MONSTRUM 8.1 (June 2025) | ISSN 2561-5629

The Earth Rises as the Ashes Fall: Intergenerational Trauma, Femininity, and Rage in *She Will* (2021)

Nina K. Martin

Like so many folk horror films, *She Will* (Charlotte Colbert, 2021) begins with a journey of urban outsiders traveling to an isolated, rural place. Similar to Sergeant Howie flying on a seaplane to the island of Summerisle in *The Wicker Man* (1973), aging actress Veronica Ghent (Alice Krige), accompanied by her nurse Desi (Kota Eberhardt), travels by train to an isolated retreat nestled in the dark Scottish Highlands forest in order for Veronica to recover from a double mastectomy. Veronica acts initially hostile and churlish toward her caretaker, uncomfortable with her weakened state, and focused on her own "decline" in relation to Desi's youthful vitality. They soon discover that these deep, dark woods, provocatively rich in local folklore, were also once the site of numerous witch burnings, commemorated by a stone marked "1722," the date of the last burnings. Veronica is drawn toward this tragic landmark, and the two women are settled into a cabin once occupied by a mother and daughter persecuted, tormented, and murdered nearby. Soon, memories of Veronica's past start to blur with the pain of the persecuted women before, conjuring fantastical encounters that render time and space strange, as the location's troubled past begins to emerge from the mists of the wooded Highlands.

Veronica's journey toward healing and acceptance becomes tied to acknowledging the interconnectedness of the human and the nonhuman, provoked by the isolated and remote location of the retreat that starts to touch her and change her in profound ways. Initially, this aging starlet surrounds herself with an impermeable shield of aloof disdain—what she sees as a necessary mask or armor that protects her from the predations of a patriarchal world that has left her physically and emotionally scarred. Yet, this place, a land that is tainted with women's historical suffering, works upon her cold reserve, calling to her and whispering to her of the past. Here, folk horror mingles with what Dawn Keetley describes as "tenticular ecohorror," where an "encounter with a nonhuman nature reaches out to grab and entangle the human," and "the forest has an agential power" (2021, 25). As she and Desi become further entangled with the flora that surround them, Veronica must choose whether to resist the pull of the earth that rises up to surround her, remaining separate from

both the human and non-human, or allow for an exposure to the landscape that will transform her, seemingly on a molecular level, into something or someone transcorporeal. Her body and her mind must no longer be "closed in on itself, shut off from the world of material flows and ecological interchange," but instead intermeshed with a more-than-human world that reveals the layers of the historical past within the present (Bigelow 2023, 5-6). While Veronica's imbrication with this haunted place generates the film's horror elements through an increasing series of happenings and summonings, the film subverts expectations by shifting its understanding of "folk" by fostering a rich mesh of kindred connections amongst the women that work with, and are touched by, the land that surrounds them.

"Folk horror" has experienced a recent surge in the last 15 years, spurred by a reexamining and renewed appreciation of films from the subgenre's first wave of British films and television from the 1960s and 70s, particularly a trio of films, known as the "unholy trinity,"—*Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968), *The Blood on Satan's Claw* (Piers Haggard, 1971), and *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973). Unsurprisingly, these male-directed films focus on the subjectivity and perspectives of their male protagonists, and women are the monstrous-feminine "others," little more than ciphers that emerge from the landscape to draw these men to their doom. Angel Blake's transformation from innocent schoolgirl to demonic cult leader in *Blood on Satan's Claw* mirrors the dancing young women of Summerisle, naked and lustful amidst the standing stones in *The Wicker Man*. Through the eyes of the films' male protagonists, *Satan's Claw*'s Judge or *Wicker Man*'s Sergeant Howie, these women are unknowable seductresses, tempting them towards imminent destruction. Yet, in the last decade, the folk horror revival, as defined and explored by scholars such as Adam Scovell (2017), Kier-la Janisse (2021), Jamie Chambers (2022), Simon Bacon (2023), and Dawn Keetley and Ruth Heholt (2023), has provided a rich tapestry of contemporary folkloric horror stretching far beyond its coining in the UK, and spreading throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Adam Scovell's "folk horror chain," defined in *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange* from 2017, provides a useful template through which to examine folk horror films made more recently, including Colbert's *She Will*. These links—landscape, isolation, skewed belief systems and morality, and happenings/summonings—do not merely support the fun game of "spot the trope" in folk horror media, but speak to an organizational structure that touches on crucial contemporary issues: the climate crisis, racism and xenophobia surrounding immigration, gender identity, bodily autonomy, and

the experiences of Indigenous and First Peoples post-colonialism (Scovell 2017, 17-18).

Along with these scholarly reframings, women-identified directors have been storming the industry with their own takes on folk horror, examining the impact of folkloric stories and tales that shape the lives of women, past and present. Films such as Kate Dolan's *You Are Not My Mother* (2021), Emma Tammi's *The Wind* (2018), Teresa Sutherland's *Lovely, Dark, and Deep* (2023), and Ishana Night Shyamalan's *The Watchers* (2024) all engage with the subgenre from a woman's perspective. I contend that Charlotte Colbert's debut feature film *She Will* (2021) not only stretches the boundaries of what we consider folk horror but also stands as a pertinent example of what Barbara Creed defines as "Feminist New Wave Cinema" in *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine* (2022). While Creed's 1993 seminal text *The Monstrous Feminine* focused almost exclusively on the experience of male spectatorship based on psychoanalytic theories and Julia Kristeva's work on abjection, her new work recognizes what this iconic monstrous-feminine figure might mean to women-identified makers and viewers. Rather than reframing the films she discusses in her earlier study, Creed identifies a series of recent films and sensibilities that constitute this new wave. She states, "Feminist New Wave films are directed primarily by women, tell stories about women who are in revolt against male violence and corrosive patriarchal values including misogyny, racism, homophobia, and anthropocentrism. The female protagonists challenge patriarchal definitions of what constitutes the proper feminine role designed to keep women impotent and marginalized" (2022, 2). Further, "Feminist New Wave films tell their stories from the point of view of the female protagonist—it is her story told in her voice. These filmmakers do not speak in 'one' voice, but in many" (2). Indeed, this multiplicity of voices serves to decenter the usual male-identified, individualist, heteropatriarchal perspectives at play in many of the folk horror films considered foundational for the subgenre. *She Will* wields folk horror tropes while placing viewers in an older woman's perspective and experiences. It highlights her multi-sensory connection to a place stained by the persecution of past women, one that subsequently empowers and transforms her once she comes to terms with her enmeshment with the more-than-human world around her.

She Will interacts in several ways with Scovell's folk horror chain. Shot in Aviemore in the Cairngorms of Scotland, the film employs a variety of camera techniques to render the characters' journey through this landscape otherworldly. Its first images track a shining silver train snaking through the forest, carrying Veronica and Desi to their isolated destination. Seen from

above, the silver train hugs the coast, undulating through the dark wood surrounding it, its silver cars shimmering in the light. By contrast, the scene cuts to a medium shot of Veronica glaring boldly into the camera lens in her private, luxury train car, tossing back mini liquor bottles as she angrily smothers the pain of her surgery, impervious to the landscape that surrounds her. She almost dares the camera to try to come closer. The view through the train window of a misty coastline blurs the horizon to a disorienting degree, where the reflection of the forested landscape merges with the water and sky to create a new, liminal space; numerous aerial drone shots from above signify a potentially non-anthropocentric perspective as Veronica transitions from an urban place of familiarity to an unknown and unfamiliar realm. Further enhancing these visuals, when the two travel from the train station, their car appears to emerge from the rain and then delve into a forested tunnel, entering into woods that conceal dark mysteries. This imagery aligns with Elizabeth Parker's work on ecophobic fears of the deep, dark forest, ones that remind humans of both their environmental and spiritual lostness, where the forest contains an "awful secret" (2019, 25-26).

Upon arrival, Veronica discovers to her distress that her "solitary women's retreat" has been invaded by another group of "outsiders," the multi-gendered yoga group led by the bloviating Arturo Tirador (Rupert Everett), who proceeds to shower the former film star with unwanted attention as soon as she enters the room where the group gathers for drinks. Veronica reels in confused horror as he thrusts a bouquet of flowers towards her, and moves in for a quick photo, its flash momentarily blinding her. Cinematographer Jamie D. Ramsay's lens distorts the members of the group who descend upon Veronica, violating her personal space with their obtrusive greetings. Shot from her point-of-view, their close-up faces bend perversely toward her in rapid succession, eyes bulging and mouths open as if to devour her. She unsurprisingly wants to flee from their overbearing attention and demands that Desi call their driver to take them back. Yet this isolated Scottish landscape has other plans for them, as the rain and the retreat's isolation force them to stay the night.

When their escape route is flooded by the storm, Veronica and Desi are led by groundskeeper Lois (Amy Manson) to a private cabin in the forest, away from the boisterous group. Along the path the women encounter a commemorative stone marked "1722"—a tragic reminder of the more than 3,000 women burned as witches in the area. Veronica immediately feels connected to this terrible landmark and experiences a powerful sense of familiarity with her surroundings. The mucky, abject peat that coats the ground surrounding the retreat is infused with the human remains of the women that

were burned there, mixing with the coal ash from the region which locals call "witch feathers." These dark substances prove to be remarkably animated and sentient, and the primary source of horror within the film. The women's encounters with these organic relics of the past are intrinsic to the transformation that Veronica, and to an extent Desi, undergoes during her stay. Yet what begins as a source of horror and alterity for Veronica transforms into a source of power as she and Desi begin to acclimate to their surroundings and enmesh with their environment.

Their "cozy" but isolated cabin, which Veronica describes as "scout camp with a touch of Guantanamo," might lead viewers to expect some typical cabin-in-the-woods horror; it is nestled in a black spot that no cell phone can penetrate. Yet, Colbert's film deliberately comments on such expectations. When Desi points out their *isolation*, an aspect of Scovell's chain, Veronica bitingly responds, "Like the beginning of one of those horror movies. The young ingenue, *you*, is brought to somewhere remote to be sacrificed in a horrendous way … to feed an aging community that refuses to die." This retort emphasizes the vulnerable bitterness she initially feels toward Desi, for the young nurse serves to remind Veronica of loss (of her breasts, her youth) in the wake of her double mastectomy. Veronica's response also suggests her acute awareness of the conventions and gender norms that circumscribe her, and her bourgeoning contempt for them—priming her later resistance to these conventions. The trauma of her surgery, revealed in increasingly intrusive flashbacks of glaring surgical lighting and a scalpel cutting into flesh, provokes the re-emergence of an older, deeper trauma, the remnants of childhood sexual abuse that Veronica does not wish to face. Yet, this place where she has gone to retreat from the world will force her to confront her scars from both the present and the past.

Landscape is the first link in Scovell's folk horror chain, and this link is instrumental to thinking about folk horror as a subgenre. In the foreword to Simon Bacon's edited collection *Future Folk Horror*, Dawn Keetley highlights this essential component, explaining that "[p]lace is often so central to folk horror that the plot can *only* unfold, the characters only develop, in that place—that necessary place" (2023, xi). *She Will* foregrounds the witch burnings and persecutions that have embedded themselves within the soil of this place, and camera angles emphasize a disorienting immensity, where humans often appear small within the frame, or gaze up at towering trees that surround them. The rain not only inhibits human movement, but also adds to the ever-present mists that permeate and thicken the air into a haze. The landscape gradually acts as an agent of change on Veronica, for it finds a kinship with the trauma that she has

endured; this connection could also be read more menacingly as feeding on her vulnerability. The present emotional and physical pain of her mastectomy causes older psychological wounds to resurface, but she only starts to relive some of these flashes of memory when she begins to physically interact with *this particular place*.

The impetus for this reckoning occurs during her first night in the cabin, when Veronica gruffly rejects Desi's assistance and sinks sullenly into the comfort of a warm bath, gingerly avoiding wetting her bandages. Moving from her exhausted features, the camera shifts to focus on the forming of a close-up drop of water hanging off the faucet. Yet, this drop of water is sooty, dark and viscous as it falls into the bath, spreading through the water in a black cloud. This darkness surrounds Veronica, spurring a montage of complex imagery, as if the droplet of peat encapsulates the magical healing properties for which the area is known. An extreme close-up of her eye, the pupil dilating, leads to luminous specks of minute particles floating through space, apparently merging with Veronica on a molecular level. Whispers flit across the soundtrack as the earth moves and roots intertwine on the ground, binding Veronica to this place. Traumatic imagery flashes across the screen, but the scenes from Veronica's surgery are now juxtaposed with a young girl's bloodied face, and a man's voice interjecting on the soundtrack, asking "Would you do anything?" Veronica's shrieks with fear and helplessness, as she suffers a barrage of painful memories provoked by the peat in the water. The eco-logics of *She Will* appear to hold that the human remains that infuse the peat particular to the area have physically manifested the trauma of the women burned there, and "the environment itself reenacts a historical trauma that occurred upon it (to it), which then [subsumes] the identity of those who get caught up in it" (Bacon 2023, 6). Thus, this place compels Veronica to persistently confront her past. Moments like this one echo throughout the film during Veronica's interactions with her environment, as Colbert viscerally represents trauma on a sensory level. As scholar Cathy Caruth claims, "the experience of trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his or her very will" (2016, 2). The more time Veronica spends within the Scottish landscape and its organic formations of traumatic history, the more its particular character and agency act upon her, transforming her.

That first night and every subsequent night, as she retreats to her bedroom and the escape of sleep, Veronica eventually rises from her bed as if in a trance—her back arched, hair flowing, and the backs of her hands brushing the bedclothes below her. She moves to the window and presses her face against the glass, eyes closed. The peat seems to be animated, moving toward the cabin

in a black, muddy rush through the grass and moss. It calls to Veronica, but it is unclear whether it is there to help her, or consume her. As Veronica stands in her white nightgown outside, the moist, mucky soil flows underfoot, between her toes, emitting a gooey sound in sharp contrast to the soft rustling of the pristine white silk gown that she wears to bed. The scene shifts to a woman silhouetted against a raging bonfire, and a circle of women joining her, chanting as the flames rise behind them. The film cuts back to Veronica now engulfed in flames. On awakening, she feels different—less riddled with pain and more infused with a sense of wonder. She soon realizes that nighttime at the retreat creates a liminal portal to another realm out of time, where her encounters with the landscape begin to provide her with otherworldly power.

In an interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, Alice Krige astutely describes Veronica's impending evolution from object to subject, victim to avenger: "She's irritated, unpleasant, difficult, but it is the beginning of a journey to redemption," and within this magical place thick with the witches' remains "this extraordinary alchemical reaction happens, and she is infused with their spirit" (Collis 2022). This infusion increases in strength as the landscape invades her senses, and she makes visceral contact with the forest and the earth beneath her. Colbert illustrates these changes through a series of abstract montages that combine experimental imagery from her breast surgery with misty, distorted memories of her past relationship with Eric Hathbourne (Malcolm McDowell), the Svengali auteur who made her a star at the age of thirteen. While Veronica tries to bury her troubled past, her memories rise up like the fecund primordial black remains that surround her. She is constantly reminded of her and Hathbourne's "special bond," by both Tirador and his group, as well as the news and tabloids, which eagerly report on Hathbourne's upcoming knighthood as he plans to *remake* the film in which she starred with a *new* young actress; these same reports scrutinize Veronica's changed appearance, participating in the time-honored double standard wherein women lose their value (visibility, desirability, potential) as they age, while men gain theirs.

These visceral, visually lush montages occur repeatedly throughout *She Will,* allowing access into Veronica's inner life—her feelings and desires. Creed claims this act of looking invokes a feminist gaze. She explains:

> The feminist gaze is not a reversed male gaze, nor is it a disembodied look. The feminist gaze invokes all of the senses…It is an all-embracing sensory gaze, one that understands the protagonist's daily life, emotions, relationships, bodily states and desires. It sees and feels the whole person—details about the woman's life not normally presented to the

> male gaze: her contemplative moments, desires, scenes of intimacy and moments of self-recognition. (Creed 2022, 17)

As Veronica becomes acclimated to the highlands, she sensorially invests herself in the natural world, gradually learning to manipulate it as an extension of her will. These trance-like excursions into the forest are primarily nocturnal, as her barefoot figure, dressed in a pale nightgown, flits between the moonlit trees, but her connection to the land starts to bleed into her and Desi's waking hours. During an outdoor painting session with Tirador, the earth compels her to grab handfuls of it and smear it across the canvas, provoking a bout of automatic writing where she writes "daughter" in Gaelic onto the painting. She later wakes from another fitful night in her bedroom with muddy feet and charcoal streaks on her face. During her reveries, her hands touch glistening ferns, and she caresses the ground, sinking her fingers and toes into the muck. The earth rises around her pale, moonlit figure, roiling along the ground with agency and intent. Veronica allows herself to be infused by these surroundings, and willfully enters into a new relationship with the more-than-human world. This process of interconnection provokes her healing, but also gives her the ability to punish those who have hurt her.

Eventually, Veronica develops the ability to astrally project her spirit (a she-will) to other places far from Aviemore, and to telekinetically affect people when her presence is felt nearby. For instance, in one of the film's standout scenes, she projects herself to a television studio where Hathbourne sits for an interview on a Glaswegian late-night talk show. As the interviewer (Jonathan Aris) lobs softball questions at Hathbourne, the scene cuts back and forth between Veronica's "presence" watching in the studio, Hathbourne smugly reclining, and a glass of water that develops a dark cloud. Suddenly, the host's bland expression transforms, and he begins confronting Hathbourne about his possible misconduct with Veronica when she was only thirteen. Under an increasing barrage of probing questions Hathbourne snaps, sputtering "it was a different era" and "we had a *special bond*," the last words echoed by a young girl's voice on the soundtrack. Starting to choke, he reaches for his water, and an extreme close-up reveals the water full, somehow, of particles of peat, which Hathbourne proceeds to vomit on stage, black muck pouring out of his mouth. Veronica can now control the earth's elements, directing them to act in her service.

Frequently, the "folk" in folk horror films are mired in skewed belief systems, worshipping old gods, and believing in what some call old wives' tales. These "folk" are a danger to the outsiders that happen to find themselves in

their community, not only possessing secret knowledge of the land that they occupy, but finding anyone that trespasses suspicious. As Veronica quips early in the film, "pagan village sacrifice" tends to be a common trope. Yet, *She Will* subverts conventional folk horror expectations by empowering its women characters with both wisdom and a way to channel their inner rage at their continued persecution. Here, the folk are gendered and infused with feminine power, embracing, rather than rejecting woman as other. The healing powers of the peat and the witch feathers are protective of both Veronica and Desi, eager to punish the skewed belief systems or the patriarchal forces that caused their trauma and suffering.

The two female groundskeepers, Lois and Jean (Olwen Fouéré), also share in this ancient knowledge of the land, watching over the two women and exchanging glances as they understand the transformative power of this place. Upon arrival, as Desi frantically tries to contact the driver of their car when Veronica demands they leave, Jean drives up in an ATV with her fox familiar trailing behind her and tells Desi that the area is a "black spot," and that she will not get a signal. When Desi insists on their leaving, Jean tells her of the flooding and knowingly states, "She might feel better by morning," implying that the place might "affect" Veronica positively and compel her to stay. Indeed, Veronica's resistance to staying with the unwanted yoga group eventually fades as she grows closer to both Desi and the landscape. Lois and Jean roll their eyes at men like Tirador, whose know-it-all proclamations about the area belie his actual disconnect from this magical place. He urges the "en plein air" painters, "Don't draw the landscape, let the landscape draw you," and then pisses on a nearby tree, stating "It's important to leave your mark on the land." Yet, he and his group of New Age goofballs are relatively harmless, and do not raise the ire of the landscape that surrounds them. The abusive men who actively hurt women are the ones who must be sacrificed in order to return the place to the sanctuary it now is, for the soil of the forest combined with the ashes of burned women have a willful agency that punishes those who violate its peace.

In a pleasurable narrative turn, Veronica increasingly comes to realize that she can channel these natural forces, and she wields them protectively and proactively as an expression of her rage against patriarchal norms. After her nocturnal "visit" to the TV studio, Veronica attends a discussion of the paintings she and the group created. When talk turns toward "the male gaze," one of the men in the group decries, "The patriarchy … the war cry of hysterical women, biting the hand that feeds them." As Veronica gives him a withering look, his hand suddenly bursts into flames; the gaze-object-gaze cutting reveals the trace of a smile dancing on her lips. During her time at the retreat, Veronica

begins to feel mentally and physically better, and she begins to let go of the armor she formerly wore to protect her from harm. She eschews her mask of make-up, unbinds her hair, and allows Desi to care for her, no longer seeing her as youthful competition, but as someone she trusts and cares for, who has experienced her share of heartache and trauma as well. Veronica's connection to the landscape fosters intimacies both non-human and human.

In a bravura scene, when Owen (Jack Greenlees), who works at the retreat, sexually assaults Desi after they share drinks and some magic mushrooms at the pub, her cries echo through the forest. She tries to brush him off, but he repeatedly overpowers her, forcing her face first against a tree as he attempts to tear her clothes off. In this moment, the trees loom over them, creating a dark and ominous atmosphere of danger. Veronica in her nocturnal trance, comes to Desi's aid, and *summons* the abject, sentient peat to ooze over the forest floor and this powerful black substance sucks him into the soil. This imagery manifests the "secret" that Elizabeth Parker claims is part of the dark, Gothic forest, "as something monstrous which lies hidden *beneath* the forest's surface (2019, 26). In mere seconds, Owen disappears from sight, devoured by the hungry mouth of the folk-horror forest. The scene is both sensuous and wildly satisfying, and distinguishes itself from Owen's abrupt, patriarchal violence through its emphasis on the flowing creep of unrestrained nature. The next morning, Desi awakens on the couch, not knowing how she arrived there, and, in searching for Veronica, finds her lying in the grass in front of the cabin, her hair loose and flowing around her, having become enmeshed with her surroundings. Veronica repeats to Desi, "Pain's all gone, pain's all gone," and reflects that she feels "different … like there's something in the earth." She is indeed "different" as she stops carrying the weight of her buried trauma and no longer clings to the girl who was traumatized so long ago. Veronica comes to understand her entanglement with nature's processes, rather than her separation from them.

Yet she also appears prepared to lose herself within this connection with the non-human, even if it might eventually demolish her humanity through its potent transformation. The relief of her physical pain propels her to seek retribution for her emotional pain. She forgoes human connection for one that aligns her with the landscape and its power to destroy. In a gesture of affection, she gifts Desi her mother's necklace before adamantly sending her away, preparing to transport herself to Hathbourne's home for a final confrontation. At this point in the film, she still rejects the comfort that Desi's care provides, believing that she must fight her demons alone. Veronica prepares to sacrifice herself to the power that the land grants her in order to achieve vengeance

against Hathbourne, and Desi storms off toward the train station in rejected confusion.

Veronica *summons* her connection to the land, and gazes out the window, her reflection revealing her chest bare and surgical scars visible. She seems attuned to her body's transformation, no longer gazing with despair at her reflection, subverting "the technique of mirror shots, in which an older woman becomes deeply sad when seeing her reflection and feels alienated by her older body that does not correspond with her younger self-image" (De Vuyst 2022, 105). Rather, she seems healthier and more vital than ever before. In the film's opening, Veronica's narration expresses her attachment to the trappings of normative femininity, as she painstakingly puts on her makeup. "It's become a ritual," she intones. "Every mask has a function. The mask is about preservation." Now, Veronica wields her red lipstick with bold strokes, slashing it across her lips like war paint. When the yoga group gathers around a raging bonfire to celebrate "the victory of reason against the demonic" as Tirador declares, they are suddenly scared off by a pulsing burst in the fire: Veronica has astrally projected to the fire she has stood by in her dreams, and hurled bandages from the mastectomy into the flames in an act of defiance. She then retires to sleep in order to astrally project to Hathbourne, witch feathers floating down on her unconscious form from *inside* her bedroom—not only blurring the boundaries between herself and the landscape, but inside and outside as well.

Veronica's presence in Hathbourne's home is indicated by the camera tracking through a window into his bedroom, as he watches his botched interview at the television studio. He relives his vomiting torrents of black muck on Scottish television, and mutters "bitch" under his breath, apparently sensing her presence. He then rises up and heads to his bar, calling "Hello? Anybody around?" before whispering "What do you want?" and burying his face in a glass of scotch. Initially Veronica's entrance is more of a whisper in the air, but then solidifies into her present, physical form. She responds, "The truth." At first, Hathbourne apologizes and reaches out to touch her face, but when she chastises him, he retorts, "You knew exactly what you were doing, you ungrateful bitch," and strikes her. She flinches on the bed in her cabin, where she lies alone, the room strewn with witch feathers that continue to fall on her. Yet instead of his violence having the effect of harming her, her image shatters in front of him, transfiguring into a swirling horde of black ashes. The girl of her youth no longer runs from him, but approaches him, stalking forward, and the black ash assaults him, sending him over the stair's banister to his death, blood pooling around his head. The floating camera and its inhuman

movements suggest that Veronica has transformed into something "other," melding with the forces of a dark nature bent on retribution.

This final *summoning* forces Veronica to face her trauma head-on, and following Hathbourne's death, she lies unmoving in a trance, coated with witch feathers. Yet this scene also suggests an insistent ecophobia in *She Will*, positing that this entanglement with nature is destructively consuming for humans, who must remain separate from the non-human or risk death and dissolution. Just as Veronica seems to have reached a point of no return, Desi bursts into her room and drags her out of there, refusing to leave her behind. In insisting on reminding Veronica of their *human* connection, Desi saves her from total absorption by the land and brings her back to the human realm by shaking her forcefully from her trance. It seems one can become *too* entangled with nature. Veronica returns to her body, as her spirit flits across the moonlit moor, gliding across the landscape one last time.

In the light of day, Veronica's voice-over queries, "What is reality? What is it? Perhaps it's only ever a longing," as she and Desi drive away from a place that has forever changed them. An alert pings on Desi's phone announcing the news of Hathbourne's death, from an apparent suicide in the wake of misconduct charges, with no evidence of their climactic confrontation the previous night. Veronica has evolved from her trauma-inflected defensiveness and has revolted internally against the ways in which older women are defined, a revolt that Kelly Oliver argues is "analogous to political revolt, that takes place within an individual and is essential to psychic development" (qtd. in Creed 2002, 79). "This revolt," continues Oliver, "is an intimate and interior revolt, a revolt in the psyche that enables us to live as individuals connected to others" (79). The film closes as it opens, the two on a train that snakes through a dark forest, but now the camera captures them in medium shot as Veronica gazes contentedly out the window, with Desi asleep, her head resting in Veronica's lap. Whether one reads this image as mother/daughter, sexual, or more broadly queer, the two have found peace and love in each other, and in a variety of new connections.

While many folk horror films have a tendency to highlight a dangerous reliance on outdated and skewed belief systems that impinge on their outsider characters, Charlotte Colbert's debut feature film *She Will* emphasizes the importance of learning from and reconciling with a past that shapes one's present. The tales of witches who perished in this remote place provide a source of connection for the women who work and heal there—connection with both the land and each other. Yet the ecohorror aspects of the film linger, as the two women ultimately escape the pull of the landscape that initially drew them in.

The film tempers the transformative aspects of transcorporeal relations with nature by cautioning spectators to beware of the non-human's consuming intensity; channeling the power of the landscape, with its immense unknowability, can lead to human destruction. *She Will* reveals how reckoning with one's past traumas can only occur when the connections between past and present suffering are acknowledged. As Veronica slowly recovers physically, her growing attachment to the land on which the retreat rests allows her to transform physically and psychically; but more importantly, she *must* recognize the shared pain and affection between her and Desi, as well as learn to accept her aging body as a corporeal representation of the wisdom and experience that she possesses.

Colbert's filmmaking and perspective, rich in vivid detail, subverts folk horror tropes by having its landscape *positively* affect and alter its female protagonists, even if this entanglement with the non-human can only go so far. Kit Hawkins, in analyzing the 2015 folk horror film *The Hallow* (Corin Hardy) explains, "While the examples of folk horror settings that Scovell explores are certainly varied, they are only ever instances of landscapes as 'Other': unsettling at best, outright deadly at worst. There is little to no accounting for the role of folkloric topographies as sites of belonging or resistance, or of its supernatural inhabitants as ally rather than antagonist" (2023, 117). *She Will* flips the conventional "othering" common to folk horror and its attitude toward supernatural threat while also weirding the typical disconnect between protagonist and landscape common to the subgenre. Indeed, the film espouses a type of feminism Creed defines as "not closed or prescriptive. Its focus is on difference. This is a disparate, mixed, hybrid movement which explores the concept of otherness in the world and the nature of radical alterity. The focus is on a feminism that is open, questioning and exploratory—a feminism that is open to all regardless of their sex or gender" (2022, 19). This opening up to difference and otherness, as well as entanglements between the human and more-than-human, are what marks a stretching of the former rigid boundaries of folk horror cinema in the film. One hopes that women-directed folk horror like *She Will* might inspire more Feminist New Wave cinema in the future.

Nina K. Martin is Professor and Chair of Film Studies at Connecticut College. She has published articles in *Atlantis*, *The Journal of Film and Video*, *Jump Cut*, and *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, as well as in anthologies on pornography, star bodies, virginity in cinema, domestic spaces of horror, Tobe Hooper, and the Weird. Her current book project is *Folk Horror Television: Strange Folk and Ancient Rites* for Bloomsbury Academic.

References

Bacon, Simon, ed. 2023. *Future Folk Horror: Contemporary Anxieties and Possible Futures*. New York, New York: Lexington Books.

Bigelow, Benjamin. 2023. *Menacing Environments: Ecohorror in Contemporary Nordic Cinema*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Caruth, Cathy. 2016. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Collis, Clark. 2022. "Alice's Krige's Life in Horror, from Ghost Story and Sleepwalkers to She Will." *Entertainment Weekly*. July 15. Accessed August 16, 2023.

Creed, Barbara. 2022. *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine: Feminist New Wave Cinema*. London: Routledge.

Hawkins, Kit. 2023. "Fae Fight Back: Monstrous Mycelium and Postcolonial Gothic in *The Hallow*." In *Future Folk Horror: Contemporary Anxieties and Possible Futures*, edited by Simon Bacon, 115-128. New York, New York: Lexington Books.

Keetley, Dawn. 2023. "Foreword" to *Future Folk Horror: Contemporary Anxieties and Possible Futures*, edited by Simon Bacon, xi-xiv. New York, New York: Lexington Books.

—. 2021. "Tenticular Ecohorror and the Agency of Trees in Algernon Blackwood's 'The Man Whom the Trees Loved' and Lorcan Finnegan's *Without Name*. *Fear and Nature: Ecohorror Studies in the Anthropocene*. Eds. Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles. University Park: Penn State University Press. 23-41.

Keetley, Dawn and Ruth Heholt, Eds. 2023. *Folk Horror: New Global Pathways*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Parker, Elizabeth. 2019. "EcoGothic Secrets: Venturing Beneath the Deep Dark Forest." *Beasts of the Forest: Denizens of the Dark Woods*. Eds. Jon Hackett and Sean Harrington. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 22-34.

Peirse, Alison, Ed. 2020. *Women Make Horror: Filmmaking, Feminism, Genre*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Pisters, Patricia. 2020. *New Blood in Contemporary Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Saito, Stephen. 2022. "Charlotte Colbert on Having A Mind for Madness in 'She Will'". *Moveablefest.com*. July 15. Accessed August 15, 2023.

Scovell, Adam. 2017. *Folk Horror: Hours Dreadful and Things Strange*. Leighton Buzzard: Auteur.

- 2025 -

MONSTRUM is Published in Montréal, Québec by the Montréal Monstrum Society.