George's desire to institutionalize the tribe stems from an affinity to the Nazi beliefs he so vocally condemns, the foundation of the play itself relies on an implicit endorsement of eugenic thought. However much Nowra positions the tribe as sympathetic, they remain exemplary of the inbred grotesque, observed and analyzed through the eyes of protagonist Francis. Hall's comparison of the tribe to the Taurians of *Iphigenia in Taurus* is apt, but this likeness is far from subversive. As in the ancient Greek play, the tribe's appearance and behavior in contrast to that of the Hobartians emphasizes the latter's health, intelligence, and normative sexuality.

More than most contemporary iterations of the hillbilly, which tend to evade recognizing the figure's origins in settler imaginaries of Indigenous peoples, *The Golden Age* is explicit in the linkage between its white "lost tribe" and Aboriginal Tasmanians. It is Elizabeth Archer who first makes this comparison, lamenting "What a pathetic group they

[161]Queenie Ayre's words recall the term "Dreamtime" coined by late nineteenth-century anthropologists to refer to Aboriginal Australian religious practices. "Dreamtime" and its correlate term "The Dreaming" have received criticism for their simplification of the complexity and multiplicity of Aboriginal belief systems. Nicholls, Christine J. "'Dreamtime' and 'The Dreaming'—An Introduction."

look, like those Aboriginals in shanty towns" (56). Peter later takes his mother's thought a step further, observing:

> They were pathetic remnants of what was probably an even more pathetic collection of people. They were like those Aboriginal tribes that withered away because their culture wasn't strong enough. It happens in nature, in human civilizations, one big animal swallows a little one. (78)

Far from endorsing this statement, the play challenges Peter's colonialist perspective on power. At the same time, Nowra can be read as using the cover of the lost tribe's whiteness to indulge freely in Aboriginal stereotypes and, ultimately, to endorse a settler policy of assimilation. While Nowra appears to position this mapping of the European imaginary of Indigeneity on to European bodies as a satire of said imaginary, dating back to Lubberland, this projection has been a fundamental aspect of the hillbilly figure. To state the obvious albeit often unremarked, by replacing Tasmanian Aboriginals with white characters, Nowra in fact further stages the erasure of the continued presence of Tasmanian Aboriginals.

Elizabeth and Peter call the tribe "pathetic," which, while framed as condescending, is an accurate reflection of these hillbillies' incessant pathos. The tribe's decline takes clear inspiration from a flawed but still largely prevalent historical narrative of the genocide of Aboriginal Tasmanian people. The tribe's relocation to New Norfolk Asylum operates as an allegory for the forced removal of Aboriginal Tasmanian people to the Bass Strait Islands in 1830. The character George Ross shares a first name and the first two letters of his surname with George Augustus Robinson, the English preacher who facilitated this displacement. The small Aboriginal Tasmanian community on the Bass Strait Islands was subject to poor conditions and increased exposure to nonnative diseases, leading to a population decline that was celebratorily mourned in the media. Following this group's second removal to Oyster

Bay, one 1861 account of the displaced Aboriginal Tasmanian group, published in *The Times* of London and titled "Decay of Race," claimed that there were now only:

> 14 persons, all adults, aboriginals of Tasmania, who are the sole surviving remnant of ten tribes. Nine of these persons are women and five are men. There are among them four married couples, and four of the men and five of the women are under 45 years of age, but no children have been born to them for years. It is considered difficult to account for this...Besides these 14 persons there is a native woman who is married to a white man, and who has a son, a fine healthy-looking child...[162]

This description of a "fine healthy-looking child" born to an interracial union, contrasted with the reported infertility of the rest of the Aboriginal Tasmanian community, provides an early glimpse into what would soon become the official colonial policy: assimilation paired with the spread of an "extinction" narrative.

This strategy relied on propaganda such as the widely circulated false history of Truganini, an Aboriginal Tasmanian woman to whom Betsheb, as the final surviving member of her group, can be read as a clear parallel. Truganini was widely, and incorrectly, recorded as the final native speaker of Nuenonne—the Bruny Island Tasmanian language—and the last person of solely Aboriginal Tasmanian descent. Following her death in 1876, Truganini was elevated to mythic status; biographer Cassandra Pybus recounts how, "like all Tasmanian schoolchildren," she was first introduced to Truganini through "the mawkish tale of the lonely old woman in the black dress and the shell necklace who was 'the last Tasmanian.'"[163] The international dissemination of Truganini as a symbol of the Tasmanian genocide obscured the continued presence of an Aboriginal Tasmanian community on Cape Barren Island. The success of this "extinction" narrative allowed colonial officials in the late nineteenth through early twentieth century to quietly establish strategies of forced

[162] "Decay of Race," *The Times*, February 5, 1861.
[163] Cassandra Pybus, *Truganini: Journey Through the Apocalypse*, iii.

assimilation of members of the Cape Barren Reserve, who were classified as "half-caste" and therefor unprotected by laws governing Aboriginal Australian rights.[164] Such colonial policies included the passage of the *Cape Barren Island Reserve Act of 1912, which "*provided that unless the residents of the Island constructed dwellings and fenced and cultivated land they would lose their right to occupy that land" (Wilkie 1). Officials attempted to separate interracial Aboriginal Tasmanian children from their parents, but after this was prevented by a court order, they resorted to pushing an educational agenda in which children were "encouraged to leave the Island and the influence of their family once they had finished school" (Wilkie 1).

As in many if not most settler colonial locales, rhetoric of Indigenous people's innate tendency towards violence, particularly sexual violence, was in part used to justify this policy of assimilation. In the article "'Wanton With Plenty' Questioning Ethno-Historical Constructions of Sexual Savagery in Aboriginal Societies, 1788-1803" (2008), historian Shino Konishi writes that "within the European imagining of so-called savage societies, sex was conceived of as purely physical and instinctive, bereft of cultural significance, moral controls, and legal prescriptions. (363). Konishi argues that this early colonial imaginary of Aboriginal Australian sexuality continues to shape Australian public beliefs and government policy today. One of her key sources for this argument is Louis Nowra's high-profile 90-page essay, *Bad Dreaming: Aboriginal Men's Violence Against Women & Children* (2007). Before the publication of *Bad Dreaming*, Nowra had received significant praise for his plays featuring Aboriginal Australian characters, including *Capricornia* (1988) and *Radiance* (1993), the latter of which earned Nowra the Australian Literature Society's Gold Medal in

[164] Meredith Wilkie, "Chapter 6: Tasmania," *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, 1.

1994. In contrast, for *Bad Dreaming*, Nowra personally accepted the annual medal of the Bennelong Society, a now-dissolved right-wing thinktank that advocated for assimilation through the abolishment of Aboriginal land rights.[165]

*Bad Dreaming* opens with Nowra's account of his stay in a hospital in Alice Springs, a Central Australian town that has historically served as a regional hub for Aboriginal Australian communities.[166] Nowra claims that he met an Aboriginal man "who was quite proud that he had raped a thirteen year old girl" (1). He then compares this to similar stories he has either read or reports to have encountered, including an account of two Aboriginal men whom he writes told him they were purchasing toys with which to bribe a twelve-year-old girl to have sex with them. Front loaded on the back cover of this work, Nowra poses a question to his reader: is such "violent behavior a pathological extension of Aboriginal traditional customs" or "the failure of Governments at all levels to deal with the horrendous social and economic dysfunction of Aboriginal communities." While somewhat acknowledging the faults of policy makers, Nowra's ultimate thesis is that it is "traditional Aboriginal sexual practices," among which he lists incest and gang rape, that are the pre-colonial origins of an epidemic of sexual violence among Aboriginal Australians (27). Nowra accuses liberal Australian courts of leniency in their culturally-aware sentencing practices and criticizes academics like Elspeth Probyn for failing to protect abused Aboriginal children through their advocacy against family removal. The only solution to this intergenerational crisis, Nowra writes, is assimilation: "Indigenous communities have to recognise that it is impossible to hide from a globalised world behind an ossified sense of tradition. They have to realise they are part of Australian society as a whole" (30).

[165] "Recipients of the Bennelong Medal," Bennelong Society.
[166] "Aboriginal Culture," *Alice Springs Town Council*.

While left-wing Sydney publishing house Pluto Press gave *Bad Dreaming* an exceptionally short print run, Nowra's essay did not go unnoticed by Aboriginal Australian leaders and scholars. In the review "Turning Dreams into Nightmares and Nightmares into Dreams" (2008), Jiman and Bundjalong academic Judy Atkinson writes that *Bad Dreaming* "provides page after page of ethno-pornographic descriptions of sexualities, which felt, for me, like voyeurism" (4). Nowra himself cites Atkinson's vocal opposition to judges who rule that statutory rape is a protected part of traditional Aboriginal culture. However, Atkinson's critiques of the Australian justice system discuss how such rulings are rooted in "'bastardized and brutalized'" interpretations of Aboriginal culture that stem from the same larger historical demonization of traditional sexual practices that *Bad Dreaming* participates in.[167] Indigenous legal scholars Larissa Behrendt and Nicole Watson concur in their "A Response to Louis Nowra" (2008), further questioning why Nowra did not contact police after hearing a confession of child sexual abuse by a man in the process of visiting his hospitalized thirteen-year-old victim. All of these authors acknowledge the existence of abuse in Australian Aboriginal communities; however, unlike Nowra, they point to the influence of the legacy of colonial sexual violence, pointing out the ongoing work of Aboriginal Australian activists who have sought an end to this cycle.

Nowra identifies the Aboriginal family as the locus of violence which, as the essay's subtitle *Aboriginal Men's Violence Against Women & Children* suggests, he views as in part the result of the improper socialization of gender roles. While Nowra focuses primarily on what he contends are incorrect forms of Aboriginal masculinity, there is an implicit reproach of those same women and children for whom he purports to advocate. Nowra depicts victims'

[167] Sonia Shah, "Judge Rules Rape of Aboriginal Girl 'Traditional.'"

supposed silence as acceptance of a patriarchal status quo. As Behrendt and Watson write in response, this "assertion that Indigenous women exist only as men's insipid chattels is new to us" (46). Perhaps most telling is the immature, feminine hypersexuality that Nowra reads as accompanying this so-called culture of abuse. Nowra contends that "Aboriginal children know more about sexuality at a much younger age than their Western counterparts," a claim that his account of a twelve-year-old girl exchanging sex for toys is positioned to support (29). This eroticized contrast between overt sexuality and youthful innocence is a clear example of the settler incest fantasy. While Nowra argues that it is Aboriginal men who are allowed to violate taboos with impunity, as his respondents each point out, it is in fact white settler men who have historically been unconstrained and even encouraged by the state to commit sexual violence against Indigenous women. Such sanctioned rape is obscured through the characterization of its victims as eager, naïve, and pliable, in need of protection from their innately degraded, pre-contact culture.

In *The Golden Age*, Betsheb's characterization closely follows such conventions native to the settler incest fantasy. Betsheb's name appears to be a corruption of Bathsheba, the Old Testament victim-seductress. While Betsheb's name appears to be a corruption of Bathsheba, the Old Testament victim-seductress, Betsheb herself is similarly positioned as unaware temptress throughout Nowra's play. Often depicted publicly masturbating, Betsheb is stage directed in one of these auto-erotic episodes to "*feel…her breasts and stomach: like a child unaware of anyone else she enjoys the sensation of her own body*" (52). As her attempts to have sex with Mac, her relative, show, Betsheb is unconscious of the existence of the incest taboo. Betsheb's libidinal energy mesmerizes Francis, who, once they are alone, tells her "I don't even know if you're stupid or crazy or whatever…Don't run away…I can smell

my heart burning" (31). Francis interprets Betsheb's aura of unrepressed sexuality as consent, groping and kissing her "*roughly*" until she "*bites him on the lip*" (31). He responds in confusion: "I only wanted to kiss you…You do it with Mac, why not me?" (31). But Betsheb's protest soon turns to enthusiasm, as she "*crawls over to him, tongue flicking in and out like a lizard's. She kisses him on the mouth with her flickering tongue*" (33). Finally, in an episode that Nowra likens to "*an epileptic fit*" but which is undeniably orgasmic, Betsheb's "*body begins to tremble violently, as if possessed by involuntary muscle spasms. She lashes out and tears at her clothes. Her eyes roll, her body convulses*" (33). Following their encounter, Betsheb becomes inexplicably sexually loyal to Francis. At the asylum, she rejects the approaches of another patient, and insists on having Francis' letters home read aloud to her over and over. However, Betsheb once again unwittingly seduces another man, William Archer. William confesses to her "How I wanted to study you. To find out. I thought if I did discover everything, then I'd know. You know, of course, that this drunken old man loves you just as much as Francis does" (66). Once he realizes that Betsheb will not return his romantic overture, William "calmly slits his throat" (70). Following this blow to settler domesticity, Elizabeth sets fire to their home in order to cover up his suicide.

In addition to the Australian settler imaginary of Aboriginal people, Betsheb's character is clearly rooted in tropes traditionally applied to convict women. In *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia* (1997), Joy Damousi describes the nineteenth century imaginary of convict women as a "combination of fear, disgust and fascination" that was shaped by:

> understandings of colonial anthropology. The drugstore terms used to describe convict women were similar to those used to describe Aboriginal women: they were 'savage' and uncivilized. But unlike their Indigenous counterparts, who were perceived to be somehow naturally in this state, convict women had been

> dehumanized by being reduced to this condition of savagery...They represented the capacity within all of us for disintegration. (53)

Importantly, as Damousi's language denotes, unlike Aboriginal women, convict women were depicted as possessing the potential for not just disintegration, but reintegration. Many critics of the Van Diemonian convict system, especially members of the mid-nineteenth-century evangelical revival, believed that marriage was the only possible way to return convict women to the settler fold. This was an important goal in itself given the colony's low rates of legitimate births.[168] In 1832, British Army official and evangelist, John Henderson advocated for policies encouraging the marriage of convict women in his published journal, *Observations on the Colonies of New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land*. Henderson began by acknowledging that "An English female convict is, probably, the most thoroughly depraved of her sex to be found in any country" (16). Despairing at the limitations of corporal punishment for the fairer sex, Henderson concluded that only marriage, and the "protection of their husbands," could prevent convict women from becoming even further debased (19).

Betsheb herself is ultimately redeemed through her romantic relationship with Francis. This requires first the death of her entire family, themselves unsalvageably grotesque, and the success of the asylum's efforts to force her into a mold of conventional, docile femininity. It is only then that Francis can extend his own settler legitimacy to her, although not until after he contemplates killing her in what is framed as an act of mercy, going so far as to point a revolver at her head. The couple instead returns to settle the lost tribe's abandoned spot of wilderness. As Francis explains to a mystified Peter, "We are lost,

[168]Rebecca Kippen and Peter A. Gunn. "Convict Bastards, Common-Law Unions, and Shotgun Weddings: Premarital Conceptions and Ex-Nuptial Births in Nineteenth-Century Tasmania." 401.

rootless people: she isn't… she's all I've got to believe in" (79). It is not Betsheb herself who offers this hope to Francis, but her symbolic potential as mother and wife. While their future is left unclear, Francis' choice to return to the fundamentals of settler principles, the occupation of land and the investment in reproductive future, is framed as giving the plot satisfying closure.

*The Golden Age* was most recently staged by the Sydney Theatre Company in 2016. Aboriginal Yolngu actor Rarriwuy Hick was cast in the role of Betsheb. Echoing Turcotte's "'Apocalypse Nowra,'" the description of *The Golden Age* on the Sydney Theatre Company's official website introduces the play with the line "Our own heart of darkness."[169] In an interview with *The Sydney Morning Herald*, director Kip Williams claims that the play is more timely than ever, citing "the questions it raises about where we are at today, questions about otherness and inclusion, the questions that are very alive in our national debate at the moment and alive in quite a dangerous way."[170] Williams is correct about the play's continuing relevance, although the answers *The Golden Age* offers to such questions are not as egalitarian as he believes. Both Nowra and McCarthy's hillbillies, superficially charming as they may be, reinforce a settler status quo that their creators perceive to be in jeopardy. While their innate biological and sexual corruption means that they themselves will never live up to their normative aspirations, these hillbillies serve as inspiration for a return to conservative gender roles, patriarchal values, and above all, investment in the collective settler reproductive future.

It is important to note that McCarthy's *Outer Dark* and Nowra's *The Golden Age* each take place in post-apocalyptic worlds in which the authority of the state is imagined to be in

[169] "The Golden Age," Sydney Theatre Company.
[170]Elissa Blake, "Lost tribe of Nowra's Golden Age make timely return."

peril. Thomas B. Byers, in "The Walking Dad: Masochism, Martyrdom, and Apocalyptic Longing in White Patriarchy's Current Crisis," contends such settings play into a fantasy of return to traditional masculinity. Using McCarthy's cannibal-haunted dystopian novel *The Road* (2006) as illustration, Byers writes that such apocalyptic imaginaries are "brutal and unhappy. But [these] are worlds in which the patriarch's life is anything but redundant: it has the greatest possible meaning…no other subject position has as much power as the white male father, and no one but his son has as much importance" (16). Each son to follow must carry on infinitely into the *terra nullius*, a bleak, always yet-to-be settled horizon where the next generation is the colony's only hope.

If the normative settler Child is tasked to continue forever pursuing his reproductive future, what of the inbred Child? If the tragic outcomes of Rinthy and Culla's infant and *The Golden Age*'s Stef are examples, it would seem the inbred Child is unlikely to live long enough to pursue such biological aspirations. Yet if the inbred grotesque's longevity throughout high and low art proves anything, it is that, despite such rhetorical mortality rates, the inbred Child always somehow manages to keep pace with and even thrive by threatening to overtake the reproduction of normative settlers. This fear fuels a pop culture belief in the hillbilly's irrepressible, infectious fertility and their consequent need to provide for the hungers of their ever-expanding kin. This depiction of the inbred grotesque would inspirate a new generation of creators who took an altogether different approach to the figure than Nowra and McCarthy. Rather than partially redeeming their hillbillies by assigning them heteronormative settler traits and aspirations, these horror filmmakers of the 1970s birthed a new icon of the inbred grotesque that unapologetically embodied the trope at its most extreme: the killbilly.

## Chapter Four

### Killbilly Kinship: Neoliberalism, Horror Film, and the Inbred Cannibal Clan

> Now the whole body, or as many of them as could, went in, and were all so shocked at what they beheld that they were almost ready to sink into the earth. Legs, arms, thighs, hands and feet of men, women and children were hung up in rows, like dried beef. A great many limbs lay in pickle…Sawney's family at the time, besides him, consisted of his wife, eight sons, six daughters, eighteen grandsons, and fourteen granddaughters, who were all begotten in incest.
>
> Captain Charles Johnson, *A General History of the Lives, Murders, and Adventures of the Most Notorious Highwaymen* (1724)

At the turn of the eighteenth century, British broadside readers were treated to a sensational murder story: the tale of Sawney Bean, the Scottish Cannibal. While accounts of Sawney Bean's life and crimes differed significantly, most authors agreed that, sometime during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Sawney Bean was born outside of Edinburgh to a family of poor laborers. Disliking his parents' life of honest hard work, Sawney left for the remote west of Scotland, perhaps for the predominantly Gaelic-speaking region of Galloway, where he found a like-minded wife with whom he settled in a coastal cave.[171] The couple began to have children, and after years of isolation, these children had children with each other, until the Bean clan had expanded through incest to forty-eight people. To support his growing family, Sawney was alleged to have begun seizing travelers from nearby roads and, with archetypical cannibal relish, cooking and eating them. The Beans evaded capture for many years, terrorizing the region, until a would-be meal escaped their clutches and told authorities the location of their cave. The state then swiftly meted out justice: "The executioners cut off

[171]Sandy Hobbs and David Cornwell, "Sawney Bean, the Scottish Cannibal," 50.

the men's penises, then removed their arms and legs. They were left to bleed to death. They forced the female family members to watch and then they burned them at the stake."[172]

The origins of the Sawney Bean story are, to no surprise, unlikely to have footing in reality. Rumors of Scottish cannibalism dated back to at least the fourteenth century, when according to legend a Bean-like character named Christie Cleek killed and ate women and children during a famine that followed the invasion of Edward III's armies. According to historians Sandy Hobbs and David Cornwell, "the best hypothesis on current information is that the [Bean] story was written for the commercial book or chapbook market by someone with no particular knowledge of Scotland but who perhaps had access to some Scottish histories" (50).[173] Taking inspiration from this account, other writers created their own versions of this first Sawney Bean tale, adjusting aspects of it to fit their needs, until eventually the narrative's origins were lost. The one constant across these different versions, Sawney's given name, is Stuart-era derogatory shorthand for a Scottish man, and thus hints at the character's post-Elizabethan fictional pedigree. As Julie Gammon writes in "Retelling the Legend of Sawney Bean: Cannibalism in Eighteenth-Century England" (2019), the Sawney Bean story's fluid nature illustrates the historical malleability of the cannibalism trope. In addition to showing their general lack of "restraint and civility," the Bean family's cannibalism could be employed to magnify their gendered disorder, unruly sexuality, and even "excessive greed," an increasing concern given the rapid economic development of British society (137).

Above all, the eighteenth-century British surge of public interest in such cannibal tales was linked to the expansion of colonial empire. While the characterization of

[172]Julie Gammon, "Retelling the Legend of Sawney Bean: Cannibalism in Eighteenth-Century England," 136.
[173]"The Scots cannibal clans," 1.

Indigenous populations as cannibal had long been a part of civilizing rhetoric, Sawney Bean illustrates that such anthropophagous projections had a tendency to return back, all too close to home.[174] This trend is reflected as early as 1580 in Michel de Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals." Adopting a perspective of cultural relativism, Montaigne writes that the European perception of the Brazilian Tupinambá people's reputed cannibalistic rituals as a "barbarous horror" fails to comprehend two important points: that Tupinambá cannibalism honors the strength of their enemies, and that far greater cruelties are perpetuated regularly by purportedly civilized nations (7). Montaigne references not only Europeans' "treachery, disloyalty, tyranny, and cruelty" (8), but acts of survival cannibalism, such as when "our own ancestors—besieged by Caesar in the city Alexia, resolved to sustain the famine of the siege with the bodies of their old men, women, and other persons who were incapable of bearing arms" (7).

"Of Cannibals" has been credited as the origin of the "noble savage" trope, but there is another figure lurking within the essay's margins: the cannibal colonizer. the cannibal colonizer critiques the barbarity of Indigenous people while at the same time engaging in acts that exceed in violence any cultural traditions of those they oppress. Rather than a critique of settler colonialism's violence, this character, like Sawney, is imagined as a deviation from the norm, a citizen who irrationally turns against the empire. While comfortingly treated as a cave-dwelling outlier, the cannibal colonizer is a reflection of the widespread, if often-repressed, panic over the early failures of colonial settlement.

[174] According to Kevin J. Wetmore in *Eaters of the Dead: Myths and Realities of Cannibal Monsters*, the etymology of cannibal comes from "the Arawak word *caniba*, a corruption of *cariba*, a word they used to refer to themselves meaning 'the bold ones'." (178)

In Montaigne's lifetime, European colonies in the New World often collapsed as a result of conflict with Indigenous groups, slave uprisings, mutinies, and—of most interest here—famine. This last, most common cause of colonial failure commonly gave rise to rumors that desperate colonists had resorted to survival cannibalism. Following the 1563 collapse of France's Charlesfort settlement in present-day South Carolina, survivors reported that they had adopted the "law of the sea" and eaten one of their own on their return voyage.[175] Popular explanations for the 1585 disappearance of the Roanoke colony included speculation that another starving, predatory "lost colony" was responsible.[176] Perhaps most influentially, the Jamestown settlement was alleged to have turned to cannibalism during the "Starving Time" of 1609-1610, a rumor that a recent study of exhumed settler skeletons suggests was likely true.[177] Such early colonial failures were not limited to the Americas. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Australian settlements were affected by infrequent supply ships and the settlers' inability and reluctance to make use of native food resources. Two years into the development of the Sydney settlement, colonists came close to starvation as a result of their dependency on supplies from Britain.[178] In the first decade of the Van Diemonian prison colony, 1803 to 1813, food shortages forced authorities to supply convicts with guns and dogs to allow them to hunt for kangaroo in territory far removed from centralized control.[179] This necessary policy provided opportunities for escape to the island's first bushrangers, who would themselves be pursued by accusations, both true and untrue, of violent cannibal deeds.

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[175] René Laudonnière, *Three Voyages, 49.*
[176] Andrew Lawler, *The Secret Token: Myth, Obsession, and the Search for the Lost Colony of Roanoke*, 77.
[177] Elizabeth Landau, "Researchers: Jamestown settlers resorted to cannibalism."
[178] Jacquie Newling, "Phillip's Table: Food in the Early Sydney Settlement."
[179] James Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, 55.

In *Seasons of Misery: Catastrophe and Colonial Settlement in Early America* (2014), Kathleen Donegan documents that starvation was a common occurrence for early settlers and thus a significant aspect of the "acute bodily experiences and mental ruptures" through which "English settlers became colonial" (2). This brutal, formative reality of settlement did not fit with the positive narrative of colonization contained in charters, leading these grim settler failures to be largely concealed in the British media. Yet as the abundant rumors and ghost tales of lost colonies attest, the settler experience of starvation, and its most frightening consequence, cannibalism, was never fully repressed. According to Donegan, while "literature of European domination often forecloses textual traces of this instability" (32), the fears of settler failure are featured throughout Early Modern media, from popular broadsides to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611). The Puritan founders of a "city on a hill" had long feared their own sinful inverse; the spread of the Gothic genre to settler states provided an ideal vehicle for the expression of this anxiety. As Bernice Murphy writes, "the spectre of the colony that fails" remains "one of the most powerful anxieties in the American psyche and manifests itself time and again in the Rural Gothic" (*The Rural Gothic* 48). The cannibal colonizer operated as a monstrous foil to the correct settler, thereby serving as an early forerunner to the hillbilly.

The cannibal colonizer continues to haunt the American and Australian settler imaginaries in the present day. The shock value and versatility of cannibalism, which can operate as a metaphor for any act of sexual, economic, or social consumption, allowed the trope to continue to thrive in media long past the memories of the earliest settler fears of failure. As this chapter explores, in the late twentieth century, an atmosphere of social and economic uncertainty would lead horror filmmakers to increasingly focus on this gruesome

characteristic of the inbred grotesque in their hillbilly allegories. As my reading of the "killbilly" horror genre reveals, the primal terror of early colonial survival should be understood as still existing within mature, neoliberal settler states, continuing to feed an inherited sense of uncertainty and anxiety in the collective settler unconsciousness. Continuing in the vein of the earlier Rural Gothic novel, the archetypical "killbilly" film reassures its viewers that, despite threats from rural "Others," the underlying structure of society remains secure. At the same time, a smaller subset of these films would begin to approach the threatening spectre of the inbred grotesque in a way not previously seen before: these innovative works embraced the potential for social critique inherent in the very violation of taboo.

## From Cabins to Caves: The Inbred Cannibal Clans of *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977)

"My family's always been in meat."

Nubbins Slaughter, *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974)

Some 250 years after the advent of the Sawney Bean legend, budding horror filmmaker, Wes Craven, picked an account of the Bean clan off of a library shelf. Craven's excitement at the success of his debut feature *The Last House on the Left* (1972) was beginning to wear off, and the scare pioneer was searching for inspiration for his next endeavor. As he told the horror fan magazine *Fangoria* in a 2005 interview, Craven, on the advice of producer Peter Locke, wanted to set his next film in the spacious, unregulated desert outside Las Vegas:

> I went to the New York Public Library, went through their sociology division, just looking at crime books, and I found the story of the Sawney Bean family from the 1600s in Scotland. It was a family that had gone wild, ran around naked, and attacked wayfarers, people going between Glasgow—I believe—and London and pulling them off their horses and eating them and their horses. So people would go on this particular route and just be vanished, you know.[180]

Craven would use the Sawney Bean family as the template for the cannibal antagonists of his sophomore film and soon-to-be cult classic, *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977).

*The Hills Have Eyes* opens on the white suburban Carter family, who are traveling through rural Nevada en route to a vacation in Los Angeles. Inside their station wagon, which tows a small trailer, the Carters bicker continuously, and only sometimes good-naturedly. Despite the apocalyptic warnings of Fred, an elderly gas station attendant, to stay on the main road, patriarch Bob and matriarch Ethel eagerly drag their three young adult children, son-in-law, and infant granddaughter on a detour to visit an abandoned silver mine. As they pass near the Nellis Air Force Range, a low-flying aircraft startles Bob, who loses control of the car and drives off the road. The family ends up stranded in a hilly stretch of the Mojave Desert that had been used as a nuclear testing site. There they encounter another "nuclear" family: a mutant cannibal clan led by Jupiter, Fred's irradiated and giant prodigal son. Jupiter lives with his wife and four bloodthirsty progeny in a nearby cave, littered with the bones of past victims. The clan stalks the Carters, picking them off one by one until the few remaining family members are forced to use equally brutal tactics to kill their attackers.

*The Hills Have Eyes* was made with only $325,000.[181] While Craven credited European auteur directors like Luis Buñuel and François Truffaut as his primary influences, his style was clearly inspired by the work of other low-budget horror filmmakers of 1970s

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[180] Tony Timpone, "*Fangoria* Screamography: Wes Craven," 116.
[181] Thomas Hutson, *Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy—The Making of Wes Craven's A Nightmare on Elm Street*, 33.

America.[182] In particular, Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) shares key features with Craven's film. *Chain Saw* also opens with a road trip, although this time, the van is occupied by a group of five young hippies. The crucial family link remains, through bell-bottom wearing protagonist Sally Hardesty—who would join the ranks of the quintessential horror movie "Final Girls"—and her brother Franklin, a wheelchair user who is treated as a source of comic relief by the group. The siblings have planned this trip in part to visit their old family homestead. As the group drives along a deserted road in rural Texas, feverishly discussing their horoscopes, they pause to pick up a hitchhiker, Nubbins. Nubbins, whose name recalls a small forgotten lump or unwanted piece of bone or cartilage, is marked as dangerous by his port-wine stain and long lank hair. Nubbins quickly turns aggressive and attacks a squealing Franklin with a razor blade.

The hippies manage to eject him from the car and, low on fuel, stop at a nearby gas station and barbecue joint named "W.E. Slaughter." When the proprietor claims to be out of gas, the group proceeds to visit the nearby abandoned Hardesty house to search for fuel. It is then that the hippies realize they have stumbled into a trap: both Nubbins and the gas station proprietor are members of the inbred cannibal Slaughter family. Once employed by the local cattle slaughterhouse, the Slaughters now torture and eat passersby, recycling their various body parts for Ed Gein-style interior decorating.[183] The most emblematic figure of the Slaughter family is the nonverbal, physically imposing Leatherface, who is named for his signature human-skin mask. Wielding a chainsaw, Leatherface slashes the hippies and impales them on meat hooks until only Sally remains. After much screaming, multiple failed

[182] Christopher Sharrett, "Fairy Tales for the Apocalypse: Wes Craven on the Horror Film," 218.
[183] In future films in the franchise, the family name was changed from Slaughter to the slightly more subtle Sawyer.

getaway attempts, and one terrifying formal dinner with the Slaughters, Sally manages to escape in the back of a passing truck while Leatherface iconically waves his chainsaw in the air in frustration.

*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* is commonly considered a turning point in the development of slasher movies, constituting, in the words of one reviewer, "the *Gone with the Wind* of meat movies."[184] The film is also a classic of the "killbilly" horror genre. Since its creation during the post-World War II boom of grindhouse and drive-in theater, "killbilly" horror has been a mainstay of popular exploitation cinema. Exemplified by popular hits such as *Two Thousand Maniacs!* (1964) and *Deliverance* (1972), these films typically recycle a single plot line: a group of middle-class urban tourists are terrorized by the violent, degenerate residents of a rural, often Southern vacation locale. The killbilly is a murderous version of the hillbilly in whom the characteristics of the inbred grotesque are exaggerated to the furthest possible extreme. Killbilly sex is perverted to the point it is nearly unrecognizable as sexual coupling. Intellectually unintelligible and often nonverbal, these characters possess disabled and disfigured bodies, often altered heavily with prosthetics. Killbillies are always framed as being somehow outside of or even lacking the boundary lines of the human.

Beginning in the early 1970s, a significant, characteristically more graphic subgenre of killbilly film began to coalesce around the trope of the "inbred cannibal" clan. In such films, a killbilly family, usually led by its founding patriarch and conceived through sinister but opaque incestuous or other biologically non-normative relations, seeks not only to murder the bourgeois city slickers who are unfortunate enough to cross paths with them, but

[184] Lew Brighton, "Saturn in Retrograde; or, The Texas Jump Cut," 25.

also to eat them. This simple and effective horror plot line has been shared by dozens if not hundreds of films since its conception, a trend that, as we will see, continues to entertain audiences into the twenty-first century. Taken together, these two films, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, deserve primary credit for the creation and subsequent longevity of this modern iteration of the inbred grotesque. Both spawned large successful franchises, with thirteen films and $367 million worldwide box office gross total between them, as well as profitable spin-offs in the form of Halloween costumes, graphic novels, and video games.[185] With the notable exception of Jack Ketchum's splatterpunk "Dead River" novels, which also take direct inspiration from Sawney Bean, explorations of the contemporary inbred cannibal clan subgenre have taken place almost entirely on film. While always reliant on shocking visuals, the inbred grotesque's expansion to film had been historically limited, restrained by a studio system that understood the aesthetics' inherent violence and sexuality to be alienating to religious and rural audiences. In the mid-1960s, however, the end of the Hays code censorship and technological innovations led to an independent filmmaking boom that finally allowed the inbred grotesque to make its logical leap to the silver screen. The low-budget production design common among early inbred cannibal films ironically heightened a sense of gonzo realism for audiences, and this grainy, gritty quality is frequently mimicked by filmmakers working in the subgenre in the present.

The decentralization of power in Hollywood was not the only reason that the 1970s saw the inbred cannibal clan subgenre grow from nonexistent to a bumper crop of near instantaneous cult classics. Despite critics' accusations that such "torture porn" slasher flicks or, in the slang of the U.K. and Australia, "video nasties" were devoid of meaning, Hooper

[185] "Franchise: The Hills Have Eyes" and "Franchise: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," *Box Office Mojo by IMDBPro*.

and Craven positioned their killbillies as uniquely the products of their socio-economic moment. Both filmmakers feature gas stations as key locations in their opening sequences, a direct allusion to the early 1970s oil crisis.[186] Between September 1973 and January 1974, as a result of an OPEC embargo, the price of gas quadrupled from $2.90 to $11.65 a barrel.[187] Shortages resulted in peacetime rationing that included reduced heating oil deliveries, gasoline cuts, and a federal ban on outdoor holiday lights.[188] The OPEC embargo was additionally a major factor in the rise of "stagflation," a term coined by 1970s economists for the unprecedented simultaneous rise in prices and unemployment that occurred during the Nixon administration. These twin crises appeared to much of the American public to herald the end of the liberal movements of the late 1960s, with the previous optimistic attitude towards the country's future increasingly replaced by a reactionary atmosphere of fear and uncertainty.

Craven and Hooper's films are set in "killbillylands," rural spaces where the effects of a larger global economic crisis are concentrated. The warnings of gas station attendants, either kin to the killbillies or killbillies themselves, signpost the protagonists crossing into killbillyland. The prominence of the ominous border gas station trope in the subgenre could, in the manner of Leo Marx's "no shepherd, no pastoral," be summed up as "no gas station, no killbilly." These gas stations are themselves figured as profound sites of anxiety, both social and economic. As a rare place of intersection between mobile and immobile strangers, gas stations underscore the static lives of killbillies in contrast to the mobility of the protagonists. Craven at first conceived *Hills* as a:

[186]The original gas station used in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* has been preserved as tourist attraction and a "bed and barbecue." Rob Clark, "'The Texas Chain Saw Massacre' Reborn at Bastrop Gas Station."
[187] Michael Corbett, "Oil Shock of 1973–74."
[188] Edward Cowan, "Sunday Sales and Holiday Lights to Be Forbidden," 36.

> new version of *The Grapes of Wrath*. In that draft, people were leaving New York because of the really horrendous pollution… no one is allowed in California because it's one of the sunbelt states but everyone wants to go there because fuel prices are so high. So you have this middle-class family trying to sneak into California in their trailer via the desert and they're set upon by this tribe.[189]

Gas stations in killbilly films are always places of decay, where the corpses of cars are scattered among other piles of junk. As Bernice Murphy has argued, the "pack-rat sensibilities of the backwoods aggressor emphasizes the fact that mainstream American culture appears to find something inherently suspicious about the self-sufficiency of those who make their own belongings rather than buy mass-produced products in a store like 'normal' folks."[190] Such trash therefor contributes to a sense of capitalism in decline.

While the film's budget constrained this original vision of a fuel-crisis fueled dystopia, *Hills* retains a strong sense of dystopic upheaval and increasing crisis. Patriarch Bob reveals in a rant that contains both racial slurs and disparaging remarks about "hillbillies" that he has recently retired from a twenty-five-year career as "a cop in the worst goddamn precinct in Cleveland" (0:11:45). The Carter family view their vacation in Los Angeles, where youngest daughter Brenda hopes to see "movie stars and fancy cars," as a reprieve from their clear frustration with suburban life in Ohio (0:04:30). The Carters' distorted mirror image, the inbred cannibal clan, are similarly unhappy with their lot. The film opens with Ruby, Papa Jupiter's sympathetic, dirt-smudged but attractive daughter, attempting to barter with her grandfather Fred for food. When Ruby learns that Fred plans to leave the desert, she begs him to bring her with him, to which he responds that she could never "pass out there with the regular folk" (0:03:20).

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[189] Christopher Sharrett, "Fairy Tales for the Apocalypse: Wes Craven on the Horror Film," 226.
[190] Bernice Murphy, *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture: Backwoods Horror and Terror in the Wilderness*, 153.

Similarly, in *Chain Saw*, while the hippie protagonists appear liberated from economic cares, signs of crisis are all around them. In the film's opening road trip sequence, a radio announcer reads in the background that, among a long list of other global calamities, "Oil storage unites continue to burn out of control at the huge Texaco refinery near the Texas-Louisiana border" and "'Oil-rich regions…today erupted into violence" (0:03:30-0:05:40).[191] Once they reach the inevitable gas station, Sally and her friend Pam try and fail to coax that quintessential emblem of capitalism, a can of Coke, from a broke vending machine. This gas station is featured once again after Sally flees Leatherface and attempts to take shelter with its proprietor, the "Cook"—a mistake, since the Cook is revealed to be a senior member of the Slaughter family. After recapturing Sally and dumping her in a bag on the passenger seat of his truck, the Cook complains that he must return to the station "to lock up and get the lights. The cost of electricity is enough to drive a man out of business" (1:02:59).

The Slaughters have turned to cannibalism in the first place after the loss of their jobs in the local abattoir. According to Nubbins, the mechanization of cattle slaughter cost him his job as "the killer" (0:11:45). As Michael J. Goleman outlines in "Wave of Mutilation: The Cattle Mutilation Phenomenon of the 1970s," the cattle industry was particularly hard hit by stagflation and world food shortages in the early 1970s, with the price of feed increasing nearly twofold between late 1972 and early 1973 (401). The resulting rise in beef prices led to a consumer boycott and the eventual Nixon administration's price freeze that nearly ruined the cattle industry, an event dubbed "the Wreck" by cattle ranchers (402). As Goleman goes on to outline, in a gory cultural episode that echoes much of *Chain Saw*'s violence, this combination of pressures had culminated in a wave of reports of suspicious cattle deaths that

[191] While the actual embargo imposed by OPEC did not occur until October 1973, tensions were already in increasing by early 1973 as the script was being written (Lanza 55).

was subsequently dubbed the "cattle mutilation phenomenon" by the media. Ranchers claimed that their cows were dying under mysterious circumstances and, when found, had their ears, eyes, udders, anus, and sex organs excised with surgical precision (399). UFO sightings often accompanied these mutilations, leading to conspiracy theories that either aliens or the government were responsible for the bovine deaths.

Hooper spoke openly about the social issues at the heart of several of his films, including *Down Friday Street* (1966), his short documentary about gentrification in Austin, Texas. Hooper said his choice to begin *Chain Saw* with a fabricated "true story" disclaimer was a response to lies "by the government about things that were going on all over the world" in the early 1970s.[192] Hooper's hippie imaginary is notably post-Manson family; the filmmaker claimed to have been inspired by the surge in consumerist values that followed the decrease in alternative cultural movements. According to Joseph Lanza in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre: The Film That Terrified a Rattled Nation* (2019), Hooper found inspiration for the film not in a library, but in the "crowded hardware section of a Montgomery Ward" during the frantic Christmas shopping season of 1972. As Hooper noticed "a bunch of chain saws in an upright display, he fantasized about slicing and dicing his way through the consumer swarm. He repressed his dream of a yuletide bloodbath, but once he escaped the claustrophobic mall and settled back home, visions of chain saws whirred in his head, setting off a chain reaction of story ideas" (1). In contrast to Hooper, Craven personally denied that he consciously included political themes in his films. Nevertheless, Craven acknowledged that the Vietnam War had a significant influence on *The Hills Have Eyes*, a work in which the nuclear "promiscuity" of the military industrial complex is featured as the catalyst for the

[192] *Tobe Hooper Interview,* 00:01:35.

birth of the film's inbred cannibal clan.[193] The Carter family's car crash is also the fault of an irresponsibly low flying Air Force pilot.

The lightly veiled social commentary at the heart of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes* would soon take center stage in the critical conversations about these films. In 1979, academics Robin Wood and Richard Lippe organized a special retrospective, "The American Nightmare," at the Toronto International Film Festival. This event featured screenings of films and appearances by prominent horror filmmakers of the era, including Wes Craven and Tobe Hooper.[194] Wood conceived of the retrospective as a demonstration that the horror genre, much like the Gothic before it, should not be dismissed as empty thrills. To open the program notes, Wood penned his now-classic essay, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film" (1979). Here, Wood argued that:

> the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses: its reemergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, the 'happy ending' (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression. (113)

In his thesis, Wood hypothesized that bourgeois audiences recoiled from the horror genre because it critiqued their lifestyles and even the very foundation of American society: "the Family." The "Family" was singled out as the "unifying master-figure" at the murderous heart of modern horror film (121). Taking *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* as one of his key texts, Wood argued that "here, 'normality' is clearly represented by the quasi-liberated, permissive young…The monster is the family, one of the great composite monsters of the American cinema'" (126). For Wood, the recent cannibal trend in horror was a result of this taboo's ability to represent "the ultimate in possessiveness, hence the logical end of human

[193] George Lang, "Wes Craven and son revisit 'The Hills Have Eyes.'"
[194]Adam Lowenstein, *Horror Film and Otherness,* 19.

relations under capitalism…the [cannibal] family, after all, only carries to its logical conclusion the basic (though unstated) tenet of capitalism, that people have the right to the lives of other people" (127-128).

Wood's evaluation of horror films' active subversion of capitalism and the family would shape the direction of much of the criticism of the killbilly genre in the decades which followed. D.N. Rodowick applies Wood's thesis to *Hills* in his 1984 essay "The Enemy Within: The Economy of Violence in *The Hills Have Eyes*." Rodowick contends that Craven's movie presents "a vision of the future in which the promised land of modern capitalism is stripped of its tranquil veneer to reveal a wasteland exploited as the site of an absolute technological aggression" (349). For Rodowick, *Hills* exposes the "repressed" violence of the "bourgeois" family by slowly revealing the Carters' hidden capability to match or exceed the hostility of the mutants (347). In *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film* (1996), Tony Williams expands on Wood's argument by applying a psychoanalytical lens to the role of the family in 1970s horror films. Williams focuses in particular on depictions of familial violence that inbred cannibal clan films epitomize to argue that horror films demonstrate the process through which abuse is bolstered. As a result of psychotic submission to the pressures of capitalism, the father "may become a monster who sexually and violently dominates his family, compensating for his lack of ideologically defined capitalist success outside the home" (5). For Williams, figures like Jupiter and Cook are manifestations of this unsatisfied patriarch who punishes his children as an outlet for his social frustration.[195]

[195] While Jupiter, according to his own father Fred, "steals a whore nobody would miss" with whom he raises "a passel of wild kids" (0:31:50), the family tree in *Chain Saw* is less clear. Cook refers to Leatherface and Nubbins as his brothers but is noticeably older than them and treats them like children. In later iterations of the

While the reparative critical intervention into horror film initiated by Wood authorized the field of horror studies, like Gothic studies before it, to shed the label of "kid stuff," the prevailing notion of the genre as anti-establishment failed to register its strong conservative vein. The 1992 arrival of Carol Clover's influential *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* heralded a disruption in this academic narrative. In her introduction, Clover writes that she was compelled to publish far outside of her previous field, Icelandic Medieval sagas, after

> a friend dared me to go see *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*…Seeing *Texas* was a jolting experience for me in more ways than one. It jolted me into questioning for the first time the notion of the 'male gaze' and its assumption of masculine mastery. It also jolted me into wondering about the notion of 'exploitation' and the relation of that notion to film theory" (19).

Adopting a previously underutilized feminist studies approach to the horror genre, Clover analyzed the ways in which these films simultaneously subvert and affirm gender roles.

While *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* is best known for introducing the now ubiquitous term "Final Girl" into the horror lexicon, the less-cited third chapter, "Getting Even," explores the genre's tendency toward what Clover calls "urbanoia" (124). Clover sums up this suspicious impulse as "People from the city are people like us. People from the country…are people not like us" (124). According to Clover, in horror films' depictions of rural Others, there is an underlying "admission of urban crimes against the country (dammed rivers, stripped forests, dirt biked and snowmobiled wilderness, mercury filled lakes, irradiated rangeland) and by extension against those who have been economically dispossessed in the process" (134). Such horror films, particularly in their focus on the non-normative bodies of those affected by such "urban crimes," reflect forms of what Rob Nixon

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franchise, such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre 3D*, Cook is changed to Leather and Nubbins' father. Lanza raises the possibility that Cook might have fathered his own brothers with their mother (116).

has called “slow violence.” Clover’s revenge plot documents a response to what Nixon described as “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.”[196]

Yet in contrast to Wood, for Clover, such an “admission” of the economic and environmental exploitation of rural and poor communities does not amount to a critique of capitalism by filmmakers. Instead, as the settler Western genre was fading, urbanoid horror began its ascent as the “demonizing mechanism must begin by acknowledging that which must be overridden” (134). Clover reads urbanoid horror as borrowing extensively from the settler western in the contortions it takes to turn victim into victimizer. Building on her reading of the Final Girl as a stand-in for the assumed urban male viewer, Clover interprets the aggression of “rural Others” towards this figure as a reversal of guilty parties that obscures the reality of class and its power dynamics (134). Rural Others are typically unemployed, unmarried men, who engage in masculine-coded behaviors such as “fixing cars, loading guns, and skinning animals” (161). Yet, as Clover notes, these efforts “are also understood to be short-run and last-ditch skills employed in an equally short-run and last-ditch act of resistance… countrymen may be male, in other words, but they are symbolically feminized, and as any viewer of horror knows, where feminized males are, violent trouble is soon to follow” (162). These “restless natives” are always eventually defeated by the simultaneously masculinized Final Girl, who, having faced and finished off the feminized male victims of the poverty she has colluded in creating and maintaining, can guiltlessly return to her class comforts (164).

[196] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2.

If, as Clover argues, the rural Other/killbilly reflects capitalist violence back at the bourgeois class, these storylines are uniquely positioned to offer insight into the obscured reality of such violence. As an economic scapegoat, the killbilly embodies the brutality of extraction that is normally obscured in free-market capitalism. Not coincidentally, the upward trend in urbanoid horror occurred in tandem with an increasing embrace of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a notoriously slippery term to define; it is at once a set of concrete economic policy goals, a philosophical model of human behavior, and an assortment of cultural beliefs. After prefacing its definition with a history of the controversy over the term, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines neoliberalism as a:

> distinctive political theory. Neoliberalism holds that a society's political and economic institutions should be robustly liberal and capitalist, but supplemented by a constitutionally limited democracy and a modest welfare state. Neoliberals endorse liberal rights and the free-market economy to protect freedom and promote economic prosperity. Neoliberals are broadly democratic, but stress the limitations of democracy as much as its necessity. And while neoliberals typically think government should provide social insurance and public goods, they are skeptical of the regulatory state, extensive government spending, and government-led countercyclical policy.[197]

The neoliberal turn came in response to the perceived failures of neoclassical economic theory. Neoliberalism was marked by a defined shift in the methodologies of biopolitics as the relationship between "life" and the economy was destabilized. In "Surplus Life: Biopower and Neoliberalism" (2012), Craig Willse charts this rupture:

> In the context of a Keynesian political economy, the life of the national population is set to positively correlate with the life of the economy: both must grow for either one to grow. In post-Fordist, deregulated capitalism, the economy becomes divorced from labor; the abandonment of mass segments of the US population (through the dismantling of social welfare programs, increased privatization of healthcare, defunding of public education) is not only social, but, very literally, economic. The economy moves on without many of us. (5)

[197]Kevin Vallier, "Neoliberalism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

That the killbilly rocketed to popularity in this moment of increased "surplus life" is far from coincidental. These films of course feed on each other, but the hunger for them suggests that they are performing cultural work. The cannibal monsters of killbilly films are born and bred in the wake of inciting incidents that include industrial disasters, mining accidents, factory closings, and the precipitant end of welfare programs. Killbillies are not quite dead but are nearly zombies. They suffer the disabling and debilitating effects of the state's disregard for its increasing unusable surplus population. Neoliberal policy had rapidly increased the number of caesuras between those whom the state must "make live" and those pushed from sight to "let die," encompassing even portions of population categories which were historically among the most protected. When young professionals assume their roles as tourist victim, they look at the killbilly in fear. These errant privileged are not simply reacting in terror to the chainsaw in front of them; they are also experiencing the horror that the white working class of their settler nation, once yeoman farmers, have been degraded into the insatiable ranks of the killbilly.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, this fear of collapse was heightened by the publication of Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968). In this best-seller, Ehrlich advanced the theory that global overpopulation would soon lead to mass global starvation. The prologue of *The Population Bomb* begins by announcing the immanent apocalypse: "The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970's the world will undergo famines—hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now" (12). For the American public, who learned of the coming doomsday through Ehrlich's frequent talk show appearances, it seemed possible that even a wealthy nation like their own might

soon experience the type of inclusive mass starvation that had been unthinkable since the days of Jamestown.

There was an unstated question embedded in Ehrlich's predictions: What might America's poor resort to in order to survive? The killbilly, like the earlier hillbilly, rarely engages in paid labor, but in this iteration of the inbred grotesque, unemployment is not the result of inherent shiftlessness, but rather of the stark disappearance of jobs. At the same time, like their forerunners who found ways of subsisting in the backwoods, killbillies possess an entrepreneurial spirit brought on by the need to endure in environments that have been irradiated, clear cut, dammed, and mined. Killbillies frequently own small, struggling businesses such as the genre's archetypal gas stations. Such situations reflect a paradox of the genre: the killbilly is simultaneously anti-capitalist and, as Clover notes, imbued with a capacity for material exploitation that matches the extractive toxicity that has been directed against them. Hooper and Craven's inbred cannibals grotesquely mimic neoliberal subjects, perceiving themselves as only acting in the healthy spirit of free enterprise that their increasingly inhospitable economic atmosphere encourages. The killbilly spouts a bizarre but recognizable form of nationalist rhetoric that justifies their actions; they reference their "right" to kill intruders on their lands, their unfettered freedom, and their inherent superiority to outsiders. For such a bloody genre, killbilly murders are surprisingly impersonal. It is as if, rather than simply out competing their opponents in the private sector, killbillies take the economic metaphor of "eat or be eaten" literally.

The general absence of overt sexuality in inbred cannibal films, a genre which relies on the premise that killbillies engage in non-normative sex, is also a result of these clans' free-market orientation. Clover, observing this unexpected tendency in this otherwise graphic

genre, concluded that in these films, "violence and sex are not concomitants but alternatives…When Sally under torture calls out 'I'll do anything you want,' clearly with sexual intention, her assailants respond only by mimicking her in gross terms; she has profoundly misunderstood their psychology" (29). The killbilly's replacement of sex with the act of cannibalism, which has historically been used as metaphor for both non-normative sex and capitalist greed, queers the figure while at the same time assigning them blame for the obscured violence of the heterosexual settler family. For killbillies, the young, white women who enter their communities are not objects of lust but straightforward commodities, reduced to the value of their meat or reproductive capacity. In killbilly kinship, the reproductive labor of women is no longer imagined as natural and consensual but reframed as forcibly coerced. In one popular plot arc in the genre, an inbred cannibal clan seeks to kidnap women tourists when their community becomes collectively infertile after generations of inbreeding.[198] The womb that produces life in one moment is reduced to meat in the next. While, as critics like Wood, Rodowick, and Williams argue, this depiction of familial violence appears to offer a critique of oppressive kinship norms, it is the inbred cannibal clan who is found guilty of such coded heterosexual violence, not these films' normative middle-class tourist families. In this way, the killbilly operates as a blank slate onto whom the ugliness of settler reproductive futurism can be and is projected; this figure is at once familiar to the viewer and unrecognizably alien.

Sex, when it must occur, is work for killbillies. Their cannibalism is pleasure. Like the vampire, zombie, or werewolf, all of whom have received ample queer readings in recent decades, killbilly cannibalism is libidinal and pansexual in its desires and scope. In both *Hills*

[198] The films *Dying Breed* (2007) and *Bloodlines* (2008) are examples of this trope.

and *Chain Saw*, the camera lingers intimately on the family's feeding, focusing on the moment flesh meets killbilly mouths, filled with broken teeth. These scenes are orgiastic, focusing on the inbred cannibal clan's communal erotic experience in a way that takes the place of an overt depiction of incest and other non-normative sex acts. Killbilly anthropophagy is coded as penetrative through its focus on the ingestion of the Other, whose flesh permeates the open and vulnerable body of the cannibal. The killbillies' feasting operates as an effective parody of the Eucharist, in which the consumption of "body and blood" serve as a sacrament to unify the group as a collective. In *Hills*, Papa Jupiter's gleeful crucifixion of his fellow father Bob reinforces this religious element. Just as Montaigne imagined the Tupinambá people's consumption of their captured opponents to be a way of honoring them, Bob's crucifixion is at once torture and an act of reverence that elevates him to the level of a god.

The inbred cannibal clan's exuberant orality owes as much to the figure of the "clay eater" as it does to more famous anthropophagous monsters. Now mostly fallen out of use, clay eater is a pejorative term for poor rural whites that originated in the prevalence of geophagia in some regions of the Carolinas, Georgia and Alabama. Clay eating is a cultural practice in which an individual consumes kaolin, sometimes called "white clay" or "white dirt." People engaged in this form of pica (the eating of nonfood substances) report craving kaolin and often obtain it via friends or family members also practicing clay eating.[199] In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, clay eating was regarded as a significant public health issue by regional officials. As Matt Wray writes, "the act of eating dirt—of incorporating what does not belong into the physical body—was for many a powerfully symbolic

[199] R. Grigsby, "Clay Eating."

transgression of boundary lines, one that stigmatyped the entire region" (*Not Quite White* 40). This inherent "symbolic transgression" and the pleasure associated with clay eating progressively lead the practice to be understood as not only a health hazard but a moral problem. The hillbilly, always too close to their moist, muddy natural environments, was allowing it to quite literally enter and permeate their body. In his first book of nonfiction, *Some American People* (1935), Erskine Caldwell included clay eating in a paragraph otherwise devoted to describing the prurient sexual practices of the region, including incest. According to Caldwell, "Clay eaters may be identified by the color and texture of their skin, which looks and feels like putty" (261).

This description of clay eaters' deviant skin highlights how the killbillies' non-normative sexuality is understood as inextricably related to their aberrant physical forms, to consolidate a key premise of the inbred grotesque. As Jack Halberstam describes in "Parasites and Perverts: An Introduction to Gothic Monstrosity" (1995), skin was constantly under examination in nineteenth-century Gothic writing, and this epidermal fascination would continue into contemporary horror film. As Halberstam writes of skin:

> its color, its pallor, its shape, mean everything within a semiotic of monstrosity. Skin might be too tight (Frankenstein's creature), too dark (Hyde), too pale (Dracula), too superficial (Dorian Gray's canvas), too loose (Leatherface), or too sexed (Buffalo Bill). Skin houses the body, and it is figured in Gothic as the ultimate boundary, the material that divides the inside from the outside. (153)

As in case of the Tasmanian convict, whose history of sodomy could be read through his malformed anus, the killbilly's disrespect of the boundary between self and Other is written onto their pallid skin. In *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film* (2014), Xavier Aldana Reyes argues that grotesque bodies in the Gothic "produce fear through their interstitiality: they are scary because they either refuse absolute

human taxonomies or destabilize received notions of what constitutes a 'normal' or socially intelligible body" (5). In other words, such bodies breakdown the assumed somatic boundaries between self and Other on which settler subjecthood relies. According to Reyes, such corporeal transgression heightens "the readers'/viewers' awareness of their own bodies, particularly of their vulnerability and shared experience of projected pain through vicarious feelings" (2). Reyes concludes that such an empathic experience allows films like *Hills* and *Chain Saw* to penetrate the normative embodied subject.

Yet even as they feature graphic depictions of traumatized or decaying white bodies, these early killbilly films' uniform conclusions, in which the Final Girl defeats the inbred cannibal clan, echo the earliest colonial narratives of cannibalism. In his history of the cannibal narrative, *Eaters of the Dead: Myths and Realities of Cannibal Monsters* (2021), Kevin Wetmore writes that "cannibalism as described by colonialism…crafts a narrative of the colonizer as the one who cannot be eaten. Whereas the cannibal has successfully devoured others, the invader is the one who will not be consumed… the colonizer is subject, the cannibal is object" (181). The archetypic Final Girl is similarly positioned as subject: she is the one character who remains intact and impermeable. As viewers have seen, Final Girl is often contrasted with a sexualized female companion who dies early on tenderized by her moral flaw her violability satisfies a morality tale. The inbred cannibal clan, in contrast, is porous, penetrable, and as in Halberstam's description of Leatherface, "loose" with their bodily boundaries.

While all the varied differences in skin that Halberstam lists appear at times in the killbilly genre, albinism is the most recurrent trope. *Stick* (1985), *Cold Mountain* (2003), and *Albino Farm* (2009) all feature the albino killbilly as antagonist. Perhaps the most

recognizable albino killbilly is the "banjo boy" in poet James Dickey's novel *Deliverance* (1970), which was later adapted into the 1972 film of the same name. *Deliverance*'s four urban protagonists encounter the banjo boy, Lonnie, at a gas station while driving into the mountainous wilderness of northwest Georgia. In keeping with Clover's theory that killbilly media must first acknowledge environmental and economic exploitation of rural areas before engaging in its "demonizing mechanism," these tourists plan to go on a rafting trip before a local river valley is submerged to create a hydropower site. Lonnie, one of the first hillbillies whom they encounter on their trip is described as a young boy, mute and albino with "pink eyes like a white rabbit's" (65). While marked by the absence of pigmentation and verbiage, Lonnie reveals a savant-like ability on the banjo in a performance that would forever change the public perception of the classic bluegrass song "Dueling Banjos." A monstrous signifier, Lonnie's albinism and intellectual disability are both understood by the protagonists to be a recessive mutation caused by generations of incest. Lonnie possesses a too-white whiteness that paradoxically marks him as an outsider from settler society. The link between Lonnie's excessive whiteness and non-normative sexuality is confirmed in *Deliverance*'s most graphic and haunting scene, in which the protagonists Bobby and Ed are anally raped by two hillbilly men.[200]

This connection between sex and skin is on high display in both *Hills* and *Chain Saw*. The most memorable killbilly of *Hills* is Pluto, who, bedecked in a necklace of bones and a ragged fur vest, is prominently displayed on the film's poster. While killbilly films frequently

[200] This link between rural incest and skin color was also perpetuated by the story of the "Blue" Fugates, a family in Hazard, Kentucky who became famous in the nineteenth century for their blue-tinted skin. Hematologists who studied the family in the mid-twentieth-century diagnosed this unique skin color as a symptom of the recessive-inherited blood disease methemoglobinemia, which they concluded was the result of genetic isolation and inbreeding. Ben Cost, "Real-life 'Avatar' blue people existed–thanks to years of inbreeding," 1.

use cosmetic prosthetics to create the illusion of scars, burns, and congenital disorders, Pluto is portrayed by the actor Michael Berryman, who has a craniofacial difference. Berryman was born with a number of genetic conditions including hypohidrotic ectodermal dysplasia, and as a result has no hair, sweat glands, or fingernails. Berryman has stated that he believes his genetic conditions were the result of exposure to radiation, which is also the backstory of his character in *Hills*. [201] Pluto receives frequent close ups that linger on his skin, often abruptly switching between him and the terrified faces of the tourist victims to highlight their difference.

*Chain Saw*'s Leatherface is also an exemplar of these films' connections between skin and, in his case, a sexualized gender ambiguity. Leatherface's human-skin mask completely obscures his identity under the preserved trophy of an equally unidentifiable male or female victim's face. The underlying queerness of this mask is made explicit during *Chain Saw*'s infamous "dinner scene." The dinner, in which sole survivor Sally is made guest of honor, is largely shot from her point of view at the end of the table. The scene, featuring a human hip bone as centerpiece, plays out as a parodic counter-image of Norman Rockwell's *Freedom from Want* (1943). In the absence of women relatives, Leatherface takes it on himself to "be mother." He dons a wig and puts eyeshadow and blush on his already androgynous mask before serving up the flesh of his victims to his family and Final Girl as they sit formally at the dinner table. In a deleted scene, Leatherface's drag performance was further emphasized as he briefly leaves the table to apply more makeup and try on a different, blonde wig (Lanza

[201]"My father was a Navy surgeon, a brain surgeon, actually, and was deployed on a secret mission to Hiroshima after they dropped the bomb… Long story short, my father came home irradiated and when I was born the radiation he was exposed to caused my genetic birth defects." Stefani Bishop, "Michael Berryman—On Being a Reluctant Actor and Being on Set with Brandon Lee," 1.

117). This shift in gender extends even beyond the mere symbolic feminization that Clover reads as essential to the Rural Other to reinforce the sense of the killbilly as sexually receptive in a way that, via Bersani, is pathologically opposed to the masculine ideal.

Counterintuitively, Leatherface's large size also reinforces this sense that he incorrectly and excessively performs gender. Like "Devil" Judd Tolliver of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* and Gabbett of *For the Term of His Natural Life*, both Leatherface and Papa Jupiter are depicted as giants, oversized in a way that marks them as belonging to a violent, primordial past. As Susan Stewart writes, "The preindustrial giant is the giant of natural forces in all their tempestuousness… the giant is frequently seen as a devourer, and even, in the case of Cyclops, as a cannibal."[202] These figures' excessive size also marks all of these characters as outside the ideal of settler masculine subjecthood. In the field of fat and gender studies, weight is often read as disrupting the performance of whiteness and normative gender, masculinizing women and feminizing men in the cultural eye. While these figures are uniformly "strong," they are often depicted as too "soft" and physically awkward. To make this point, the camera lingers on Leatherface as he staggers behind his victims, always too slow to catch up with them; during the finale, he is knocked over and cuts open his own thigh with his chainsaw. In contrast, in each of these films, the Final Girls are notably thin and agile. In "Gendered Fat Bodies as Neoliberal Bodies" (2023), Hannele Harjunen argues that this paradigm of fatness has accelerated as a result of the spread of neoliberal thought. According to Harjunen:

> 'neoliberal norms' have come to govern the so-called intimate sphere, for example, how we eat, move, relax, and rest. Everything from diet and working out to sleep can be programmed, scheduled, counted, and quantified for the best (or most effective) possible result. Furthermore, the requirement to do so has become commonly adopted

[202]Susan Stewart, *On Longing : Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 86.

> and accepted; that is, it has become normalized in the present day, for example, in what is known as the wellness culture. (30-31)

Leatherface and Papa Jupiter's bulk is positioned as a stubborn rejection of such programming in favor of the libidinal excess of cannibalism that fuels their growth.

As the 1970s came to a close, the use of killbilly tropes appeared to be growing exponentially. The release of movies such as *Motel Hell* (1980), *Mother's Day* (1980), and *Just Before Dawn* (1981), each of which contains variations on the themes of rural incest and cannibalism, seemed to confirm the genre's future. Yet following the inauguration of Ronald Reagan in 1981, killbilly antagonists unexpectedly left theaters, even as the six-year period commonly cited as the Golden Age of "slasher" movies, 1978-1984, was only halfway through its run. "Reagonomics" solidified the status of neoliberal policies and further developed justifications such as "trickle-down" theory that obscured the country's rising levels of poverty and homelessness. Rather than facing the previously feared backlash from the working class, the American upper-middle class thrived amid tax breaks that allowed them to further self-isolate in suburban enclaves. This reality was reflected in slasher films of the mid to late 1980s, which took an abrupt turn away from their rural roots towards suburbia. The killer was no longer a killbilly but, as in the case of *Halloween*'s Michael Myers, *A Nightmare on Elm Street*'s Freddy Krueger, and *Friday the 13th*'s Jason Voorhees, the former middle-class boy next door. This trend in horror continued until the early 2000s when, seemingly out of thin air, the inbred cannibal clan experienced a resurgence that would expand the subgenre far beyond its previous reach.

**Wrong Turns: The Twenty-First Century Killbilly Revival**

> Y'all think us folk from the country's real funny-like, dontcha?

Captain Spaulding, *House of 1000 Corpses* (2003)

On September 11, 2001, director Eli Roth and his producers were set to audition actors for the role of sexy co-ed camper Marcy what would be Roth's debut feature, the killbilly film *Cabin Fever* (2002). They had selected a monologue in which Marcy compares the group's immanent death by killbilly as "like being on a plane, when you know it's gonna crash. Everybody around you is screaming 'We're going down! We're going down!' and all you want to do is grab the person next to you and fuck them, because you know you're going to be dead soon, anyway." As producers were unable to reach most of the actors to cancel the day's audition following news of the terrorist attacks, the auditions went ahead as planned, with Cerina Vincent cast in the role for her portrayal of the scene.[203] A year later, *Cabin Fever* premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival, where distribution rights were bought by Lionsgate for more than twice the movie's slim $1.5 million budget. The film would go on to gross $30.5 million worldwide, signaling the beginning of a global killbilly renaissance that would continue into the mid-2010s.[204]

While still characteristically low-budget, the films of the twenty-first century killbilly revival far exceeded the killbilly films of the 1970s in terms of cultural reach, profits, and depictions of sexuality and violence. From 1996 to 2007, horror films as a whole grew from a 1.70 to 7.16 percent share of the U.S. box office.[205] Filmmakers like Roth were influenced by the importation of New Extreme films from Europe, which in the early 2000s had provoked significant critical debate over their transgressive use of graphic imagery. New Extreme

[203] Jeremy Dick, "Eli Roth's 'Cabin Fever' Still Makes Our Skin Crawl."
[204] "Cabin Fever." *Box Office Mojo by IMDBPro*.
[205]Mark David Ryan, "Whither culture? Australian horror films and the limitations of cultural policy," 46.

pedigreed French filmmaker Alexandre Aja was recruited to direct the immensely commercially successful remake *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), which rendered the violence of the original *Hills* with a new level of brutal detail. Equally characteristic of killbilly revival films, the 2006 *Hills* also amplified the original film's underlying critique of the American military industrial complex. With a detail that Craven's budget precluded, Aja depicts the ravages of nuclear testing on the Nevada landscape, setting much of the film in bomb craters and an abandoned test village. Aja also characterizes his killbillies as especially patriotic; in one scene, the disabled boy "Big Brain" sings the national anthem while Carter son-in-law Doug stabs Pluto through the neck with an American flag.

As the remade *Hills* (2006) attests, the twenty-first century killbilly revival was clearly influenced by the aftermath of 9/11. In *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (2013), Jennifer Brown attributes horror filmmakers' renewed focus on the "'othering' of the Southern American" to "the guilt associated with unpopular, highly criticized wars in the Middle East, the shame associated with Abu Ghraib, and the embarrassment of having a globally mocked president" (142). Brown argues that this toxic combination led to "popular culture displaying a kind of liberal fascist revenge acted out upon the 'stupid hicks' who voted for Bush" (142). While there had always been a strong element of humor present in inbred cannibal films, many of the killbillies of the new millennium were more comic and arguably less frightening than their predecessors. In the original 1977 *Hills*, the cannibal family act strategically, collaborating to plan their attack on the Carters. Michael Berryman has said that he "made a point of making Pluto…quite cunning. When he's ransacking the trailer, I made sure to leave the soda can and apple but take the hatchet, ammunition and

things that he would actually use."[206] In the 2006 remake, *Hills*' killbillies are notably less organized, clumsier, and make more foolish choices that seem intended to elicit laughter from the audience. Pluto in particular, as portrayed in heavy prosthetics by Michael Bailey Smith, has a reduced affect in comparison to the emotional range of Berryman's performance. While these twenty-first century inbred cannibals were more violent than ever, they posed less of a believable threat to the protagonists of killbilly films, who themselves killed their attackers with an increasing brutality and enthusiasm that contained little of the characteristic shock and reticence of their 1970s analogues.

As these developments illustrate, in the original killbilly films, audience sympathy was not uniformly directed towards the tourist protagonists. While Hooper and Craven conformed to the conventional dichotomy of urban victim and rural villain, there is space in both *Chain Saw* and *Hills* devoted to developing the inbred cannibals as unique individuals. Their relationships to each other are also teased out at length, creating a recognizable portrait of a dysfunctional family. For the majority of films in the killbilly revival, this nuance was lost in favor of a singular alliance with and focus on the protagonists. These intensely urban victim-allied films necessitate their own designation, what I call the "Primary Strain" of twenty-first century killbilly films. Examples of the Primary Strain include the aforementioned *Cabin Fever* (2002) and *Hills* (2006) as well as the reboot *2001 Maniacs* (2005), *Blood Ranch* (2006), *Hatchet* (2006), *Hillside Cannibals* (2006), *Bloodlines* (2007), *Offspring* (2009), and *We Are What We Are* (2013). Primary Strain inbred cannibal films reduce the already simplistic plotlines of their 1970s forerunners to their most rudimentary parts. The heteronormative sexual appeal of these films' young victims is an increasing point

[206] Daniel Goodwin, "Michael Berryman Talks The Hills Have Eyes."

of focus that contrasts starkly with the characterization of their killbilly attackers, who exhibit more and more extreme forms of the inbred grotesque. In the Primary Strain, Final Girls and (previously unusual for the genre) their Final "Boy" partners typically survive unscathed, while the inbred cannibal clan is subjected to an escalating series of humiliating defeats.

The *Wrong Turn* franchise is useful as a formula making representative of the Primary Strain. While *Wrong Turn* (2003) was met with unfavorable reviews from critics, it recouped 2.9 times its budget at the box-office and was followed by five sequels as wells as a 2021 reboot.[207] In the original *Wrong Turn*, a group of millennial college students camping in Greenbrier County, West Virginia encounter three inbred cannibal locals: One Eye, Three Finger, and Saw Tooth, whose noms de guerre reflect their looks. The film's opening credits feature a flurry of killbilly clichés: missing person posters, human cells dividing, and a newspaper headline that reads "Facial Deformity Caused by Inbreeding" (0:03:30-0:04:00). In an allusion to *Chain Saw*, as the viewer is introduced to the tourists, a radio preacher can be heard on a car radio sermonizing that "when you plant seed into your own kin you anger God" (0:05:45).

In stark contrast to *Chain Saw*'s easy-going hippies, *Wrong Turn*'s yuppies reflect a shifting attitude towards labor and class. Medical student and Final Boy, Chris, joins the group after crashing his classic Mustang into their Range Rover. Chris' wrong turn is occasioned by distraction: he is running late to a job interview. *Wrong Turn* consistently asserts the tourists' class status through signifiers such as their cars, careers, and interest in outdoor sports such as hiking and mountain biking: the film opens as a killbilly murders a

[207] "Wrong Turn (2003)." *The Numbers*.

pair of rock climbers mid-climb. Meanwhile, as Chris stresses over his interview illustrates, these millennial students and career ladder climbers do not feel secure in their promised bourgeois futures. Their attempts to survive the inbred cannibal clan become a life and death metaphor for their attempts to compete on the job market. Breaking with the trope of fallen non-virgins dying first, it is the overly-relaxed stoner couple who are the killbillies' first victims; only go-getters Jessie and Chris are ultimately able to overcome the series of mental and physical challenges faced by the group. By vanquishing their killbilly foes, and simultaneously outcompeting their fellow millennials, this couple is elevated by earning their coveted place in the professional class.

Significantly, while inbred cannibal films of the 1970s were largely American productions, beginning in the mid-2000s and escalating into the 2010s, the subgenre became an increasingly global phenomenon. While the Scottish *Lord of Darkness* (2012), Slovenian *Killbillies* (2015), and Canadian *Butchers* (2020) exhibit key tropes of the subgenre, it was in Australia where the inbred cannibal clan formula, reformulated, took hold. Much as in the United States, the Australian horror film market had grown rapidly after the country's adoption of the R-rating in 1971. Over the following two decades, Australian horror film would experience what is commonly referred to as the "Ozploitation" explosion. The category of Ozploitation, or Australian exploitation, encompasses low-budget films from a variety of genres, including biker flicks, martial arts, sexploitation, and, of course, horror. Ozploitation horror, which often sought to appeal to an international audience, frequently relied on earlier Australian convict and hillbilly tropes. The popularity of Ozploitation led to the gradual development of a figure strikingly similar to the American killbilly, on display in the Ozploitation cult classics *Wake in Fright* (1971), *Mad Dog Morgan* (1976), and *Mad Max*

(1979). Yet with the notable exception of the made-for-TV cannibal killbilly movie *Night of Fear* (1973), the inbred cannibal subgenre was not embraced by twentieth-century Australian makers of horror films. This changed in the mid-2000s with the success of *Wolf Creek* (2005), which, with its profits of over $50 million AUD on a budget of $1.4 million AUD, earned the greenlight for similar projects. These films include *Storm Warning* (2007), *Prey* (2009), *100 Bloody Acres* (2012), *Charlie's Farm* (2014), and *Two Heads Creek* (2019). Steeped in incest and its close kin, cannibalism, this early twenty-first century outpouring predominantly conforms to the framework of American primary strain films.[208]

The Tasmanian-set *Dying Breed* (2008) illustrates how these films frequently draw on Australia's past for their killbilly imaginaries. *Dying Breed* imagines an alternate history in which Alexander Pearce, the infamous cannibal convict escapee, successfully avoids capture and goes on to sire children. As in the Sawney tale, these children go on to have children with each other, eventually populating a rural village in a remote western part of the island of Tasmania. The movie's protagonist is high-achieving zoologist Nina who, accompanied by her boyfriend and another young couple, visits the town in hopes of finding the supposedly extinct Tasmanian tiger. Years before, Nina's older sister had vanished while also searching for the tiger. As the viewer is introduced to the incestuous local townspeople, who are unfriendly and display a variety of deformities and disabilities, it becomes clear that her sister's disappearance was unlikely to have been an accident. In the words of one of Nina's co-travelers, this is "*Deliverance* country" (0:35:55). As in *Deliverance*, the local "Pieman" River has been dammed and the area is becoming increasingly economically depressed following the shutdown of local mines. The only remaining employer is, suspiciously, a meat

[208] Mark David Ryan, "Whither culture? Australian horror films and the limitations of cultural policy," 46.

pie factory. Meanwhile, a jobs' shortage is not the only problem facing the town: Pearce's descendants' gene pool has grown unsustainably small, and as Nina soon discovers, they plan to use her, like her sister before her, to "breed" the next generation (1:19:20). Curiously, in her attempts to find a tiger, whom she suspects will be inbred if it exists at all, Nina and her sister parallels the female eugenics researchers who came before them. Thereby, the killbillies' hostility towards Nina is coded as similar to the opposition to interloping eugenicists in the prior decades. In degenerative sum, the clan's defensive aggression confirms the viewers' understanding that Pearce's progeny grown to a town have become genetically depleted in ways that predispose them to violence.

While the majority of both American and Australian twenty-first century inbred cannibal clan films doubled down on the depictions of killbillies via increasingly extreme versions of the inbred grotesque, this Primary Strain was met with competition from a small subset of filmmakers who took a more critical and creative approach to the subgenre. The resulting films, which I refer to as the "Secondary Strain," were equally inspired by the inbred cannibal clans of the 1970s, but reimagined where an audience's allegiance could lie. These films turned the focus by reimagining where an audience's allegiance could lie. As a whole, these films are often referred to as "satires" of the subgenre, since like the Primary Strain, they focus heavily on the comic nature of their characters. However, this classification undercuts the ways in which these Secondary Strain films seek to reclaim and reenvision the subgenre that they satirize to the point of parody. In the Secondary Strain, killbillies are rendered not as mindless, cruel antagonists, but as rational, often highly knowledgeable individuals who cohabitate happily with their kin until a group of urban outsiders disrupts their lives.

Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chain Saw Massacre 2* (1986), one of the few inbred cannibal clan films produced in the wake of the early 1980s collapse of the subgenre, is perhaps the first of these Secondary Strain films. In *Chain Saw 2*, Hooper leaned further into the original film's strain of morbid humor by casting the victims of the opening scene as highly unlikeable wealthy teenage boys who drunkenly drive their Mercedes convertible through rural Texas, terrorizing other drivers and making prank calls on their car phone. By the time Leatherface arrives in a dilapidated pickup truck to terrorize the teens, the audience's sympathies have been completely reversed, and we root for him instead of his privileged victims. In the words of one contemporary critic, *Chain Saw 2* abandons the 1970s socio-political fears of its forerunner in favor of a "none-too-subtle" send-up of "several facets of '80s excess."[209] While many read the film as simply a satire of the subgenre that its forerunner had originated, in the first third of *Chain Saw 2* the killbillies are depicted with surprising sympathy and nuance. However, following its unorthodox opening, *Chain Saw 2* does pull back from a full allegiance with the Slaughters. In the film's next two acts, "Stretch," the punky radio DJ Final Girl, takes over as protagonist. Yet even after this shift, Stretch and Leatherface break formula to share a surprising intimate moment. As the two lock eyes as Leatherface rubs his chainsaw against her thigh, the phallic-coding of his weapon unusually explicit, Stretch asks "How good are you?", egging him on. Leatherface ultimately does not kill her (0:42:00-0:45:30).

While there were few occasions for the Secondary Strain to develop further in the fifteen years following the release of *Chain Saw 2*, filmmakers interested in exploring alternative visions of the inbred cannibal clan were quick to seize the opportunities provided

[209] Keith Phipps, "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2."

during the twenty-first century killbilly revival. In April 2003, less than a year after the premier of *Cabin Fever*, Rob Zombie, né Robert Bartleh Cummings, made his directorial debut with *House of 1000 Corpses*. As a musician, Zombie had already been experimenting with killbilly themes, as evidenced in the title of his horror-themed heavy metal album *Hellbilly Deluxe* (1998). *Corpses* is the first in what would become Rob Zombie's *Firefly* trilogy, which includes *The Devil's Rejects* (2005) and *3 From Hell* (2019). Revealing the influence of Hooper's *Chain Saw* films on Zombie, the trilogy is set in the mid to late 1970s and follows the titular Firefly family as they gleefully torture and murder their way across Texas. *Corpses* begins with the grainy image of a local television advertisement in which a large middle-aged man in faded clown make-up declaims in a thick Southern accent, "Howdy folks! Like blood, violence, and freaks of nature? Then come on down to Captain Spaulding's Museum of Monsters and Mad Men" (1:26-1:35). This TV barker is Captain Spaulding, one of the many adoptive kin of the Firefly family, a clan whose elaborately woven family tree rivals that of the Kallikaks or Jukes.[210] The Fireflys are participants in many interconnected illicit trades, from brothels to moonshine distilleries, and own the Museum of Monsters and Mad Men, a combination freak show, gas station, and fried chicken establishment in the fictional rural town of Ruggsville, Texas.

When the film's four yuppie tourists, reminiscent of *Chain Saw*'s more likeable hippies, arrive late at night while on a cross-country road trip, they quickly discover the real purpose of the museum: luring in victims for the family's annual murderous Halloween rituals. The Museum of Monsters and Mad Men is considerately designed to bring in out-of-towners who are themselves in search of the kind of carnivalesque spectacle that the Firefly

[210] *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (1912), Henry H. Goddard; *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity* (1877), Richard Louis Dugdale.

family desire to enact. As the two young couples poke fun at the museum, Captain Spaulding knowingly plays into their expectations. He confronts one of them, saying "Y'all think us folks from the country real funny like, don't you? Well saddle up the mule ma, slide me some grits, I'se got to get me some education. You asshole" (12:05-12:15). When he breaks into laughter, revealing this to be a joke, the tourists are delighted by the performance of rural hostility towards them. They have come in search of the thrill that comes with this expected conflict, one which frames them as the youthful, vigorous forces of progress pitted against envious, backwoods antagonists with violent backwards morality.

Captain Spaulding satisfies this desire, leading them on a tour of his museum, which features robotic replicas of the serial killers Albert Fish and Ed Gein.[211] He warns them that, "You are about to enter a world of darkness, a world where life and death are meaningless, and pain is God" (12:30-12:40). This may be read as invitation to participate in carnival. First defined by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, carnival is a term for a ritual in which the familiar and free interaction between unlikely people, often between classes, temporarily allows for a radical upset of hierarchies. The carnivalesque mode is often satirical, as it upends expectations and reframes what is assumed to be good as bad, bad as good, or even does away entirely with value systems. When the tourists agree to go on the Murder Ride, they do so because they have actively sought out the opportunity for a carnival centered around urban-rural class conflict. Because of this, the Firefly family understands these two couples to have consented to the bloodbath that ensues, referring to the tourists

[211] Ed Gein, who was also referenced earlier in the chapter as inspiration for *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, was a Wisconsin serial killer who was arrested in 1957 for killing two women. When police arrived at Gein's family farm, they reported to have found a "house of horrors" containing "household items, clothing, and masks" made from human remains that Gein had obtained through repeated grave robbings (Jenkins). Gein, who reportedly also used the house as a shrine to his dead mother, was also inspiration for Robert Bloch's 1959 novel *Psycho,* later adapted into the 1960 Hitchcock film of the same name. As the crossdressing scene at the end of *Psycho* illustrates, in popular culture, Gein was often depicted as having a non-normative sexuality and gender.

continuously as their partners, artistic muses, and children as they both terrorize and entertain them.

Throughout the film, the Fireflys knowingly perform the role of reactionary white rural hillbillies while simultaneously satirizing such tropes, a running joke that the tourists consistently fail to get. Following the genre's typical script, the Fireflys kidnap the tourists and engage in the expected verbal and physical abuse. During this predictable exchange, Otis Firefly, dressed in an American flag tank top, calls one tourist woman a "Malibu middle-class Barbie piece of shit" (42:00-42:30). The tank top and threat towards "coastal elites" gesture towards the kind of violent rurality that the tourists anticipate. However, Otis is not what he seems. The tank top also bears the words "Burn This Flag" and, when the tourists ask what he intends to do to them, he explains that he is an artist hoping to break his "dry spell" (44:10-15) by using their mangled bodies in his abstract performance art. Clothing is similarly used to show Captain Spaulding's awareness and rejection of killbilly clichés. When two police officers arrive at his museum in search of the missing tourists, he greets them while wearing a "Pigs is Beautiful" t-shirt with an image of a sharp-toothed pig wearing a police officer's cap. By highlighting the contradictions in the typical framing of these killbillies as both responsible for state violence and simultaneously—threateningly—anti-establishment, Zombie positions the Fireflys as intelligent critics of American politics and culture who refuse their assigned roles, subverting the centuries-long history of the hillbilly figure.

Rather than being figured as allies of the oppressive state, time and again the Firefly family distinguishes themselves as actively opposed to regulation. To understand why this is such an unusual and deliberate turn, which requires Jack Halberstam's concept of

metronormativity to make sense. Halberstam coined the metronormative in his *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* to refer to ways in which visible—"out"—queerness is figured as only possible through the migration to urban space. This normative "spatial narrative within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution, and secrecy" mirrors the larger narrative of regressive rurality that the tourists have been socialized to believe (Halberstam 36-37). Halberstam sees this dichotomy as exemplified by the case of Brandon Teena, the transman whose 1993 murder in Humboldt, Nebraska was the basis of the movie *Boys Don't Cry* (1999). For Halberstam, one of the problems at the root of metronormativity is the assumption of a clear-cut straight villain/queer victim dynamic. Not only does this reify a binary view of sexual orientation, but it also denies the existence of non-urban queer ways of living that cannot be fully understood using the cliché of the closet. The rural queer individual is reduced to a tragic, unrealized figure, subjected to overt violence at the hands of the prejudiced rural poor. Such violence, the metronormative archetype implies, could never happen in the more civilized world of the liberal media consumer who watches this dynamic play out on television.

Within the metronormative framework, queer identity is a manageable commodity that is permitted to reside within certain monitored urban areas and heavily policed outside of this limited space. The possibility of the rural nostalgia that exists among certain queer urbanites who have migrated to the city is forestalled by the threat of violence "back home." Ironically, even as the heterosexual urban dweller bemoans the existence of this rural violence, the threat of such eruption works to control queerness from overflowing into their own backyards. Non-normative gender and sexuality are figured as permittable, but only in

certain easily recognizable, binary identity forms. This ugly regulation is outsourced via media to rural lumpenproletariats. Considered from this perspective, films like *Boys Don't Cry*, while purportedly sympathetic tragedies, must be read as laden with hidden threats.

While the Firefly family may or may not consciously hold queer sexualities, they are certainly queer-coded. Their kinship structure is complex, but there are no clear erotic or romantic connections. Instead, the Fireflys share an exuberant, omnivorous sexuality that floats between family members regardless of gender or age. To the tourists' horror, they flirt and touch each other continuously in ways that strongly imply the presence of incest. The Firefly family also seems to have rejected a nuclear patriarchal structure. While, as in *Chain Saw*, someone called Grandpa lives in the attic, there is no man or indeed any character at the family's organizational center. It would be accurate to call this assemblage a "chosen family": a queer familial group formed purposefully along lines of common interest and excess of fellow-feeling rather than biology. The Fireflys' prioritize communal living, common purpose, and their shared bonds of affection. This vision of a rural chosen family threatens the metronormative narrative of rural queer isolation and backwoods violence. *House of 1000 Corpses*' two tourist couples are disturbed by this subversion of their expectations and try to ascertain what exactly the relationships among the Fireflys are. When they question Baby Firefly about whether she lives alone with her "brother," she answers abstractly "Nah, there's a bunch of us around somewhere" (24:20-30). In another *Chain Saw* allusion, family members begin appearing one-by-one for dinner with the tourists, who are treated to a suspiciously unidentifiable spread. As the Fireflys' biological relationships remain stubbornly unclear, the tourists become increasingly unsettled by the lack of a clear

biological story: a narrative of hierarchies that type the settler model of what is known as the nuclear family.

After dinner, the tourists are forced to don papier-mâché masks, with the women tourists wearing the faces of classic monsters and one of the male tourists wearing a made-up feminine face. As these masks illustrate, just as the Fireflys unsettle the notion of "family" to suit their needs, gender and sexuality are sites of play for them. Baby Firefly and Mother Firefly joyfully wield their performances of killbilly feminity and hypersexuality as weapons. While luring the tourists into a false sense of security, the Fireflys bring them to their make-shift theater to watch Baby Firefly perform in what is arguably a form of drag. Donning dramatic white pancake makeup and a long sparkling gown, she mimes along to Marilyn Monroe's voice singing "I Wanna Be Loved by You" from *Some Like It Hot* (1959). For the performance in the original film, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemon accompany Monroe on the bass and saxophone while dressed in drag. Baby Firefly's choice of sexual lure indicates that she is consciously putting on an over-the-top gendered performance. This harkens back to Otis' assertion that the chief Firefly concern is art. Once again, the tourists are being invited to participate in a kind of carnival, this time through a spectacle in which gender is consciously being performed by an artist whose own gender is essentially lost in the complex mirrored reflections of femininity that she has created. The women tourists are able to perceive the intentional irony in her drag performance and become frustrated with their partners, who seem to drop their fears about the Fireflys in the face of this saccharine spectacle of feminine sexuality. In the end, Baby Firefly's gender non-conformity appears via her apparent hyper-conformity. Her femininity is that of a drag artist, reveling in camp sexuality and desire as a way of at first drawing in and later adding to the horror of the men

in her audience. Contrary to their assumptions based on her performance, Baby Firefly has only murderous, not erotic, intentions towards the male tourists.

Captain Spaulding is also an ambiguous figure whose queerness is best understood through an inter-textual reading. His closest relationships seem to be with the other poor rural white men who frequent his museum. In the film's opening scene, he exchanges raucous jokes with one of them about an incident of anal masturbation gone awry. Their sexually charged camaraderie hints at a deeper erotic connection. While Spaulding's face of makeup, with prominent circles of blush, is one of the film's most noticeable signals of queerness, perhaps more significant are his knuckle tattoos, which read "LOVE" and "HATE." This bodily text is an allusion to Reverend Harry Powell, the similarly tattooed serial killer portrayed by Robert Mitchum in one of the first and most enduringly influential rural American thrillers, *Night of the Hunter* (1955), which was set in West Virginia in the 1930s. There, the misogynistic religious fanatic Powell marries a series of women and then murders them for their money.

Echoing others, film critic David Thomson reads Powell as a deliberately queer-coded villain. According to Thomson, director Charles Laughton:

> confessed to Mitchum his own homosexuality (he may not have needed to), and [I] wonder - hopefully, perhaps - whether he touched some such buried instinct in the frequently surly and very male Mitchum. One never knows, but I find it more likely that Mitchum - intrigued by the part and impressed by Laughton - offered something like a gay comic style in his Powell. In other words, is there something a little swish in this great performance, a gloss…? (21)

With this in mind, the finger tattoo allusion accomplishes two things: queer-coding Spaulding through a link to a similarly queer-coded character, and subsequently, anchoring this queerness as an essential part of the film's larger project of reimagining the killbilly film's roots. While Mitchum might capitalize on queerness to give a "gloss" to Powell, Sid Haig's

Spaulding is far from glossy. Instead, his overlapping roles as storyteller, antagonist, and rural queer "victim" serve to break up the rigid binaries of urban/rural and good settler/bad hillbilly, allowing for an interrogation of why killbilly film has capitalized on such dichotomies in the first place.

The Fireflys do not let the Final Girl live to pass on the story, but the message is clear: the killbilly may offer us a visionary alternative to a heteronormative white settler family structure that is more violent than any of the gory, joyful violence that the figure enacts. Zombie's reversal of the inbred grotesque's protagonists makes this irony profound and clear. Other films in the Secondary Strain similarly draw upon shifts in point of view to expose the hypocrisy of the killbilly genre. In *Tucker and Dale vs. Evil* (2010), good-natured hillbilly friends Tucker and Dale have their own vacation interrupted by a group of college students who mistake them for killbilly murderers. The prejudiced, media-mad students proceed to die one by one by misadventure as they attempt to rescue their "kidnapped" friend, who was in fact rescued by the pair after injuring herself. Less comically, *The Woman* (2011) and *Darlin'* (2019), sequels to the more conventional Primary Strain film *Offspring* (2009), focus on attempts to "civilize" female members of inbred cannibal clans. In these strange takes on the captivity narrative, the Woman and later her adopted inbred daughter Darlin' are subjected to torture and rape at the hands of lawyers, doctors, and religious authorities. Here, in a rare turn of the camera, killbilly women are imagined as victims of institutional violence as a result of their refusal to conform to normative femininity. The Woman and Darlin' each eventually have their revenge, turning on their abusers to bite a literal chunk out of the patriarchy.

Yet even as these Secondary Strain films attempt to liberate the killbilly, consciously positioning them as the challenger to state power that they are, scene by scene, it remains an open question whether such a figure can or should be fully reclaimed. In his 1955 book *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire writes that "colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism" (13). In settler narrative tradition, the cannibal colonizer and their close relative the killbilly are among the few figures that are allowed to fully reflect this brutality. As Ryan Lee Cartwright observes in *Peculiar Places: A Queer Crip History of Rural Nonconformity* (2021), when in the 1970's:

> Black film viewers enthusiastically embraced anti-idyllic horror films featuring poor rural white antagonists, they brought a different history to and way of looking at the films than white viewers did: for Black viewers, the banjo-picking 'mountain men; of *Deliverance* were menacing not because they evoked a failure to meet norms of white rustic virtue, but because they evoked the violent legacies of overseers and lynch mobs. (18)

While these films are aimed at a white urban audience, killbilly movies' graphic depiction of white violence and racism are not accompanied by explicit, exploitative scenes of Black and Indigenous suffering continues to be anomalous in film. In their exaggerated physical differences, killbillies can also be seen as embodying the alien-quality of the colonizer as a monstrous, unknown invader.

Killbilly cannibalism in particular echoes the symbolic and literal cannibalism that Orlando Patterson identifies in *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (1998) as key aspects of Postbellum Southern lynchings. Patterson describes how the actions and motivations of lynch mobs bore a strong similarity to other instances of ritualized human cannibalism. According to Patterson, lynchings were of a "gastronomic and religious nature," with the frequent burning of the victim's body allowing it to be consumed,

via smell, by the mob, who would subsequently engage in a group meal and take "souvenirs" of the event, from photographs to pieces of the victim's corpse (199). Secondary Strain films tend, like the genre as a whole, to take place in an imagined monoracial killbillyland. While occasional alliances with Black characters appear, these reclaimed killbilly protagonists retain little of the original rejection of interracial prohibitions in history that rendered the hillbilly a threat to settler whiteness.

In the present day, the hillbilly is more culturally relevant than ever. And, for the first time in their history, the figure is not for want of friends. In both Australia and the U.S., there exists an ongoing cultural and political debate over who is the rightful heir to the inheritance of our "contemporary ancestors." While such a legacy would at first glance seem less than desirable, these efforts to reclaim the figure reflect a renewed trend in the creation of narratives of white belonging, ownership, and even Indigeneity. Whether the hillbilly will be coopted by such conservative revisionist historians, becoming a persecuted hero and martyr to identity politics and government overreach, or whether they will instead be salvaged by the poor, rural queer communities that they once represented, remains to be seen.

## Epilogue

### What do Hillbillies Want?: Contemporary Politics of the Inbred Grotesque

> Don't you just hate 'em? Every gap-toothed, inbred, uncivilized, violent, and hopelessly DUMB one of 'em? Jesus, how can you *not* hate 'em? There's no class of people with less honor. Less dignity. No one more ignorant. More gullible. They're a primitive breed with prehistoric manners, unfit for anything beyond petty crime and random bloodletting. Their stunted, subhuman minds are mesmerized by cheap alcohol, Lotto fever, and the asinine superstitions of poor folks' religion. They stop beating their wives just long enough to let 'er squeeze out another deformed rug rat. They scatter their hand-me-down genes in a degenerative spiral of dysfunction. They breed anencephalic, mouth-breathing children. Vulgarians. All of them. Bottom feeders. They really bring down their race.
>
> Jim Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto: How Hillbillies, Hicks, and White Trash Became America's Scapegoats* (1998)

HillBilly Brand Raspberry Iced Tea, $19.95 USD per twelve-pack. Replica Cat O'Nine Tails with Fremantle Prison Branding, $11.00 AUD. Billy-Bob Handmade Hollywood Quality Hillbilly Teeth, $9.98 USD. Hand-Crafted Teddy Bear in Broad-Arrow Convict Uniform, Small $12 AUD, Large $16.50 AUD. Hillbilly Nutrition Grass-Fed Bone-In Ribeye, $30.00 for 1.1-1.2 lbs. Child Convict Outfit Set, Sizes 0-12, $46.95 AUD. With a quick search on Google Shopping, all manner of "white trash," "redneck," or "convict" themed merchandise can be purchased and shipped to your location in a few business days. While the global hillbilly has always been a subject of fun and profit, this now centuries-old figure is more than ever an economic dynamo. Of all the parallels between the hillbillies of Appalachia and Tasmania, perhaps none is more striking than how they have contributed to the tourist industries of both places. As of 2023, an estimated 37,300 Tasmanians, 12.1% of the workforce, are directly or indirectly employed

by tourism: the highest percentage of any state in Australia.[212] Among the island's most popular tourist attractions is the Port Arthur Historic Site, home to the ruins of the largest Tasmanian penal colony. Port Arthur saw a total of 388,196 visitors between June 30, 2018, and June 30, 2019. Visitors on average spent $42.48 AUD while visiting the site.[213]

In Appalachia, interstate development in the 1960s and 1970s led to the creation of popular venues like "Hillbilly Golf" and "Hillbilly Village" along the Blue Ridge Parkway. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, tourism in the region is a "nearly $60 billion per year industry, directly employing over 577,000 workers across the region while generating over $4.5 billion dollars in tax revenue. It ranks among the largest industries in each of the 13 states, and it is also one of the region's fastest growing employment sectors."[214] A 2008 study of visitors to the Great Smoky Mountain National Park showed that while natural beauty was the leading attraction for tourists, 64% of respondents reported heritage sites and 55% reported arts and crafts as among their primary reasons for travel to the region.[215]

In both Tasmania and Appalachia, local responses to the dominance of the tourism industry have been historically mixed. While the influx of visitor dollars arguably benefits residents, large corporations make up a significant share of these tourist economies. For instance, Dollywood, the theme park creation of beloved East Tennessee country musician Dolly Parton, has been the subject of controversy over its labor practices. Parton has claimed that she originally envisioned her theme park as a way of reliably employing the residents of her hometown of Sevierville. However, over the ensuing decades, Parton sold the majority of

[212] "Tasmanian Tourism Fast Facts," 1.
[213] "Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority Annual Report 2018-19," 8.
[214] "Extending Our Welcome: Trends and Strategies for Tourism in Appalachia," 38.
[215] "Extending Our Welcome: Trends and Strategies for Tourism in Appalachia," 51.

shares of her expanding park empire to international conglomerates. In 2018, Dollywood paid its primarily part-time and seasonal workers a starting wage of $9.25 an hour in an area where the cost of living has dramatically risen due to the influx of out-of-state visitors and retirees.[216] In both regions, efforts to increase tourism have also been accused of promoting harmful regional stereotypes. In 2020, the government-run organization Tourism Tasmania featured the slogan "We are all family here" in its promotional materials, an unintentional public stumble that was disparaged for evoking the incest stereotype.[217]

The prominent use of the extinct thylacine in tourist materials has also received criticism in recent years for advancing a mythology of the state's dangerous, "uncivilized" wilderness. As Stephanie Turner documents in her 2009 article "Negotiating Nostalgia: The Rhetoricity of Thylacine Representation in Tasmanian Tourism," although the last thylacine died in captivity in 1936, this former charismatic megafauna continues to function in effect as the island's "brand logo" (97). Tourist guides and tours that advance the possibility of glimpsing a "Tasmanian Tiger" shore up the international image of the island's violent Gothic character. Similarly, Dark Mofo, an annual winter cultural festival hosted by Hobart's private Museum of Old and New Art that creates a "pagan style ritual space" for visitors, has been critiqued for promoting a notion of the island as a violent, Gothicized location at the "end of the world."[218]

Yet the effects of tourism on regional identity are not clear cut. In a poll of Tasmanians who attended Dark Mofo, 79% responded that the festival had caused them to feel "'pride and ownership'" (Ryan 438). Similar feelings of increased pride were reported

[216] Jessica Wilkerson, "Living with Dolly Parton."
[217] Louise Ayling, "Tasmania is mocked over its new tourism slogan—which echoes an insulting stereotype about the island state."
[218]Louise Ryan, "Re-Branding Tasmania: MONA and the Altering of Local Reputation and Identity," 430, 442.

by community actors and local businesses in a study of the Crooked Road Trail, an Appalachian music heritage trail.[219] Across locations, it appears that this pride is correlated with a sense of control over the narrative presented to visitors. During Dark Mofo, local artists receive a platform and patronage that helps to supplement Hobart's galleries through slow periods during rest of the year. Southwest Virginia's Crooked Road Trail is known best for its small festivals and "wayside exhibits," two dozen small community-designed roadside kiosks that provide information about local history and culture. At the same time that tourism's use of regional tropes may be construed as damaging, communities referred to as "hillbilly" by outsiders have long endeavored to reappropriate the term as a positive label for rural culture. In "The Performing Hillbilly: Redeeming Acts of a Regional Stereotype" (2010), Mark Roberts calls this phenomenon of revisionary narration "*rehibillification*" (78). Roberts sees poor rural whites who identify with the hillbilly label as performing a "stereotypes [that] maybe seen as attempts to 'redeem' regional identity for the performers and regional tourists who consume it" (78). According to Roberts, this self-presentation can act "as a kind of guerrilla cultural warfare, where regional people utilize the enemy's weapons—in this case, hillbilly stereotypes—to combat, or reverse, identity attacks" (81). As an example, while the sale of hillbilly kitsch at rural gas stations throughout both Appalachia and Tasmania appears to play into stereotypes, through the lens of rehibillification, such items may be read as self-conscious anticipation and rebuttal of stereotypes— a nod to tourists that condescends to say "yes": we know what you think of us; what you are ready to buy into and reify; we know what you want.

[219] "Extending Our Welcome: Trends and Strategies for Tourism in Appalachia," 141.

While Roberts understands rehibillification as an act of resistance, in recent decades, public performances of hillbilly-ness have raised questions about who is entitled to "speak" as a hillbilly. In "The 'R' Word: What's So Funny (And Not So Funny) about *Redneck* Jokes" (2001), Kentucky author Anne Shelby traces how, in the 1990s, a wave of stand-up comedians including Larry the Cable Guy and Jeff Foxworthy rose to fame while self-identifying with stereotypes ascribed to the rural white poor. Shelby argues that these "redneck" comedians in fact took care to separate themselves from the "redneck" figures in their jokes, those "other" rednecks who are always worse off, more foolish, and more frightening. In Shelby's words, "the 'real hillbillies,' whoever and wherever they are, are hard to find. They're always over the hill somewhere, or on up the holler, one county over and one class down" (154). This identifying principle is similarly at work in what has undoubtedly been the most influential piece of hillbilly media of the first quarter of the twenty-first century: Ohioan lawyer, venture capitalist, and most recently politician J.D. Vance's "memoir of a family and culture in crisis": *Hillbilly Elegy*. With its well-timed publication in the summer of 2016, *Hillbilly Elegy* offered readers an explanation for why the white rural poor had apparently "voted against their interests" in electing Donald Trump. As a result, the book reached viral popularity with both liberal and conservative readerships. In her *New York Times* review, Jennifer Senior called Vance's bestseller as "a civilized reference guide for an uncivilized election … in a vocabulary intelligible to both Democrats and Republicans," while *Library Journal* described it as "heartbreaking and heartwarming…akin to investigative journalism," and the *Wall Street Journal* praised Vance's "cultural criticism."[220]

[220] "Critical Praise: Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis."

Throughout his *Elegy*, Vance asserts his personal hillbilly identity, attributing his struggles with imposter syndrome at Yale Law School to this background. Using his West Virginian grandmother as his primary example, Vance espouses what he sees as the virtue of hillbillies: the independence, sense of humor, and family values. At the same time, Vance takes care to separate himself from those "real hillbillies" who, lacking his grit and innate talent, will never escape their degrading circumstances. Like the dilapidated barn on *Elegy*'s cover, Vance sees the hillbilly as decaying from a kind of self-inflicted rot, aided and abetted by lax government social welfare policy. One of the book's most referenced passages is Vance's observations about food stamps recipients' purchasing habits. Vance, who worked as a grocery store cashier as a teen, recounts that "they'd ring up their orders separately, buying food with food stamps, and beer, wine, and cigarettes with cash. They'd regularly go through the checkout line speaking on their cell phones… those living off of government largesse enjoyed trinkets that I only dreamed about" (139). Noticeably, Vance portrays these food stamp recipients as using their extra funds to purchase pleasures that he implies contain some form of toxicity: beer, wine, cigarettes, soda and prepared meals. His "drug-addict neighbor" buys T-bone steaks, clogging the veins that he injects (140). Poor mothers buy baby formula, filling their infants with chemicals when, it is implied, they could breast-feed for free.

Through his depiction of Appalachian daily existence as a crisis in need of a solution, Vance, much like John Fox Jr. before him, was able to position himself in the role of capitalist savior. In January 2020, Vance founded the Columbus, Ohio based venture capital firm Narya. In its opening months, the firm raised $93 million, with the aim of targeting "underserved areas" (*Tech Crunch*). The firm's founding thesis is in line with the logic of *Hillbilly Elegy*, which portrays the government as failing to address the underperforming

Appalachian economy and even exacerbating it through aid programs that enable the hillbilly's degeneracy and cultural anachronisms. For Vance, only the free market can elevate hillbillies into the American mainstream and rid them of the toxins that he sees as leaving them on the verge of extinction.

Vance's eventual public embrace of far-right views in the run up to his 2022 election as U.S. Senator shocked the media, but this trajectory should have come as little surprise to any student of rehibillification politics. Eighteen years before Vance rose to fame, another James, the 'zine publisher and provocateur Jim Goad, received similar acclaim as a translator and defender of hillbillies for his book *The Redneck Manifesto: How Hillbillies, Hicks, and White Trash Became America's Scapegoats* (1998). Goad first received public notice in 1995 after a bookstore carrying the fourth issue of his *Answer Me!* magazine, the "Rape Issue," was charged with criminal pornography by a prosecutor in Washington state ("American Psycho" 102). After the bookstore was found innocent and awarded a $1.3 million settlement, Goad himself became a minor free speech celebrity and signed a deal with Simon & Schuster for $100,000.[221]

The product of this contract, *The Redneck Manifesto*, resembles *Hillbilly Elegy* in its hybridization of memoir and social commentary. In his signature hyper-obscene style, Goad recounts his life story as "'white trash with a brain'" to condemn wealthy white liberals for looking down on poor whites. This narrative strategy is accomplished even as Goad paints a portrait of his own parents that conforms to key tropes of the inbred grotesque he paints a portrait of his own parents that conforms to many key tropes of the inbred grotesque ("American Psycho" 102). Again, like *Hillbilly Elegy*, *The Redneck Manifesto* received

[221] R.J. Smith, "American Psycho," 101.

positive reviews from a number of mainstream outlets including Publishers Weekly and Kirkus Reviews. Goad's *Manifesto* has been through 17 printings and "shot up 200,000 places" on the Amazon sales rankings between 2012 and 2017.[222] *The Redneck Manifesto*'s enduring popularity is in part a result of its adoption by the alt-right. A review of Goad's book on the Proud Boys' website reads: "This is Proud Boy Holy scripture…This book could be our bible." Goad himself has profited from being a vocal supporter of Donald Trump and he, himself, has been involved in several street clashes with anti-fascist activists in his home of Portland, Oregon (Korfhage 1).

Behind their respective attitudes of sympathetic disdain and indignant disgust, both Vance and Goad share a discomfort with the characterization of hillbillies via the inbred grotesque. Even as their depictions of their families and neighbors conform to many of the tropes of the inbred grotesque, they fundamentally seek to separate the hillbilly imaginary from perceptions of the figure as disabled, queer, and otherwise non-normative. For Vance, hillbillies may be purified if they are forcibly "uplifted" from their squalid state and into the ranks of the middle-class; for Goad, elites must have their noses rubbed in the vile stereotypes they have perpetuated about poor whites. Yet, at their core, *Hillbilly Elegy* and *The Redneck Manifesto* share a revisionist philosophy: hillbillies can be cleansed of the deviance inherent in the inbred grotesque and take their rightful place at the table of power. Their hillbillies are not inbred grotesque but "victim chic," the term Nancy Isenberg coined to refer to "glamorously marginalized white folks [who] attempt to emulate what they perceive to be the privileged authenticity of victimized multicultural groups" (*White Trash* 5)

[222] Matthew Korfhage, "Two Decades After Author Jim Goad Fell From Grace In Portland, He's Re-emerging As an Icon of the Alt-Right."

As a result of *his*—for in this vision the hillbilly's gender is now unimpeachably male—masculinized suffering at the hands of white elites, this redeemed hillbilly is also imagined as innocent of any complicity in settler violence. While Vance and Goad at first entertained the idea of accomplishing this goal through dialogue, they both reached the conclusion that greater upheaval will be needed than can be achieved through peaceful means.

To understand the role of the hillbilly in contemporary far- and alternative-right political violence, it is necessary to return to Australia. Beginning in the late twentieth century, this figure has been increasingly mobilized in conversations about Australia's history, identity, and future. Greg Jackman, in "From Stain to Saint: Ancestry, Archaeology, and Agendas in Tasmania's Convict Heritage—A View from Port Arthur" (2009), traces the immense shifts in perceptions of convicts in Australia over the past fifty years. Jackman contrasts the widespread feelings of "shame" over convict heritage in the 1960s with the present national imaginary, in which "the convict is transformed from reviled villain into a romantic hero, misunderstood, oppressed, downtrodden, and yet ultimately triumphant" (105). This shift was in large part the result of changes in historians' approaches to the subject of convicts, perhaps most influentially Robert Hughes, whose best-selling *The Fatal Shore* (1986) presented the Australian convict system as a tragic precursor to Stalin's Gulag Archipelago. As the attitude towards convicts became more sympathetic, despite the low rates of actual convict ancestry, many contemporary Australians began to proudly claim convict heritage.

However, the adoption of what would come to be called "convict chic" contained a distinct class marker; according to Jackman, educated, wealthy Australians often resisted the revisionist imaginary of convict as "archetypical hero" (102). This resistance was likely in

part a result of the convict figure's association with populist politics. Megan J. Sheard's recent article "The Lure of the Lash: Spectacular Violence and White Ethnonationalism at an Australian Convict Site" (2023) examines how the new "convict consciousness" served to recast convicts as "noble pioneers as part of Australia's 'underdog' nationalism" (193). In this "nationalist imagination," convicts are no longer a degraded, inferior counterpart to true settlers, but "renegade forefathers foundational to 'our' identity" (193). It is no coincidence that convict chic came into style during the first stirrings of what would become known as the Australian "history wars": a fierce academic and public debate over the contemporary national characterization of the European colonization of Australia and the genocide of Aboriginal people. Those who focused on celebrating "convict consciousness" in the 1980s and 90s often also refused to engage with this national reckoning. In *The Fatal Shore*, Hughes' compassionate depiction of convicts is contrasted starkly with his account of pre-contact Aboriginal societies as culturally underdeveloped and violent. As Jackman writes, the turn to pride in convict heritage "appears to be rooted in anxiety about the future and a desire by many to ground claims to the present within a formative, if largely imagined, national white epic" (105). Like Vance and Goad's purified hillbilly, this white Australian ethnonationalist vision of the convict is removed from the original sin of settler aggression, having *himself*—a distinct gendering to which Sheard also calls attention to—been subject to such violence.

In their attempts to appeal to visitors and foment a sense of connection to history, convict heritage sites throughout Australia often embrace elements of convict chic in their exhibition design. Before entering the Port Arthur Historic Site, visitors are encouraged to take a playing card with a name and illustration depicting one of 52 people associated with

Port Arthur, almost all convicts; placards throughout the site then provide further information about their lives. Visitors who prefer a guided experience can opt for the "Escape From Port Arthur Tour." The online tour information challenges prospective guests "Could you have escaped from Port Arthur?," giving a romantic description of convict escapees as "men whose desire for freedom far outweighed any fear of consequences. They were not intimidated by authority and were more than willing to risk severe punishment and ultimately survival."[223] While this depiction of convicts as brave, freedom-loving men may seem innocuous, it closely mirrors the convict imagery present in current Australian far- and alt-right extremist rhetoric. Between 2016 and 2019, the Dingoes, an alt-right youth group that formed primarily through online connections, produced a weekly podcast, *The Convict Report*.[224][225] As the podcast's title reveals, these self-described "politically incorrect larrikins" identified strongly with the convict figure as well as stereotyped figures representing rural white Australians. One of the many political memes created by the Dingoes features an "Ocker," a pop culture caricature of a tanned working-class white Australian man, that closely resembles the American redneck. The Ocker meme, which is captioned "Hold still while I glass you," makes a jab toward racially-motivated violence. This meme would eventually be shared on the forum 8chan by the Australian perpetrator of the 2019 Christchurch massacre in New Zealand, who was motivated by white supremacist beliefs (Begley).

[223]"Escape From Port Arthur."
[224] Patrick Begley, "Alleged mosque shooter's meme popular with Australian far-right group."
[225] The Dingoes' name choice is similarly reflective their desire to create a sense of embattled belonging. As Deborah Bird Rose discusses in *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction* (2011), "the dingo is an iconic animal, its beauty and exceptionalism a key figure in the wider aesthetic of Australia's own beauty and exceptionalism" (64). Dingoes, which may be wild or domesticated, play an important role in Aboriginal Dreamtime narratives. While, as Rose traces, dingoes have historically been disparaged and hunted by white Australians, they also have been used as a national emblem (similar to Tasmania's thylacine).

The Australian and American Left have taken notice of the far-right mobilization of the hillbilly, but there has been a stark internal divide in approaches to engaging with the figure. Unfortunately, among the more popular attempts to disarm the hillbilly has been a blanket condemnation, often accompanied by a tendency to equate the stereotyped figure with poor rural whites themselves. In his October 2020 article "A Bribed Tool of Reactionary Intrigue: Black Panther Ideology and the Rise of a White Lumpenproletariat," political scientist Clyde W. Barrow claimed that no matter the outcome of the following month's American presidential election, the Left still must deal with the specter of "an army of counter-revolutionary shock troops": the white rural lumpenproletariat (441). Barrow borrows the article's title from Marx's infamous description of the lumpenproletariat, defined as an underclass below the proletariat that is composed of the lowest strata of society: the long-term unemployed, criminals, opioid users, unhoused people, and sex workers. Like Marx, Barrow views the lumpenproletariat as easily bought and coopted by populist movements that offer them superficial gains. Barrow is part of a chorus of voices in academic circles and media outlets who label the white rural poor as responsible for the election of Donald Trump. This approach ignores the reality that, if we utilize Marx's class categorizations, the vast majority of Trump-voters are white members of the proletariat and petite bourgeoisie. Additionally, when populist leaders do mobilize hillbilly imagery, as we have seen, it is in a form stripped of the inbred grotesque. Leftist and liberal pundits who have, since the progressive era, used the tropes of the inbred grotesque to attack the far-right, fail to understand the inner workings of populist rhetoric and risk alienating potential allies among poor rural whites.

While the approach described here has been embraced by much of the Australian and American Left, there is a vocal subset of activists and artists who have adopted an altogether different strategy to combat the far-right mobilization of the hillbilly. Like Vance, Goad, and the Dingoes, this group engages in "rehibillification." However, unlike the far-right, these self-identified hillbillies do not attempt to separate the figure from its non-normative past. Instead, this "hillbilly Left" leans into a model of the hillbilly as symbolic Other. For the hillbilly Left, the characterization of the hillbilly via the inbred grotesque offers up opportunities for a personal and shared exploration of identity and experience. At its best, the hillbilly Left treats the hillbilly as a cyborg figure: the illegitimate child of settler colonial capitalism whose simultaneously straight and non-normative sexuality and gender, ability and disability, hyper-whiteness and not-quite-whiteness, challenge assumed dichotomies. Alternative forms of kinship in particular are at the heart of this cyborgian hillbilly imaginary. These connections might be called affinities. Donna Haraway defines the term affinity in "A Cyborg Manifesto" as to be "related not by blood but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidity" (10). For Haraway, the cyborg desires:

> a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household…Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden—that is, through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos. The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family… (9).

Like Haraway's cyborg, the hillbilly has always challenged the "organic family," both through their rejection of it and their erosion of it from within, by means of cacogenic reproduction.

Launceston-born Carmel Bird, one of the preeminent authors of Tasmania's hillbilly Left, has published multiple novels that engage with the hillbilly figure as cyborg. In her

debut novel, *Cherry Ripe* (1985), Bird weaves together the story of four generations of Tasmanian women who refuse to obey their assigned sexual and gender roles. Agnes, the first in this line of women and the black sheep of the larger extended family, forms a close relationship with her great-great-niece Cherry as they bond over her stories of the family, told in Agnes' well-tended orchard. Eventually, Agnes reveals the secret at the heart of the novel: Cherry is in fact Agnes' great-granddaughter, as her grandmother Gloria was Agnes' secret child with her brother. Agnes and Cherry both ultimately find kinship not through heterosexual romance or normative reproduction, but through a shared affinity based in their shared creativity and love for nature.

In her second novel, *The Bluebird Café* (1990), Bird expands on the incest theme, again through the use of a multi-generational family saga. The central Mean family live in a small rural Tasmanian town. While they are treated as white, it is known that they have recent Aboriginal ancestry. The family's youngest child, a girl with dwarfism named Lovelygod, is born from the illicit liaison between twins Carrillo and Bedrock Mean. When Lovelygod, aged ten, vanishes one night in the bush, her disappearance becomes a local and then national legend. A decade later, a wealthy Tasmanian family, the Bests, seize the opportunity to capitalize on the popularity of the Lovelygod myth and create a theme park, the Copperfield Historic Museum Village, contained within a "monstrous dome" of glass (1). In "Tasmania's Cupboard: Indigenous and Convict Australia in Carmel Bird's Writing," Gerardo Rodríguez-Sala argues that Lovelygod "is the catalyst that embraces all the signs of Tasmanian difference" (177). The unending search for the missing child illustrates how she has come to stand "for the Holy Grail of Tasmania's secret past," a past that no number of theme parks can succeed in revealing (178).

While Bird infuses her novels with a sense of place and deep sympathy for hillbilly figures, it is noticeable that the Tasmanian hillbilly Left, which includes other influential island-born authors like Richard Flanagan and Danielle Wood, is characterized by a tendency to avoid personal narratives. This contrasts starkly with writers of the Appalachian hillbilly Left, who frequently publish memoir or autofiction. Perhaps the most enduringly influential hillbilly Left writer in this genre is Dorothy Allison. Allison has spoken extensively about how her fiction and non-fiction work draws on her lived experiences as a lesbian, BDSM educator, and survivor of childhood abuse and generational poverty. In a 1992 interview, Allison explains that her goal as a writer is:

> To tell the truth and to pay homage to the people who helped to make me the person I've become. I show you my aunts in their drunken rages, my uncles in their meanness. And that's exactly who we are said to be. That's what white trash is all about. We're supposed to be drunks standing in our yards with our broken-down cars and our dirty babies. Some of that stuff is true. But to write about it I had to find a way to pull the reader in and show you those people as larger than that contemptible myth. And show you *why* those men drink, *why* those women hate themselves, and get old and can't protect themselves or their children. Show you human beings instead of fold-up, mean, cardboard figures.[226]

Allison is best known for her semi-autobiographical *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), which follows the childhood of Ruth Anne "Bone" Boatwright. Bone grows up in Greenville, South Carolina, the working-class "Textile Center of the South" in the Carolina Piedmont region bordering the Blue Ridge mountains. As a young girl, Bone's stepfather subjects her to extreme sexual and physical violence. Despite possessing a loving rural poor extended family, Bone struggles to communicate her experience of abuse. This difficulty stems not from a lack of language, but because Bone possesses an idiom that is all too rich in the

[226] Amer Hollibaugh, "Telling a Mean Story: Amer Hollibaugh Interviews Dorothy Allison," 16.

imagery of sexual violence. Her knowledge that to name her experience of incest is to become a humorous "white trash" cliché forces her to remain silent.

While the hillbilly Left's revisionist imaginary of the hillbilly is commendable, the cautionary tale of Queer Appalachia, a former mutual aid organization and publisher of the zine *Electric Dirt*, illustrates how this effort can all-too-easily go wrong. Founded in 2016, Queer Appalachia began as a coalition of queer and trans Appalachians invested in combating negative portrayals of the region and showcasing the vibrancy of LGBTQ+ life in the mountains. Gradually, the organization and its popular Instagram account began to be run solely by the activist Gina Mamone. A 2020 Washington Post article exposed that Mamone had misappropriated funds from Queer Appalachia's microgrant program for Black trans Appalachians for their own personal use.[227] Mobilizing the hillbilly as an identity category additionally runs the risk of replicating the kind of white nationalism that the figure has come to represent on the right. The hillbilly will always be anchored in the history of settler colonialism; even as they represent a failed settler, they are simultaneously portrayed as the ground forces of the settler project. Any reclamation of the hillbilly must include an awareness of the figure's limitations and legacy as a symbol of racial violence. For the hillbilly to be reborn as a symbol for the Left, the figure's original interracial relationships must be a primary point of focus. Afterall, it is these binary-breaking alliances that are at the root of the hillbilly's conception as a threat to the state. The hillbilly Left must focus first and foremost on coalition building with local Black and Indigenous leaders, those whom the hillbilly figure has historically been harnessed to erase.

[227] Emma Copley Eisenberg, "The Tale of Queer Appalachia."

Even as organizations such as Queer Appalachia operate as cautions to the Left, there are just as many success stories that serve as models for conscious engagement with the hillbilly figure and its cultural and historical legacy. In Monteagle, Tennessee, the Highlander Research and Education Center advances the mission of "grassroots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the South. We work with people fighting for justice, equality and sustainability, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destiny."[228] Since its founding as the Highlander Folk School in 1932, the Highlander Center has served as a successful incubator for union and civil rights organizing throughout the region. In Tasmania, groups such as the Rural Youth Organization not only provide "opportunities for the personal development of members through social, educational, cultural and agricultural activities," but work to create a sense of pride in their rural Tasmanian identity.[229]

The arts have also played a role in a revival of the Australian convict figure that is shaped by those most touched by its lasting legacy. In March 2023, I visited the small Western coastal town of Strahan, a popular tourist destination and the base for boat trips to the former penal settlement on Sarah Island. After visiting the island ruins, I attended the local Round Earth Company's staging of *The Ship that Never Was* (1984), a pantomime that, at thirty years of shows seven nights a week, is the longest continuously running play in Australia. The play "recounts the incredible true story of ten convicts who stole a ship built at the Sarah Island penal settlement and successfully sailed it to Chile, South America." Two local high school students played the leads and recruited audience members, including myself, to play the other convict characters. The play is a community production that has

[228]"Mission and Methodologies." The Highlander Research and Education Center.
[229] "Structure of the Rural Youth Organization of Tasmania Inc." Rural Youth.

required decades of active community participation; it is, in a region whose image has so often shaped by the perspective of outsiders, a rare opportunity to center local voices.

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic was contributing to increased social media usage, the platforms Reddit, YouTube, and TikTok saw a sudden uptick in the hashtag "#feralpeople." These videos and posts addressed a growing rumor that cannibalistic, inbred "feral people" were living in American national parks, most frequently identified as parks in Appalachia. One TikToker, @garcious, referred to "hundreds of eyewitness accounts about these people that the government refuses to investigate."[230] Writers for the anthology series *American Horror Story* would eventually use the trend as the inspiration for the show's 2021 stand-alone episode, "Feral." Social media users from the region attempted to explain that these "feral people" bore a strong resemble to prior hillbilly stereotypes. Yet as of February 2024, the conspiracy theory still maintains a strong foothold online—and may well give birth to a new generation of literary and filmic depictions of the topic explored in this dissertation, the inbred grotesque, a figure alive and well today.

[230] Kelsey Weekman, "What Rumors of 'Feral People' in National Parks Say About the Future of TikTok and Folklore."

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