



University of South Florida

## Digital Commons @ University of South Florida

---

USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations

USF Graduate Theses and Dissertations

---

March 2021

# Reframing the Gothic: Race, Gender, & Disability in Multiethnic Literature

Ashely B. Tisdale  
*University of South Florida*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

### Scholar Commons Citation

Tisdale, Ashely B., "Reframing the Gothic: Race, Gender, & Disability in Multiethnic Literature" (2021). *USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.  
<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/9619>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the USF Graduate Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

Reframing the Gothic: Race, Gender, & Disability in Multiethnic Literature

by

Ashely B. Tisdale

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of English  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Ylce Irizarry, Ph.D.  
Kristin Allukian, Ph.D.  
Maria Cizmic, Ph.D.  
Quynh Nhu Le, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:  
March 23, 2021

Keywords: disability studies, Black feminism, migrant labor, pandemic, ecoGothic, zoe-ification

Copyright © 2021, Ashely B. Tisdale

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This project would not have seen the light of day without support from my loved ones, on and off campus. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee for their unwavering support throughout this process. Time and time again Dr. Ylce Irizarry modeled what it means to be an excellent advisor, a mentor, and a scholar. It has been my privilege to collaborate so closely with a committee of brilliant and generous scholars: Dr. Kristin Allukian, Dr. Maria Cizmic, and Dr. Quynh Nhu Le. To my friends and peers Kimber Wiggs and Will Forde-Mazrui, your words of encouragement and thoughtful critique kept me afloat. I am thankful for my family, Nicole, and Brownie. You all have showered me with unwavering love and support, no matter the pursuit, and I am grateful. This dissertation is a reminder for my BB's, Kendrick, Kylie, and Ari, that you lose nothing and gain everything when you pursue your interests with reckless abandon. Finally, I want to thank God, because God gave me the vision for this dissertation, and I feel God around my laptop today.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Introduction .....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	9
American Gothic.....	10
Uniting Race, Gender, & Disability in the Gothic.....	14
Disability Studies.....	15
Chapter Summaries.....	18
Chapter One: Transfigured Women: Race, Gender, And Disability in <i>The Rag</i>	
<i>Doll Plagues</i> .....	20
Critical Framework: Chicana Gothic, Disability, Metaphor & Materiality .....	22
Marisela .....	27
Sandra .....	38
Gabi .....	46
Conclusion .....	55
Chapter Two: We Bear The Mask: Constructing Monstrosity in <i>The People In The Trees</i> .....	59
Critical Framework: ecoGothic, Memoir, Zoe-ification, Asian Studies .....	60
The Dreamers .....	72
Victor .....	80
Conclusion .....	85
Chapter Three: Papa’s Maybe, Mama’s Crack Baby: Labor and Addiction in	
<i>Delicious Foods</i> .....	89
Critical Framework: Addiction, Disability, African American Studies,	
Labor Exploitation.....	90
Disability and Exploitation: A Gothic Primer.....	98
Delicious Foods Farm.....	102
Darlene.....	105
Eddie .....	107
Conclusion .....	112
Conclusion .....	115
References .....	126

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is about the exploitation and disposability of disabled bodies. I am interested in understanding how some bodies are vulnerable to systems of exploitation by virtue of their race, gender, and disabilities. Chapter one interrogates Alejandro Morales's *The Rag Doll Plagues*, where ill and disabled female characters are disposed of during the protagonists' journey toward national progress. Hanya Yanagihara's *The People in The Trees* is the subject of chapter two. In this novel, ill, elderly characters of color are experimented on as their sovereign island is mined by pharmaceutical corporations. Chapter three discusses how James Hannaham's *Delicious Foods* portrays a major food supplier that compensates drug-addicted characters with drugs for their grueling field labor. Each chapter of my project discusses how fiction constructs monstrosity as raced, feminine, and disabled. I begin by discussing how scholars perpetuate labeling different bodies as *deviant*. Critical disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues that deviance refers specifically to bodies that stray from culturally mediated expectations for "normal" bodies (*Extraordinary Bodies* 6). Each novel under study addresses the function of capitalist systems that allow for the disposal of these deviant figures after they have served their physically exhausting purpose. The comparative analysis I perform illustrates how these literary and historical representations reverse the Gothic and render the nation horrifying for the marginalized characters instead of the dominant social class.

My analysis begins by arguing that the use of history in Revisionist Gothic reveals oppression and resistance in American fiction. Although each of the novels in "Reframing the Gothic" is set in a different period and comments on varying historical events, they all use history

to frame monstrosity. My study aims to expose socially constructed aberrations, such as racism, sexism, and ableism for the horrors they are in literature and reality. American gothic and disability studies scholarship, especially those primarily concerned with race, frame my research. My research identifies disconnections between these areas and aims to reconcile the growing distance between gothic, critical disability, and critical race studies.

While there are scholarly works connecting the Gothic to critical race studies and critical disability studies to Gothic studies, to my knowledge, no comprehensive study triangulating all three disciplines exists. This is startling because the gothic relies heavily on the literary portrayal of disabled people of color and literature by and about people of color relies heavily on gothic elements. “Reframing the Gothic” considers how multiethnic authors revise the gothic form to interrogate structural and historical policies that compartmentalize and contain disabled bodies. The sites of containment have either been neglected or over-mined for their environmental resources. Each chapter explores diverse temporal and geographic settings where policies that privilege white, wealthy, and able-bodied figures have led to mass environmental harms with long-lasting consequences for marginalized characters. Chapter one addresses environmental racism and its link to a fictional pandemic in 18th century Mexico, the 1980s HIV/AIDs crisis in Los Angeles, and a dystopic future where environmental pollution creates waves of incessant plagues. Chapter two addresses bioethical harms committed against an Indigenous population and attempts to exploit their bodies and land for resources from the 1960s-1990s. The focus of chapter three is the overlap of detrimental migrant farm labor practices and the 1980s crack epidemic.

## INTRODUCTION

...cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation's literature...  
– Toni Morrison, *Playing in The Dark*

At the closing of Toni Morrison's short story "Recitatif," Roberta turns to Twyla and asks, "What the hell happened to Maggie" (155)? She is not actually concerned with Maggie's whereabouts, nor does she expect Twyla to answer. Roberta's actual concern is about what happened to Maggie in the apple orchard behind their orphanage. While both women agree Maggie was "harmed" in some way, they agree neither on who the perpetrators were nor the extent of Maggie's injuries. The women are haunted by their fragmented memories of Maggie, a woman they may have attacked to relieve their frustrations about being abandoned by their mothers. Toni Morrison's first published short story, "Recitatif" has remained a significant text, often re-published in literary anthologies. Morrison removes all direct references to the protagonists' race and never states who is Black and who is white. These elusive racial markers drive much of the scholarship produced about the story. Some scholars have focused on the elusiveness of female friendships that cross racial lines and strenuous mother-daughter relationships. What has received less attention though, is Maggie's experience as a Black, disabled, non-speaking cafeteria worker.

The women can neither agree about who attacked Maggie in the orchard, nor what she looked like. When trying to recall her race, the women describe Maggie as both "sandy colored" and not "pitch Black" (140,153). Both women are also unsure as to the extent of her disability. During a moment of reflection, Twyla says, "I think we were wrong. I think she could hear and didn't let on" (141). Later, Twyla says she was "Deaf, I thought, and dumb" (153). Regarding the

attack, Twyla first remembers Maggie “falling down” (140). During an intense argument, Roberta accuses Twyla of racism: “You're the same little state kid who kicked a poor old black lady when she was down on the ground . . .” (151). The lack of clarity surrounding Maggie, except for the work she did at the orphanage, marks her as a spectral figure in the text. Scholars suggest her role in the story is to serve as a haunting memory that pulls the characters together for years.

Not only does Maggie remain spectral in the text, she also remains a spectral figure in African American literary and disability studies scholarship, though published in 1983. Articles dedicated to understanding her role in the text have only recently been published.<sup>1</sup> Twyla’s questions about what happened to Maggie parallel questions about both Maggie’s and the story’s place in literary scholarship. Maggie’s spectral role, the repetition of discord within Roberta and Twyla’s friendship, Twyla’s fragmented memories, and the orphanage itself, mark the story as Gothic. Reading the story as Gothic and through a critical disability studies lens allows me to shift Maggie from the margins of scholarship to its center.

All the characters discussed in the dissertation spend extended periods looking backward at their respective family histories and the breakdowns within them. *The Rag Doll Plagues* begins in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and spans into the late 2000s; in each century, spectral ancestors haunt the protagonists. *The People in the Trees* is posited as a chronological retelling of one person’s decades’ lengthy career; however, it begins and ends in precisely the same moment. Lastly, *Delicious Foods* uses flashbacks to explain the impact of haunting memories and drug addiction on a family.

---

<sup>1</sup>See “What the Hell Happened to Maggie?”: Stereotype, Sympathy, and Disability in Toni Morrison's "Recitatif" Howard Sklar (2011) and “Maggie in Toni Morrison's "Recitatif": The Africanist Presence and Disability Studies” Sandra Kumamoto Stanley (2011).



A traditional Gothic reading would marginalize Maggie because such approaches do not typically consider female characters of color and characters with disabilities as anything other than monstrous. Maisha Wester differentiates African American gothicists and early predominately white male gothicist by stating they “rarely mimic” traditional gothic narrative styles (2). Traditionally, the gothic “present[s] various problems and threats for the black writer. Rather, black authors appropriate and revise the genre’s tropes in unique ways to both speak back to the tradition’s originators and to make it a capable and useful vehicle for expressing the terrors and complexities of black existence in America” (Wester 2).

Wester’s theory allows readers to understand how race, gender, and disability converge in Maggie’s body. I suggest shifting away from reading Twyla and Roberta as the text’s protagonists; instead, I suggest we consider Maggie’s positionality in the text and her value in facilitating the protagonists’ development. bell hooks argues “To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. . . This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center” (17). Readers might better understand the character’s limited possibilities for developing and maintaining relationships, because of her racial and bodily difference if they examine the text with Maggie’s positionality in mind. “Recitatif” is one example of the many possibilities for examining the relationship between contemporary Gothic, critical disability studies, and critical race theory in U.S. multiethnic literature. In this study, I use critical disability studies and critical race theories to situate the contemporary novels, *The Rag Doll Plagues*, *The People in The Trees*, and *Delicious Foods* as gothic novels.

While there are scholarly works that connect the gothic to critical race studies and critical disability studies to gothic studies, to my knowledge no comprehensive study triangulating all three disciplines exists. My research builds on foundational criticism in Maisha Wester’s *Screams*

*from Shadowed Places: African American Gothic* bridges critical race studies and American Gothic studies by examining contemporary works by African American gothicists. Wester does not include any germinal disability scholarship, despite the presence of disability in nearly all the texts she examines. In *Demons of the Body and Mind*, scholars analyze various representations of disability in Gothic literature. Editor Ruth Birkenstok-Anolik argues, “The invisibility of the disabled discussed in this collection allows them to create all sorts of joyously transgressive havoc because no one notices their existence” (15). The anthology does not include scholarship on novels written by or about people of color; moreover, only the last three essays feature texts written after the early 20th century.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This dissertation is about disposability and exploitation. I am interested in understanding how some bodies are vulnerable to systems of exploitation by virtue of their race, gender, and disabilities. In each of the texts in my dissertation, complex webs of identification based on race, gender, and ability determine what happens to people labeled deviant. The term deviance refers specifically to bodies that stray from culturally mediated expectations for “normal” bodies (Garland-Thomson 6). Each novel addresses the existence of marginalized communities and how their bodies become disposable after they have served capitalist purposes. I take a comparative analysis approach to each of these processes of exploitation and how they render the nation horrifying for the marginalized characters.

The novels I examine originate in different ethnic traditions. Yet they share tropes: family secrets, physical disabilities, and a looming sense of horror. Each timeline overlaps with the succeeding novel. Investigating the periods of overlap through a comparative analysis reveals

similar patterns of oppression and resistance. Whether these characters are mistresses, scientists, elders, or children, or laborers, when pulled from “margin to center,” the horrifying systems that allow for their disposal are also pulled to the center.<sup>2</sup> Teresa Goddu asserts, “Instead of fleeing reality, the gothic registers its culture’s contradictions, presenting a distorted, not a disengaged, version of reality” (3). This study explores these varying realities in American literature and repositions those characters who have been marginalized.

### **American Gothic**

Gothic literature is a branch of Romantic writing appearing as early as the 16th century; its roots spread across Western European countries including, Britain, France, and Ireland. The gothic “. . . [clings] obsessively to the personal, the familial, and the national pasts to complicate rather than to clarify them, but mainly to implicate the individual in a deep morass of American desires and deeds that allow no final escape from or transcendence of them” (Savoy 169). While there is no formal definition, American Gothic texts generally align with Savoy’s explanation. Well-known Gothic works include Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Matthew Gregory Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796), Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1823), Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).

According to David Mogen’s *Frontier Gothic*, American Gothic differed from British Gothic because its settings are often “uniquely American” (14). Mogen is referring to settings such as the Western frontier, suburbia, and the American South. Early American Gothic often highlights particularly American “terrors” such as miscegenation in the great frontier. Goddu argues the fear

---

<sup>2</sup> This is a reference to bell hooks *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984).

of lax segregation laws contributed to the social concerns (4). American Gothic alerts readers to the “recent” past, which is a haunting presence that cannot be escaped or repressed. The Gothic often grounds these fears in the non-normative bodies of Others. Normative bodily expectations can be traced back to the Enlightenment period’s hyper-focus on controlling and categorizing nonwhite, male, heterosexual and “able” bodies (Birkenstock-Anolik 2).

Savoy notes Nathaniel Hawthorne “Americanized” British gothic elements. According to Savoy, Hawthorne “. . . purged American Gothic of its European trappings by avoiding the sensationalism of Brown, yet he consolidated Brown’s investment in the ongoing haunting of history’s evils and injustices” (176). In Hawthorne’s stories, there are no exhumations nor encounters with actual ghosts; he uses these elements figuratively (Savoy 179). Hawthorne represents the beginning of a tradition of American writers revising traditional Gothic norms. Early American gothic writers engaged with disability and illness differently than their British counterparts.

Leslie Fiedler’s germinal essay collection, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, argues psychoanalysis and madness are common Gothic literary elements; however, he does not engage with representations of mental instability critically. Fiedler asserts the mentally unstable figure is merely a placeholder for larger national anxieties. He also writes at length about African American and Native American characters but reads them metaphorically, as repositories for social angst. He states “Indians” represent “. . . whatever in the American psyche has been starved to death, whatever genteel Anglo-Saxondom has most ferociously repressed” (195). Fiedler and scholars following him failed to cite the problems of Gothic scholarship and writing; they do not engage it appropriately as racist, sexist, or ableist.

Jack Halberstam's germinal *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* takes a chronological approach to Gothic literature examining how monsters are "made," specifically as by-products of sexist and homophobic policies. Halberstam argues racism ". . . becomes a mark of nineteenth-century Gothic arises out of the attempt within horror fiction to give form to what terrifies the national community" (15). *Skin Shows* reveals two important concepts. First, it clearly articulates the Gothic practice of creating monsters with non-normative bodies to embody national fears as racist, ableist, and sexist.<sup>3</sup> Second, Halberstam identifies this practice but primarily engages with only one part of the triad, sexism. Like scholars before them, Halberstam acknowledges the racist and ableist elements at play but stops short of engaging them.

A particular aspect of Gothic literature haunts its scholarship: the horrors of people of color in American history are omnipresent in its pages, but few scholars discuss primary literature written by or about those marginalized figures. Given the corpus amount of criticism on harrowed race relations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the lack of research from the perspectives of authors and characters who are not white is perplexing.

Teresa Goddu's *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* is one of the earliest full-length explorations of the Gothic's presence in African American fiction. Goddu contends the gothic ". . . needs to be historicized...[and] can remain continuous with official narratives, even when it apparently contradicts them" (2). Goddu's work is groundbreaking because it examines writing by people of color to interrogate racism in America. She illustrates the gothic cannot be unwound from the cultural context in which it was produced. Gothic scholarship has always acknowledged how racial fears have fueled the texts without discussing racist policies beyond

---

<sup>3</sup> They refers to Halberstam's chosen pronouns.

mentioning that slavery was atrocious. Thus, Goddu's work marks a critical shift in reading and writing about the relationship between the gothic and its historic context.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of color-blind criticism is also evident in the lack of engagement with Toni Morrison's *Playing in The Dark* (1985). While scholars often cite her discussion of Poe and his more obvious acknowledgments of race in gothic literature writing, gothic scholars often fail to discuss her theory on the Africanist presence. Morrison argues the impact of Africans and African Americans on American literature has been so impactful that it should be recognized as a "history unto its own" (6). Morrison's significant theorizations are often used to explain the significance of the Africanist presence in American literature, especially gothic literature. Much of the writing widely accepted as gothic relies on the bodies and terror-filled experiences of people of color haunting white characters as opposed to characters of color being haunted by a legacy of terrorizing experiences themselves. Scholarship on revisionist gothic, then, could and should acknowledge traditional approaches to gothic elements but reimagine their possibilities for subversion and or ability to respond to national anxieties.

While trauma studies and psychoanalytic approaches are often used to examine gothic literature, there are far fewer disability studies interventions. This is especially interesting considering how often non-normative bodies are the "Other" in Gothic texts. The Other is often described by scholars as being a person of color, non-heterosexual, but more often than, not able-bodied in some way. Victorian disability literary scholar Martha Stoddard Holmes writes, "The relationship between disability and the Gothic as a genre and literary/cultural mode is both overdetermined by a plethora of representations and undertheorized by literary scholars" (181).

---

<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in "Frankenstein's Monster and Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain", H.L. Malchow compellingly argues that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* was actually a reflection of angst experienced by slave owners in Jamaica during the time of its publication (130).

According to Holmes, gothic texts do not just employ disabled figures in the text but instead rely on disability to produce their effects (182). Additionally, Holmes illustrates much of this literature attempts to create metaphors for illness and disability through disabled and disfigured bodies. In the collection, *Demons of the Body and Mind*, Lisa Hermsen asserts American Gothic tales of disease and disability, when viewed through a disability studies lens, reveal cultural horrors. Hermsen argues accommodations were also considered “threatening” to an otherwise rational and presumably able-bodied public (157). Hermsen mirrors Goddu’s point that the representation of marginalized groups in gothic literature is inextricable from the historical and sociopolitical contexts in which it is produced.

Gothic literature, history, and sociopolitical discourse are so entangled there are a range of other areas of study that could inform this project. While I expound on this more within the chapters, labor studies would prove especially illuminating as much of the violence enacted against some characters is driven by capitalist pursuits. Scholarship on the history of labor would provide context for the literal and figurative settler colonialist desires to expand Spain’s empire, selling human tissue, and ending with agribusiness owners exploiting laborers to save money. Environmental studies would also be a useful area of study to include in a longer version of this project. In each chapter environmental chaos disproportionately impacts already marginalized characters. For example, environmental conditions contribute to the spread of disease in one section of the Morales’ novel and in another, pollution causes mass biological harms.

### **Uniting Race, Gender, & Disability in the Gothic**

Research on disability in early gothic literature and research about race in more contemporary gothic literature are two areas of study with room to grow. The critical disability

studies approach I employ performs exactly this intersectional analysis. Critical disability studies has historically lacked discussion of its relationship to race and gender. While each text in the dissertation is written by authors from distinct multiethnic literary traditions and all focus on varying subject matter, they share an important feature. These texts are revisionist gothic and revise gothic features in similar ways, to reveal terrifying cultural realities. Wester argues “transgressive” bodies are not typically monstrous in and of themselves; instead, she asserts “social processes and institutions that define these bodies as aberrant ...are the actual Horrors” (1039). I build on Wester’s argument to illuminate the processes and institutions rendering the characters in them “monstrous” and therefore, disposable.

### **Disability Studies**

Literary disability studies is a broad and interdisciplinary field that has made great strides in a brief period. Unfortunately, it has also neglected significant literature by writers of color. Anna Storm, scholar of Black women’s literature, argues literary traditions “. . . are constructed not only by the authors in them but by the critics who create them; constructions though they may be, they are nevertheless necessary acts of critical resistance that must be continually examined and revised” (iii). A lack of citation amongst fields—a failure to be interdisciplinary within a field claiming to be interdisciplinary—has created the illusion of an undefined category. Reframing the Gothic aims to show the ways the U.S. multiethnic authors have reconstructed literary worlds to resist material and metaphoric restriction of marginalized bodies.

Literary disability studies of the 1980s and 1990s, with some exceptions, became a decidedly Anglo-American project. Christopher Bell’s “Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal” (2006) served as an early inquiry into the state of critical disability studies



scholarship as far as race was concerned. Bell expresses his frustration with a satirical critique of the disability studies. Bell contends scholars tend to “whitewash” (275). Disability studies, “while not wholeheartedly excluding people of color from its critique, by and large focuses on, the work of white individuals” (Bell 275).

Not only were disability scholars not widely integrating multiethnic scholarship, but multiethnic scholars were also failing to engage with disability studies. Michelle Jarman posits the lack of scholarship on behalf of “race” scholars is a historical one grounded in what she refers to as “biomedical attitudes” (18). Multiethnic literary scholars may have rejected disability studies to distance themselves from racist notions of physical and mental degeneracy used to legitimize the oppression of people of color. Despite these issues, multiethnic disability studies would eventually develop an expansive corpus of scholarship on African American, Asian/American, and Chicana/o literary disability studies. The growth in critical disability analyses of contemporary multiethnic literature reflects the currency of my dissertation.

Considering how important race has been for justifying bodily atrocities committed on the enslaved, it is odd that Black studies and disability studies do not explicitly overlap in more critical disability scholarship. Antebellum historians often focus their attention solely on the function and behavior of an individual body and not the intersections of systems allowed for the atrocity of slavery and its impact on individual bodies. Sami Schalk makes a similar criticism in her scholarship, rejecting facile readings of people and characters with disabilities. Schalk’s material/metaphor character approach demands readers trace how systems oppressive systems intersect and support each other in the labeling of *somebodies* as deviant and thus disposable. I employ Schalk’s approach to analyze *The Rag Doll Plagues* to analyze chapter one.

Chapter two explores connections between Asian American literary studies and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) studies, complicating these fields with representations of disability. Lee draws a connection between Pacific Islander and indigenous studies. Lee writes, Pacific Islander studies draws from “. . . critical indigenous studies for its critique of continuing settler colonialisms across the globe” (4). Quynh Nhu Le links the experiences of “Asian arrivant and Aboriginal communities” in “States of Arrest: The Affective Temporalities Structuring Canada’s Public Apologies” (43). Le writes, “Settler racial structures of feeling identify a settler racial common sense that is internally contingent upon the containment of affective formations of communities of difference” (43). This chapter examines the containment and molestation of indigenous islanders in *The People in The Trees*.

The Asian/American literary disability canon may have a much longer and richer history that has not been directly associated with disability. According to Wu, early Asian/American studies “privileged a heteropatriarchal – and by extension, nondisabled – subject” (2). Early activists and scholars chose to “generate their critiques of social inequality by appealing to a standard of normative masculinity” (Wu 2). Despite a lack of direct engagement with disability studies and its early initiates, Asian/American literature and cultural studies scholars were engaging with the field through peripheral topics. For example, in *Extraordinary Bodies*, Garland-Thomson writes Barnum’s American freak show used the bodies of “Siamese” twins Eng and Chang to challenge the “bodies of the individual, asking whether this entity was one person or two” (59). Garland-Thomson reads the twin’s role in the show as an opportunity for Americans audiences to “make self” through a physical comparison of their own bodies against the “freaks” in the shows. Chapter three interrogates the consequences of relying on Othered bodies for more than physical comparison, but for manual labor.

## Chapter Summaries

Alejandro Morales's *The Rag Doll Plagues*, is the focus of chapter one. In it, a recurrent figure battles illness and its accompanying social crises across several centuries. Using first-person narration, each reincarnation of Gregorio Revueltas offers readers a medi-historical account of the people and cultures they encounter during their missions. These journals and medical notes are, foremost, detailed accounts of each Revueltas' medical challenges and successes. Each predecessor comes to rely on his ancestors' writings as guiding texts for understanding the illnesses that develop in later centuries much like a scientific manuscript. Within each section, Morales relies on the bodies of disabled and disfigured characters to relay the impact of illnesses on primarily Chicana/o citizens. I will analyze the metaphoric and material figurations of characters with physical disabilities and illnesses, to show how they are rendered disposable in this chapter. Analyzing the text within the context of the Gothic tradition allows me to tease out the horrifying consequences of oppression, colonialism, racism, and classism embedded in the novel. Furthermore, like the changing landscape of the text, the nature of horror changes in each section.

Chapter two explores Hanya Yanagihara's *The People in The Trees*. This novel follows medical doctor Norton Perina as he uses memoir to discuss his greatest achievements and his eventual professional demise. Perina and his editor Dr. Ronald Kubodera try to explain how he came to discover the secret to "eternal life" and how his adopted son Victor came to accuse him of sexual abuse. Yanagihara relies on and revises Gothic elements when detailing how Perina became a sadistic "anthropologist." Like the very fields the main character studies, anthropology and medicine, Yanagihara's work calls for an interdisciplinary reading of the power dynamics at play between powerful and disenfranchised bodies. Perina's memoir belies his reliance on the

bodies of non-normative characters, especially those with disabilities, to further his professional goals. Chapter one explores the novel's form and the Gothic elements Yanagihara revises give voice to the repressed figures in the text. I utilize methods from anthropology, memoir, disability, and postcolonial studies.

*Delicious Foods*, the focus of the third and final chapter, is the story of a family struggling to build lives amid a mother's growing drug addiction and labor exploitations. Author James Hannaham reveals how Mother and son, Darlene and Eddie, came to provide slave labor for the Delicious Foods corporation, and after, how Eddie came to lose his hands. Scotty, crack cocaine and Darlene's drug of choice, also participates in the retelling of their family life and experiences. Additionally, Scotty functions similarly to Yanagihara's Perina; Scotty consistently works to resist culpability for the incidents that occur around him and in Darlene's search of him. Darlene, Eddie, and Scotty often recount the same memories as one another, using their memories to explain to readers how they came to be in such a harrowing predicament. Even the most benign memory becomes tortuous in its repetition, regardless of whether they are positive or negative. A cyclical retelling of the same experiences reflects the Gothic elements: familial discord and frame narratives.

My project aims to strengthen multiethnic studies using the topics of one tradition to help highlight the unique values of another. This is important given my desire to bridge the predominately Anglo-American focused gothic and disability studies to critical race studies. By turning to literature and scholarship by people of color to argue their place in the fields I (1) incorporate people of color into predominately Anglo-American fields of study and (2) present multiple entry points for other writings by people of color to be read as having a place in the Gothic field. My overall goal is to express that reading U.S. multiethnic Gothic literature is a valuable

endeavor. Reading these texts and including them in this dissertation is my attempt to forward the historic argument that studying multiethnic American writing is important for understanding individual cultures and American culture at large.

**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**TRANSFIGURED WOMEN: RACE, GENDER, AND DISABILITY**  
***IN THE RAG DOLL PLAGUES***

She saw our carriage . . . ran toward it and threw her child at the window.  
I saw the child's limp naked body . . . Her arms and legs were like stockings  
of skin, grotesquely swollen, reddish blood as is a sausage . . .  
I had seen the woman's eyes and I felt cursed.  
—*The Rag Doll Plagues*

The epigraph above comes from Alejandro Morales's sweeping 1992 Chicana novel *The Rag Doll Plagues*, which illustrates crucial yet overlooked ways race, gender, disability, intersect in gothic novels. Organized into three "books," the novel depicts epic struggles against mysterious diseases. Book I is set in eighteenth-century Mexico; Book II takes place in twentieth-century California (the 1980s); Book III imagines the twenty-first century set in the merged nation of Los Angeles and Mexico (LAMEX). The novel's subplot interrogates the disposability of racialized, disabled women's bodies. Because the male protagonists, Gregorio, Gregory, and Gregory have generated considerable scholarship, this chapter addresses the significance of the female protagonists: Marisela, Sandra, and Gabi. The novel and responding scholarship have often linked these women to disease and depravity by reading them as metaphors: Marisela as Indigenous inferiority, Sandra as contagion, and Gabi as inhumanity. Morales uses Marisela, Sandra, and Gabi and their subsequent disabilities as corporeal channels; they are the novel's central figures because it is only through them that readers can understand Morales's vision of the past(s) and possible futures. A benefit of these foci, though, is scholars have opportunities to interrogate the marginalization of women as well as to examine the novel's engagement with ableist discourse.

While most of the novel's scholarship reads the community's inability to control and prevent the spread of the contagions as alarming, few have examined the social consequences of this lack of control as horrific. In this chapter, I initiate my goal of bridging disability and gothic frameworks to include more contemporary works by writers of color.

*The Rag Doll Plagues* might best be understood as part of a lineage of gothic pandemic literature because it capitalizes on the form's reliance on a simultaneously familiar and foreign pandemic. Although the characters vary widely in each book, they all share a similar confusion and fear in the face of a pandemic. *The Rag Doll Plagues* is wholly predicated on tracking the development of diseases attributed to deviant populations; because the story is focused on female characters who contract it, the novel is situated at the center of feminist disability, gothic, and Chicana studies. There may be a lack of inter-disciplinary conversation surrounding the novel because of its precarious location among different fields. By identifying the constitutive elements of these varying approaches, one might overcome the roadblocks that have prevented a disability studies approach to U.S. multiethnic gothic literature.

### **Critical Framework: Chicana Gothic, Disability, Metaphor & Materiality**

One solution to the issue of expanding the theoretical approaches to the novel is reading it as Chicana Gothic. In “ ‘The Spirits Talk to Us’ ”: Regionalism, Poverty, And Romance in Mexican American Gothic Fiction,” Tace Hedrick asserts, “. . . readings of race and history in the US gothic novel by scholars such as Teresa Goddu and writers like Toni Morrison provide ways to think about how a racialized Mexican American narrative world meshes—or doesn't quite mesh . . . with the generic elements of the contemporary gothic/romance plot” (326). As I explained in my introduction, the exclusion of Chicana literature from the gothic canon is because of critics historically categorizing predominately white men as harbingers of the form. In, “The (Gothic)

Gift of Death in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*” Tanya González argues even though there is not much overlap between Chicana and gothic literature, the Gothic is important in these contexts because historically it “...not only introduced literary monsters such as Dracula, Frankenstein, and Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde, but that also served as the aesthetic space where authors could comment on the socially and culturally aberrant” (47). Thus, by reading Chicana writing as Gothic, scholars can critique Anglo American and interethnic representations of normality and abnormality.

A Chicana Gothic methodology redefines literary monstrosities as existing beyond imaginary bodies and allows readers to consider cultural aberrations horrifying. In “Gothic Fuentes,” Ricardo Gutiérrez Mouat argues “The Gothic, however, must be considered an integral element of the cultural politics of this period. It was a cosmopolitan genre that could be transplanted to Mexican soil. . .” (301). Morales takes a multi-century approach to the various horrors that have been directed towards a diverse range of figures, especially Chicana characters. Reading these historic moments within the context of the gothic redefines the traditionally rendered subject and perpetrator of horrific acts. Thus, the significance of a Chicana Gothic is unlike traditional gothic studies, which might normally render a figure monstrous by virtue of their being non-white and/or non-American, this approach considers racism and xenophobia an aberration.

The study of gothic literature and epidemics has an extensive history. Several of the more popular gothic writers focused primarily on the transmission of communicable diseases and a lack of public health services. Some of these novels include Charles Brockden Brown’s *Arthur Mervyn* (1799) about yellow fever, while Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe tackle fictional plagues in *The Last Man* (1826) and “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842). Like many other writers of the



day, Harriet Beecher Stowe examines cholera in *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856). All these writers used the gothic form to reflect on the horrifying social responses to the spread of seemingly uncontrollable diseases. In “The Gothic Origins of Global Health” Sari Altschuler contends the gothic has been the primary means of transmitting information about global public health and the social consequences that ensue when it is threatened. Specifically, she argues, “early gothic stories emphasized the disease as a medieval and foreign entity, later fiction narrated its uncanniness as simultaneously familiar and foreign” (16). These gothic texts were all published during the nineteenth century. It bears repeating one of the primary issues with the gothic canon is many of its primary texts were not published after the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This means literature by women and people of color are not included in the gothic canon at the same rate as white, male, heterosexual, normates.<sup>5</sup> Thus, classic and contemporary works from their perspectives are foreclosed within the gothic and its sub-areas, such as pandemics, as in *The Rag Doll Plagues* and *The People in The Trees*, the memoir from chapter two.

Altschuler argues in Eugène Sue’s, *The Wandering Jew* (1845), the Jewish character is a racialized Other “responsible for both the black death and the cholera pandemics” (566). The Other, typically a monster or harbinger of monstrosity, is often racialized, feminine, and/or disabled. Jack Halberstam writes monsters are “made” as by-products of sexist and homophobic policies. Halberstam argues, “Gothic monsters are defined both as other than the imagined community and as the being that cannot be imagined as community” (*Skin Shows* 15). Halberstam asserts racism “...becomes a mark of nineteenth-century Gothic [and] arises out of the attempt within horror fiction to give form to what terrifies the national community” (15). This study reveals

---

<sup>5</sup> Rosemarie Garland-Thomson asserts that a normate is a *constructed* identity who, “by way of the bodily configurations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them” (*Extraordinary Bodies* 8).

the gothic practice of creating monsters with non-normative bodies to embody national fears as racist, ableist, and sexist. This becomes even more apparent at the end of the chapter when Sue's wandering Jewish character is transformed by anti-Semitic literature and policies. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes the ease with which those in either social identity categories can be labeled Other, and thus suspicious, is because they have been historically marked "deviant" (6). Otherness, for the women in this novel, is determined by their gender, race, and illnesses.

Critical race scholars and disability scholars have also missed an opportunity to expand the novel's frame of analysis. While they have interrogated the relationship between the oppressive systems of racism and ableism, and gender, both fields have been slow to perform intersectional analyses of women of color's race, gender, and disabilities. Kimberlé Crenshaw, leading legal critical race and gender studies, asserts "when . . . practices expound identity as woman or person of color as either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling" (1242). Crenshaw writes more than mere acknowledgment of such relationships is necessary; there must be an interrogation of how they constitute one another. Examining the patterns these women create offers readers a chance to see how explicitly, disability and gender constitute identity.

Disabled characters are often used to enhance metaphoric or symbolic themes in fiction; academic scholarship, in turn, perpetuates this marginalization. Marisela, Sandra, and Gabi's bodies propel each Gregory toward a necessary action in battling each illness; however, they are discarded as their diseased or disabled bodies are cast aside not only in the novel but also in criticism. In metaphorical readings of the novel, Gregory's emotional journey is given analytical priority. For example, Marc García-Martínez writes of Gregorio of Book I: "Thus, what the reader is faced with is a crusade between hero and villain, a man and his own survival, a healer and a

virus, sinners and forgivers, and a character and some abstract supernatural force or entity—manifestations of paradigmatic literary conflict” (45). Such an analysis does not consider the impact of race, gender, and disability on any of the central female figures. Marisela, Sandra, and Gabi all represent the historic intersection of race, gender, class, and disability. Choosing to have three generations of the same male character battle an epidemic, all as medical doctors, Morales underscores the generational impacts of migration, racism, and technological “advancement” on women’s bodies. Analyzing these women through any single lens constricts the opportunity to critique the systems they navigate.

Jennifer James and Cynthia Wu, scholars of critical race and disability studies, write there is a risk of conflating the identities of subjects when examining the relationship of their social identities (6). However, this can be avoided if scholars focus on the way the categories produce the character. The women discussed here offer readers a glimpse into the interworking systems of oppression when they are examined both metaphorically and materially. In *Bodyminds Reimagined* Sami Schalk asserts, “Reading for both the metaphorical and material significance of disability in a text allows us to trace the ways discourses of (dis)ability, race, and gender . . . collude or work in place of one another” (34). Intersectional approaches, to women occupying multiple social spaces, is fundamental to improving the scholarship on disabled characters of color.

Sami Schalk claims disability metaphors “allow us to explore the historical and material connections between disability and other social systems of privilege and oppression such as race, gender, sexuality, class, the nation, and more” (“Interpreting”141). Thus, I employ a feminist disability approach to *The Rag Doll Plagues* to tease out Morales’s larger comments on the link between race, gender, and disability. *The Rag Doll Plagues* reveals the material consequences of various gothic pandemics leave racialized, gendered, and disabled figures at a greater risk of being

disposed of within the text and within supporting scholarship. The structure of this chapter will follow the historical structure of the novel itself, from the eighteenth-century into the 1980s and then into a dystopian twenty-first century. First, I offer a reading of these characters that identifies their contributions to the text and scholarship when they are read-only as metaphor. Then I examine their materiality, paying close attention to their roles in the text outside of their relationships to their respective Gregory. The essay concludes with a discussion of the value of using disability metaphor to engage with literary figures while also attending to their material representation.

### **Marisela**

Morales claims this novel is about illness and its impact on intimate relationships. In an interview he states, “This is the idea the novel presents: Three different times, same scenario with some kind of a great plague threatening the people and all taking place in basically one area” (qtd. in Neff and Morales 174). Despite this, Book I opens with only a vague mention of some predicament the narrator Gregorio Revueltas has been called to quell. Revueltas introduces himself as a friend of the King who has been ordered to help their mutual friend, New Mexico’s new Viceroy. Before the narrator explains that the predicament is a raging epidemic decimating the country’s population, La Mona, he details the dangers of his travels. He explains the journey to his new homestead is potentially deadly for the laborers carrying his luggage. He writes “the journey became more dangerous...for the Indian *tamemes* - professional carriers - who crossed over their foreheads wide leather straps to help support the massive loads they carried. Long ropes were attached to the head straps, to which were tied my *petacas*, heavy leather trunks with medical instruments, medicine and my personal estate. They lugged the *petacas* on their backs” (11). He describes them as “bald and scarred” Indians (11). Their foreheads were calloused and deformed

from a lifetime of service. I was fascinated by the strength and durability of their emaciated bodies. They kept moving for as long as I advanced. They appeared cool and concentrated as if in a trance” (11). According to David J. McCreery, the Spanish depended on *tamemes* for carrying various things, no matter the environment or weather. This job was a “low-status, largely hereditary occupation for which the men trained from childhood or were forced into by poverty” (36). The significance of including this image not only in the novel but also the following scene of a *tameme* slipping beneath the waves of a river and his body being left behind, immediately shows that one of the primary consequences of colonialism is some people’s bodies will be used up for state-sanctioned labor and disposed of when they can no longer meet the demand. Furthermore, Gregorio’s descriptions of their bodies as bald, scarred, deformed, calloused, and emaciated but still durable, reflect Morales’ later inscription of colonialism on the bodies of the conquered. This introduction foreshadows how Marisela’s indigenous pregnant body will bear the consequences of harm caused by Spaniards. Finally, this opening scene foreshadows the series of characters of color laboring to the point of disability and/or death and then being disposed of is present in the other gothic novels in this dissertation.

Readers learn Gregorio is a surgeon who has been called to help identify the causes and potential cures for La Mona. Father Jude, Gregorio’s local guide tells him, “It begins like the pox, but only on the extremities of the body. Then in a few days, it does horrendous damage to the internals. The suffering is great then, but when it gets to the trunk and head, it is indescribable” (Morales 22). Like early 19<sup>th</sup>-century pandemic gothic novels, *The Rag Doll Plagues* includes details of horrible and seemingly inexplicable symptoms, social panic, and a figure that aims to calm the diseases effects. Altschuler maintains pandemic gothic usually features “familiar settings that are hauntingly defamiliarized by the infiltration of dark, unseen, and foreign intruders that

threaten to corrode the familiar at the levels of both the individual and the population” (572).<sup>6</sup> Morales revises this trope by making Revueltas a foreign intruder who has been brought in to prevent the corrosion of a quickly changing nation. The changes in the nation, caused by Spanish colonialism, have already defamiliarized the country from its native citizens. Revueltas’ does not restore the area, but becomes part of the familiar, a colonial settler.

In “Settler Colonialism and The Elimination of the Native” (2006) Wolfe holds the logic of settler colonial elimination has two aspects. The first and negative aspect is it “...strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base. The two are not separable. . . the positive institutions of settler society continue to be shaped by the elimination of the native” (385). The new colonial society relies on the durable, not necessarily healthy, bodies of its Native members and land. The novel advances three different examples of settler colonialism in each “book”.<sup>7</sup> Morales explores Spanish colonial rule, expansive gentrification in California, and class-based segregation in the 21<sup>st</sup> c. While the means of instigating each formation of colonialism differs from one book to the next, all are driven by capitalism and determined by violence. Of course, this dissolution cannot be created or maintained without violent and repressive tactics. In *Unsettled Solidarities: Asian and Indigenous Cross-Representations in the Américas* Quynh Nhu Le asserts settler colonialism produces asymmetrical “violence and liberal beneficence” (4). While Le is referring directly to narratives written by and

---

<sup>6</sup> The novels Altschuler refers to are *The Wandering Jew*, Charles Averill’s (1850) *The Cholera-Fiend; or, The Plague-Spreaders of New York*, and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s (2000) *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, originally published in 1856.

<sup>7</sup> In *Unsettled Solidarities: Asian and Indigenous Cross-Representations in the Américas* Quynh Nhu Le writes that there are different types of colonial techniques a quote, such as “extractive colonialism and/or internal colonialism” (19). The difference between settler colonialism in in Canada and the U.S. is that extractive colonialism in Mexico did not rely on “racial disappearance” (Altamirano-Jiménez 8). Instead in Mexico “extractive colonialism implied that Indigenous peoples were recognized as subjugated peoples who had to render tribute and pay taxes to colonial authority” (Altamirano-Jiménez 8).

about Asian and Indigenous peoples, her work underscores the imbalanced and bloody stakes of settler colonialism Morales describes. Each woman, Marisela, Sandra, and Gabi is necessary insofar as her death teaches the male protagonist an important lesson. Each male character imparts this wisdom onto the preceding Gregory. Thus, the female characters in the novels are disposable beyond their role as metaphors to their male counterparts. Morales embeds the inseparability of elimination and colonialism during the process of de-escalating a major health crisis.<sup>8</sup> Father Antonio, General Secretary of the Holy Office and current director of the city's "hospital," explains to Gregorio La Mona is not curable; with "Bleeding, medicinal herbs, and roots and amputation we can slow it down, give the patient at most nine months to a year" (40). Father Antonio's warning, paired with the amputation of a male cadaver's arms, foreshadows the impending familial interaction between Gregorio and Marisela.

Marisela is an Indigenous woman who becomes disabled and loses a child to La Mona only eight pages after her introduction in the text.<sup>9</sup> She then is diagnosed with La Mona, has a quadruple amputation, delivers a baby, and then dies. The disease, its treatment, and fatality precede mention of Marisela. When she and her daughter are introduced, it is again through illness, not by name or even her role as the viceroy's mistress. By introducing Marisela to readers first through her relationship to La Mona, the illness is given priority over her identity. In her study of illness and identity in Chicana feminist literatures, *Encarnación: Illness and Body Politics in Chicana Feminist*, Suzanne Bost writes, "illness changes the external and internal workings of a body, it also changes one's place in society, the nature of one's relationships and the routines of one's

---

<sup>8</sup> I will expand on my discussion of colonialism's destruction of a place and its inability to return to its former self also in chapter two when discussing the island of Ivu'ivu.

<sup>9</sup> While Morales makes it clear that Marisela is indigenous to Mexico, he does not clarify what group she belongs to. According to the novel's setting in 18<sup>th</sup> century Veracruz and Spain's ongoing invasion, it is likely she was a member of the Aztec empire.

movement" (343). Morales's portrayal of Marisela underscores illnesses ability to alter these relationships. One example is her having to move into Father Jude's quarantined compound before she is even diagnosed with La Mona. The movement of her body, despite its not fully symptomatic state, is determined by La Mona, rendering her further subject to the disease.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Gregorio and Father Jude move freely among the infected population, working to stop the spread of the disease. Their non-indigenous masculinity parallels survival.

One of the earliest, and now germinal, discussions of disability metaphor comes from *Narrative Prosthesis* by David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder. These scholars define narrative prosthesis as a "perpetual discursive dependency" wherein disability is "a stock feature of characterization and . . . as an opportunistic metaphorical device" (47). In *The Rag Doll Plagues*, Marisela's body serves as metaphor for Mexico's suffering under colonial misrule. This view of Marisela is supported with ample evidence from the text; however, reading a character for metaphor can limit a reader's engagement with the social constructions of the setting she exists in and other marginalized parts of her identity. Schalk explains disability metaphors as "representations of disability that can be interpreted as representing something other than the lived experiences of people with disabilities, such as loss or evil" ("Interpreting" 140). Much like the *tamemes* from the beginning of the chapter who, metaphorically represent the horrors of Spanish conquest, materially they held positions determined by their class and functionality. As Schalk, and Mitchell and Snyder point out, using the disabled figure to represent "something else" can lead to their marginalization in scholarship.

---

<sup>10</sup> There are also three unnamed Indigenous women that live in the compound and help Gregorio care for Laurinda and Marisela. While the text does not say they are ever infected, they are also tied to the compound by the disease. They are only described as working as Gregorio's medical assistants, treating Laurinda and Marisela.



Garland-Thomson notes women of color are at risk of being labeled deviant whether they are disabled or not, as many cultures privilege white bodies. Thus, for disabled women of color, the possibility of being labeled deviant is ever present. The further disabled people's bodies and women's bodies deviate from socially constructed corporeal norms, the more likely these people will be read as "deviant" (Garland-Thomson 28). Thus, for disabled women of color, the possibility of being labeled deviant is ever present. Marisela's role in the text is girded immediately by her connection not only to La Mona but also to motherhood. Whenever Marisela speaks, it is typically only about her children and La Mona. This parameter for her speech clearly links maternity and disease. Marisela is an Indigenous woman, the viceroy's mistress, and later ill victim of La Mona. Marisela's race, scandalous relationship, and illness all mark her as deviant. Her characterization reveals the deviant body becomes disposable especially if read only as a metaphor for Mexico City. Marisela's brief role is transient; she appears to have been written in the novel only to offer Gregorio purpose in the face of brutalizing conquest and hopelessness.

Notably, some feminist disability scholarship would argue as an ill mother, Marisela disrupts traditional expectations of normative motherhood. In *Fading Scars: My Queer Disability History* Corbett O'Toole writes "The archetype for motherhood embeds the nondisabled body so deeply any deviation from that illusionary body is deemed unacceptable" (iii). Lillie Lainoff argues this is because dominant social expectations of motherhood include physical behaviors such as "performing domestic activities like cooking meals for them, cleaning up their toys, changing their diapers" not all women can perform (1). Thus, conversations about disabled or ill mothers rarely extend beyond the socio-political reactions such as forced sterilization. In *The Rag Doll Plagues* Marisela's devotion and access to her children despite her progressive physical decline is a revision of common ill and disabled mothering tropes.

Upon first arriving in the “old world,” Gregorio was resolutely judgmental and disgusted by its citizens despite their victimhood. He writes in his diaries “the King ordered my presence here to help . . . the Viceroy [and] I have come to endure the filth and corruption of this demoralized capital” (11). The link between a filthy and corrupt capital and the bodies of the community was Spaniard’s early attempt to devalue indigenous community members and render them disposable. Disability studies scholar, Julie Avril Minich discusses the relationship between corruption and the corporeal in *Accessible Citizenships*, noting corporeal devaluation is “rooted in systemic disregard for the lives of people with racially marked bodies” (99). Even before Gregorio encounters the disease and anybody with it, he links the people to corruption and devalues them; thus, their race, class, and exposure to illness makes their survival unimportant. Outside of medical experimentation, their bodies are disposable.

There is a separate canon of postcolonial gothic scholarship primarily concerned with 19<sup>th</sup> century British and American writing. While I do not advocate removing the spaces between these genres, some novels, such as *The Rag Doll Plagues*, are lost between them. While colonial gothic studies are primarily concerned with 19<sup>th</sup> century American and British instances of colonialism and land occupations, they share many features. These texts often use general gothic elements of hauntings, tyrannical men, and figurative and metaphorical examples of imprisonment. They also share feature narrators and/or protagonists, is always preoccupied with fear and disgust of the native population harming them in some way. In these imaginary instances of native attack, the main characters who are causing the actual harm through colonialist practices, read and react to native bodies fearfully. Gregorio’s initial response to the city and its people are reminiscent of other colonial gothic texts. In response to these classic works, some authors have revised their novels in interesting ways, such as rendering the native people victors over the invading

population.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, although they often feature substantial gothic elements and are responding to texts widely categorized as gothic, these texts are often labeled more generally as postcolonial. Thus, post-publication categorization can marginalize the experiences and responses of people of color by preventing their circulation within the gothic canon. *The Rag Doll Plagues* does not fit neatly into any one of the categories it most reflects, which may explain its marginal placement between the categories.

Gregorio begins to reassess his initial response to the city after interacting with Marisela and her daughter Laurinda. Marisela reveals she, too, is infected with La Mona by revealing her ankles “with great modesty” and showing Gregorio they are reddish in color, a symptom of La Mona (52). Here the word “modesty” separates her from La Mona’s earlier, unsympathetic victims. Notably, Marisela’s separation from the “deviants” in the city begins with her connection to royalty; her access to the higher class increases her modesty. Morales only attempts to dislodge the connection of her race, her illness, and femininity after her death.

Marisela, as a disabled woman of color, demands a framework that re-embodies her. In their introductory disability studies reader, *Rethinking Normalcy*, Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko explain representations of disabled figures in literature often leans toward “the rhetorical or symbolic potential of the prototypical disabled figure, who often functions as a lightning rod for the pity, fear, discomfort, guilt, or sense of normalcy of the reader, or a more significant character” (71). Titchkosky and Michalko do not explain in disability studies the “prototypical” disabled figure, who receives robust critical attention, is typically not a woman of color. Minich argues, “the corporeal images used to depict national belonging have important consequences for how the rights and obligations of citizenship are distributed. Bodily metaphors used to define nations are a

---

<sup>11</sup> Examples include Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Jamaica Kincaid's *The Autobiography of My Mother*; a response to Charlotte Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

subject of theoretical inquiry for disability scholars, certainly, but they are relevant as well for scholars in any field that takes seriously the issue of political belonging, including Chicana studies, border studies, and queer studies” (2). Minich’s point applies to Marisela as she represents citizens and immigrants, “including those with disabilities and diseases (whose bodies challenge the image of the healthy national body) and racialized and sexual minorities (whose claims to social and political rights are seen to imperil national unity)” (2). Marisela is an Indigenous woman whose community is being ravaged by La Mona, a plague that may or may not have been brought on by colonial settlers.

Morales links La Mona to Spanish antinativism. Marisela’s indigenous body serves as the ideal space mirror the impact of geographical conquest. During his first tour of the local hospital for La Mona victims, Gregorio meets Father Antonio. Father Antonio tells Gregorio to improve medical conditions, the colonial administration should “stop persecuting the curanderos, for they are an asset . . . Many are truly learned texxotla tictil, doctors and surgeons. . . They save more lives with their vulgar language than we do with our sanctified words” (40). Morales implies Father Antonio, given his extensive knowledge of their medical practices, is either indigenous to Mexico, mestizo, or sympathetic.

Gregorio, a literal agent of the state, notes his intention with Marisela, the embodiment of Mexico, is not to “conquer death, but to placate it for enough time to give birth to her child” (57). His interest is not to prevent Marisela’s death, which represents declining Mexico, but to preserve its resources for future use, possibly to continue the production of laboring bodies. Because of the overreliance of Spanish medical practices on Marisela and other Indigenous community members, her survival is no longer possible. Morales establishes La Mona is not curable but by allowing Indigenous medical treatment, the pain it causes may be curbed. When Morales chooses to sacrifice

Marisela's infected and pregnant body, he does so slowly and cruelly. Her death is arguably the most painful one of the three female protagonists as it is delayed by childbirth and amputation. Painful here serves to describe Marisela's painful last moments of life. Gregorio notes "Marisela suffered excruciating pain" and even refuses to provide some of the more gruesome details of her surgery (57).

Marisela's body exemplifies Mexico's inability to recover from the damages caused by Spanish conquest. The material body cannot be restored but can survive with the cooperation of Spain and Mestizos as indigenous characters are severely mistreated. Marisela's surgery proceeds with the employment of both Spanish and Indigenous treatment. Altschuler writes "racist geopolitics of gothic narrative are encoded at the core of medical understanding" (579). Before her legs are amputated, Marisela "[drinks] the xinaxtli potion without hesitation and applie[s] the iyauthtli cream to both her legs which had been overtaken by the disease almost overnight" (57). Marisela tries to reduce the pain caused by the amputation by drinking this traditional medicine, even though Spain's Holy Office has banned it. While she employs traditional medicines before her surgery, however, the merging of treatments—colonial and Indigenous—is not enough to prevent her painful death. Morales is pointing to the impossibility of two cultures thriving when one is under the rule of the other. Mexico cannot survive under the ravenous rule of Spain, despite brief periods of respite or a "birth" of hopefulness. Several days later, Marisela provides a hopeful future, embodied in her child Monica Marisela. Monica Marisela embodies a hopeful future for Gregorio partly because she is mestiza, or mixed race.<sup>12</sup> Scholar of Latin American and Latinx Culture, Ilan Stavans writes "Majority rule established the *mestizo* sensibility at the core of the

---

<sup>12</sup> Monica Marisela's mother is indigenous to Mexico and her father to Spain.

emergent national project” (“The United States of Mestizo”).<sup>13</sup> This designation remains contested as it helped to initiate an extensive caste system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Stavans argues, recently the term “has been the literary elite, mostly coming from the middle and upper classes, that has embraced the word as a valuable tool to understand politics and culture in Mexico and in other parts of the Americas” (“The United States of Mestizo”). In the colonial setting of *The Rag Doll Plagues*, the only possible outcome is an entirely new future that leaves behind the remnants of a Mexico crushed under Spanish rule.

Following her leg amputations, Marisela must have her arms removed. Twice before the surgeries, Marisela requests her hands not be cut off so she might hold her child before she dies. Although she objects to having her hands removed, Marisela implores Gregorio and Father Jude to “Take my feet. I want to float from earth to paradise. I don’t want to walk. I want God to ask me why I am floating on stubs instead of walking on feet. I want to make sure he has not forgotten us” (56). By removing her arms, Gregorio denies this pregnant mother the right to hold her child before dying. In this sense, she represents a *New Mexico*—she embodies the impossibility of preconquest Mexico to survive colonialism. Marisela evokes Catholic ideology and transitions into a martyr. She also aligns herself with the victims of La Mona, who have been predominantly Indigenous. Marisela is deserving of the utmost sympathy in response to Spain's impact on "her," but there is no space for her pre-colonial body.

Marisela speaks for the last time well before she dies. Marisela uses the last of her strength and her voice to request her child be given religious salvation via her conqueror’s religion. Her final words are “Take the child now before I die. You must save the child’s soul!” (61). Her role

---

<sup>13</sup> Stavans, “The United States of Mestizo,” *HUMANITIES*.

in the text as a catalyst for the tainted future of Mexico ends before she even dies. Her child, Monica Marisela, is not infected with La Mona; she is “untainted” by the disease and the colonial misrule it stands for. Her father, the Viceroy, has gone mad, is taken out of power, and is being sent back home to Spain before she is even born. His individual removal from power, though, does nothing to change the structure of the government itself. In “The Global Border,” Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez reads Gregorio as portraying two worlds merged into one individual. He argues the “key to (cultural and/or racial) survival is not seen in the preservation of unchanged traditions and customs (or racial or ethnic purity, for that matter) but. . . in their constant transformation and adaptation, in the continual crossing of new borders . . .” (94). Marisela’s decaying body becomes a vessel through which the possibility of merged and transformed traditions comes to exist (Monica Marisela). It is only as metaphor Marisela’s death is foundational for the development of a transformed nation wherein social cooperation may be possible. Materially, Marisela, like the drowned *tameme* from the opening of the chapter, has completed her task of birthing other bodies for Spain, and now her mission is complete, she can be disposed of. With Marisela’s death behind them, Gregorio and Monica Marisela look ahead to the future of Mexico.

### **Sandra**

Book II, titled “Delhi,” is set in Orange County, California, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Amid gang-related violence and the nation’s initial HIV/AIDS outbreaks, Dr. Gregory Revueltas attempts to strike a meaningful life-work balance with his love, the beautiful actress Sandra Spear. Morales’s portrayal of Sandra contracting HIV is interesting, given the novel’s publication date.<sup>14</sup> By 1984, the medical establishment had confirmed anyone could contract

HIV.<sup>15</sup> As with Marisela, if we read Sandra only as metaphor, she is rendered a silent figure who exists solely to give Gregory purpose. In choosing to have Sandra contract HIV through a blood transfusion, Morales disconnects HIV from gay men entirely.<sup>16</sup> Morales' decision to portray a wealthy Jewish woman as contracting HIV is an interesting one because early on, media outlets contributed to the construction of a victim of HIV/AIDS as a gay male who contracted the disease through sex or intravenous drug use. Some media outlets even linked people to HIV based on their ethnicities, especially Caribbean and African people, who were also assumed to be sex workers (Davidson 221). Like La Mona, neither could HIV/AIDS be contained to poor bodies. Sandra's body, much like Marisela's, serves as space for medical experimentation. Also, like Marisela's body, Sandra's body enriches our understanding of this novel and revises popular 70s and 80s HIV/AIDS conversation when read materially. Sandra's positive HIV status read only as metaphor neglects an in-depth discussion of her materiality and the social consequences of being HIV positive in late 1970s-1980s America.

Morales does not immediately reduce Sandra to her illness as he does with Marisela, and later, Gabi. The first chapter of the section depicts her as a strong and captivating extension of nature. For example, Gregory refers to Sandra as a "well planted behemoth cypress tree" before

---

<sup>14</sup> *The Rag Doll Plagues* was first published in 1992, after over a decade of ignorance and homophobic discourses on HIV/AIDS. There is well-documented personal violence against and medical institutional neglect of members of the LGBT community. Response to this violence and neglect included disrupting the "AIDS is gay disease" narrative. For example, in the 1993 article "Homosexuals and AIDS," Vandevyer writes, "'Homosexuals' as a homogenous group do not exist. It is only some people's practices which are dangerous . . . The abuse of the expression 'high risk group' to designate homosexuals regardless of their behavior might foster the rejection of homosexuals as scapegoats . . ." (320).

<sup>15</sup> This was in part precipitated by the highly public activism of Ryan White ("Who Was Ryan White?"). White made national headlines when he and his family became advocates for AIDS patients' rights. A hemophiliac who contracted HIV through transfusion, he was diagnosed in 1984 and died in 1990, at age eighteen.

<sup>16</sup> The exception to this is a brief passage in Book III about a fictional massacre of gay San Franciscans in 1995: "Without warning, the outside community attacked and brutally dragged out to the street every AIDS victim in the Moribundus Support Houses and systematically murdered them" (160).



he learns her name or occupation (Morales 69). “Delhi” begins by revealing to readers how this iteration of Gregory and the ethereal actress Sandra met. Before he finds out she is a hemophiliac, Gregory views Sandra’s body as cultural topography. An enthralled Gregory reveals when he saw Sandra, he “saw the world, the sea, the mountains in her legs, her arms, her face. The cosmos became her body” (69).

When Morales does link Sandra to illness, it is in direct contrast to his image of her body as powerful and magical. He says her breasts were “like sacred shrines of memories from which I suckled the past” (73). After she slashes her hand on cardboard and nearly dies, Gregory's view of Sandra changes, and readers learn she has had multiple near-death experiences. Once she is pregnant, Sandra cannot get out of bed alone nor can she carry a child to full term (78). It is only in his dreams that Gregory can view Sandra’s body as anything other than weakened and fragile. In choosing to mark her body as fragile, except in Gregory’s imagination, Morales links Sandra’s physical decline to the decline of the California community she lives in. The Delhi community is a predominately Chicax neighborhood struggling against racist gentrification practices. Whenever Gregory looks at Sandra’s body, he projects memories and fantasies onto it. He says, “My gaze covered her with red flowers like a bougainvillea covering the walls of a city . . .” (74).

Materially, Sandra suffers from an incurable illness, hemophilia, and to treat it, acquires a second one. For Sandra, treating her hemophilia with a blood transfusion leads to HIV, loss of her job, and social rejection. Sandra’s body represents an unimaginably unified community of wealthy white art patrons and impoverished Chicax community members who cannot survive the gentrification. Attempts to unify these two groups, with Sandra’s body as its interjection, can only result in its decline as both old and new residents wage war for control of the neighborhood.

Reading gentrification and its process as a violent set of policies that target poor communities within the context of the gothic would mean reading those policies as harmful or horrific. The residents, who are resisting the socio-economic changes in the neighborhood, would not be understood as the “problem.” Ruth Bienstock-Anolik broaches this argument when she states the zombies in Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One* are part of a gothic lineage of monsters who embody the fears of invasion, including plagues and gentrification. So, while gentrification and its political process are not overtly gothic, the terror of facing displacement and one's disposability within community redevelopment plans aligns it with the gothic. While some scholarship argues gentrification has a positive impact on neighborhoods, Morales points to some indisputably negative effects. One is gentrification occurs in areas are primarily home to impoverished people of color. The state of the communities can also be attributed to decades of historically racist and classist policies that sought to contain segregated communities and redistribute its funds out of the community. David J. Vázquez defines gentrification as “neoliberal urban renewal policies that shift finite resources in urban neighborhoods away from the poor and toward middle-class, mostly white residents” (204). Daniel José Older holds gentrification’s “intentional process of uprooting communities” is violent (par. 6). Sandra is a participant in both communities, as she is dating and spends time with Gregory the physician who works directly with providing local community members access to quality medical care. However, as a wealthy presumably white actress Sandra is a member of the burgeoning art scene that seeks to dismantle the Chicana community.

Sandra is also one of only two Jewish characters in the novel. Morales’s decision to mark Sandra as Jewish is a curious one, especially when reading this novel as gothic. In *Anti-Semitism in British Gothic Literature*, Carol Margaret Davidson tracks the shapeshifting of the wandering Jewish figure into an increasingly demonic and vampiric figure from a man cursed with

immortality for mocking Jesus. She asserts his presence “haunts” gothic British literature (2). According to Davidson, “anti-Semitism has remained a consistent and readily adaptable component in British identity construction. Indeed, it has been the real vampire that has birthed demons by projecting its macabre tendencies onto the Jew” (14). While this study is attending to interactions between a Jewish American woman and Chicana residents, not British figures, it is still applicable to this novel. Davidson’s characterization of anti-Semitism as vampiric supports my argument, prejudicial social responses to figures who are not Christian, male, and able-bodied are the true horrors, not the people themselves.

Davidson’s study also aligns with Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s feminist disability theory. Davidson writes contends the “transgressive Wandering Jew figure...became an agent of the uncanny onto whom were projected that nation’s anxieties and aspirations...” (9). According to Garland-Thomson the “physically disabled body becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity” (6). I am not asserting that to be Jewish is to be disabled; however, non-normative bodies, especially those with overlapping social identities, are represented similarly in cultural production. Literary representation of Jewish figures in gothic literature typically links back to adapted versions of the cursed protagonist Ahasuerus from Eugène Sue’s *The Wandering Jew*. In the following centuries Ahasuerus would be transformed into various horrifying and stereotypical characters. According to Davidson, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is part of this lineage of distorted Ahasuerus.

Morales relies on some element of this trope, especially the transmission of blood from one body to another; however, Morales revises this trope by marking Sandra’s body as ill and thus, sympathetic. She becomes a social outcast after she is diagnosed with HIV and it is not because of the fear of vampiric but because of a lack of knowledge about how HIV is transmitted. Following

a car accident, the “homeboys” offer their blood for Sandra’s blood transfusion. There is nothing vampiric about the blood exchange between Sandra and the “homeboys.” As they all enter the hospital, a nurse immediately calls for security and assumes Sandra is the victim of a gang-related stabbing. The young people are then accosted by the police, searched for weapons, and accused of theft.

While Sandra lies unconscious and bleeding out, she is presumed to be a member of their gang, impoverished, and without insurance. Amid the chaos, a female officer orders: “Send her to County jail ward . . . All of you are going in!” (100). This scene reveals how Sandra’s mere association with poor homeboys renders her susceptible to institutionalized racism. The quality of care offered to a woman assumed to be “like” them in terms of race and class reveals the lack of care police and hospital workers believe they deserve. This scene has three crucial functions. First, it foreshadows Sandra’s future experiences in the text as a devalued and disposable body. Next, it highlights the links between racism and class in medical care. Finally, this scene highlights how the imagined threat the homeboys represent results in material consequences for them and Sandra.

Sandra is very much supported by the homeboys owing to her performance of Federico García Lorca’s “Blood Wedding.” Gregory says, “Sandra’s performance in Barrio . . . was one of the most eccentric performances of my life” (90). By performing in the neighborhood, Sandra creates a bridge between the artistic pursuits of the wealthy gentrifiers and the poor longtime residents of the Chicanox Delhi community. Her audience consisted of not only homeboys and Gregory but also Doña Rosina, the neighborhood matriarch, and Dr. Flink, Gregory’s professional mentor. Until Sandra’s performance(s), the only time these characters interacted with each other

was during unpleasant encounters in the hospital. The tragic end the parties face after Sandra brings these different figures together reflects the plot of the play itself.<sup>17</sup>

Later, Sandra gives a similarly striking performance for a much wider and diverse audience, including those from the barrio and Orange County. These feuding communities are joined to witness Sandra's beautiful performance. Some audience members wrote to the Orange County Register the "barrio homeboys, Mexican gangsters, looked absurd and defiant sitting in the architectural dignity of the Center. They should not have attended . . ." (Morales 92). In lieu of commenting on her actual performance, Sandra is overshadowed by her relationship with the audience. Although they are not forcibly removed from viewing her performances, Sandra is no longer given major roles or material that might especially interest Chicana audience members to reduce their being in the theatre.

During the play's production, Sandra's body and her performance offer a glimmer of hope in the development of positive relationships among the various Los Angeles communities. Like the community member who transmits HIV to her via a blood transfusion, a hopeful and active Sandra is treated like a leper within spaces that once welcomed her. Sandra then comes to represent the deteriorating boundaries of each community. In her privileged, white body circulates the tainted blood of the poor Mexican homeboys.<sup>18</sup> Morales writes Sandra is "transmuted into a decomposing creature, bursting with foul-smelling miasma, spilling fluids and dropping maggots in its wake, and decorated with a crown of filthy flies" (109). Marisela's death mirrors the impossibility of the location surviving cohabitation by colonizing and native populations.

---

<sup>17</sup> In end of the tragic "Blood Wedding" protagonist, two men kill themselves as they fight for the love of a woman known only as the Bride.

<sup>18</sup> Sandra is presumed white.

Miguel López-Lozano argues blood in *The Rag Doll Plagues* represents “the fear of intercultural contact and points to the shortcomings of concepts such as mestizaje to resolve social inequalities, advocating instead a multicultural agenda able to address the socioeconomic complexities of contemporary society” (42). Thus, the development of positive social relationships alone is not enough to ease tension in this intercultural location of Southern California. One reason is the tension is caused by racism and classism. Therefore, Sandra unwillingly comes to serve as a metaphor for racial mixing. Sandra is physically “married” to the homeboys and their predominately Chicana community through the sharing of blood or blood wedding. López-Lozano argues upon receiving the transfusion, Sandra comes to serve as “both the embodiment of the epidemic and the primary agent of cultural hybridity” (55). For Morales, the “two-in-one” condition of Sandra's body can only lead to the destruction of the location itself. The experience of the homeboys and Sandra’s treatment demonstrates the impossibility of the old and new residents’ peaceful coexistence, signaling instead the continuation of tension between incorporation and expulsion beginning in Book I.

When she attempts to resume work as an actress, post-diagnosis, Sandra is dismissed by the program director. He tells her, “You just don’t know about this sickness. Nobody wants to endanger their lives by working with you” (109). Her having contracted HIV leads to her total expulsion from her artistic community. Sandra’s mere presence in the theater is enough to ignite fear in its patrons. These acts of discrimination mirror the treatment she receives from the doctors and nurses who refuse to be in proximity to her body. The consequences for Sandra and the homeboys, however, are not the same. Gregory recounts some of Sandra’s experiences with discriminatory medical staff, noting “Several doctors and nurses absolutely refused to be in the same room with her. . . They considered Sandra a human scourge, a Pandora’s box filled with

diseases capable of destroying humanity. . . . Their complaint was that they did not get combat pay for endangering their lives with scum like her” (112). A material reading of Sandra’s experiences with medical staff renders these moments opportunities for discussion of discrimination, especially institutionalized racism. While I do not suggest La Mona is a strain of HIV or Marisela’s and Sandra’s illnesses are the same, the material impact of having been diagnosed with a highly contagious illness renders both women deviant and determines the level of care and treatment they receive. Reading this gothic text through a feminist disability lens helps illuminate the larger question of how society responds to and creates narratives about infectious disease.

In *Contagious Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*, Priscilla Wald argues literature controls the way the larger public responds to pandemics and illness. Novels can impact survival rates because they either “promote or mitigate the stigmatizing of individuals, groups, populations, locales (regional and global), behaviors, and lifestyles” (Wald 3). These works can “influence how both scientists and the lay public understand the nature and consequences of infection, how they imagine the threat, and why they react so fearfully to some disease outbreaks and not others at least as dangerous and pressing” (3). Published in 1992 during the period of major stigma and public confusion about HIV/AIDs, Morales’s work sternly criticizes public health professionals who mistreat their patients. This gothic text posits the stigma as the object of fear, while the patients in the work are drawn sympathetically.

In Lyles’s work on HIV and fictional women’s “domestication,” he contends there is a relationship between “heteronormativity, gender compliance, and even able-bodied productivity” (157). Lyles explains, “In addition to demanding that the HIV-positive body acquiesces to the principles of normative bodily expression, that body must also abide by the mandates of nuclear familial structure, particularly through the motherhood imperative” (162). Sandra, despite her

access and relationship with a skilled doctor, unlimited financial support, and desire to have a child, cannot mother because she cannot carry a child to term. Marisela exists in a social system that amputates victims of the disease, leaving them completely disabled. According to her characterization and the novel's settings, Marisela needs arms and legs to parent productively. Marisela, a mother who literally cannot hold her child, is written out of the novel. Both Morales and Lyles imply infected bodies must meet certain gendered and able-bodied standards, or they forfeit their place within these fictional worlds. This standard is underscored as Gregory goes on to have a child with a woman other than Sandra; he is the grandfather of Gregory in Book III. This mother, ironically, is completely contained and not visible or audible in the text. She seems to exist only as the vessel for the existence of the next and final Gregory Revueltas.

## **Gabi**

Morales portrays characters who exist in similarly dystopic gothic conditions. The result of this authoritarian government is continued environmental devastation and bodies that suffer because of the devastation and attempts to cure it. Victims of environmental devastation, or “unpeople”, are primarily poor, already ill, people of color. This group begins their lives without full access to the rights of citizenship or quality medical care.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in Book III the three's blood donors, whose “work” I liken to migrant farm labor, reflects the ways already disadvantaged bodies become tools for supporting an establishment exploiting and disposing them. Since the initial blood donors are Mexican soldiers and local female virgins who live on the outskirts of

---

<sup>19</sup> In Margaret Atwood's dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale*, a category of people, primarily women, are categorized as “unpeople.” Unpeople are forced to live on and act as laborers on radioactive land. These people have lost their rights to human privileges because of some act of deviance including being gay, old, or having an extramarital affair. Their punishment is they lose their status as human beings deserving of basic rights and access to decent living facilities.



Middle Existence colonies in Mexico City, around the borders of the restructured California-Mexico, they are simultaneously necessary and disposable. By beginning the section by explaining how Lower Life Existence camps were created by social outcasts from prison towns, Morales demonstrates the ways systems of labor and exploitation can be created once its victims are stripped of their humanity.

Book III's late 21<sup>st</sup>-century setting is a dystopic vision of the now merged Mexico and Los Angeles, LAMEX. The second chapter of this book describes these communities as Lower Life Existence concentrations, "Built around old prison facilities, most of the population consisted of the Lumpen...criminal and dregs of our society" (137). Morales figuratively returns the text to Book I in his description of the people in the community he must treat. So, while the temporal setting is extremely different, there are computer superhighways and no literal *tamemes*, its geographical setting is the same. The text also seems the same and yet changed. Morales relies on what Freud termed uncanniness. According to Freud, the uncanny is "that which is familiar but repressed [and] eventually returns to haunt the subject or subjects" (*Uncanny*). In *The Rag Doll Plagues* the uncanny is a figurative and literal device. The text returns to examples of marginalized community members being disproportionately impacted by epidemics. Thus, Morales is not "building worlds" as one would in a sci-fi dystopian novel. Morales is rebuilding worlds on top of one another, criticizing the lasting effects of colonialism. The foundation is so imbued with horrific acts no world built on top of it will be untainted. Like the land itself, the community in Book III cannot escape a legacy of human atrocities. It is unsurprising then the government, or The Directorate, maintains a highly segregated public health program. In fact, it is the fear of contagion spreading among the uber-wealthy that drives the Directorate to hire Gregory and his assistant Gabi, to investigate and treat the pandemic. In its newest iteration, La Mona has become Blue

Buster. Like most other epidemics, both actual and fictional, the disease is exacerbated by a lack of effective public health outreach. Despite grand technological advancements, such as computer speedways the social class disparities only worsened.<sup>20</sup>

Morales creates a sense of terror by including a description of a poisonous gas that leads to symptoms like La Mona among those in the LLE's. Gregory refers to this current outbreak as a "plague" causing a "hyper cancer" among its victims (128). Gregory also notes these outbreaks occur frequently and are linked to the city's overpopulation and pollution (128). Thus, the reader may feel a sense of anxiety about the possibility of an outbreak occurring at any moment. Of course, the most explicit gothic reference occurs when Gregory states, "I, like Doctor Frankenstein, decided to conduct clandestine experiments, but unlike the good doctor, I needed living people to give blood and terminally ill patients for experimental subjects...I knew that the monster I could create was not an individual man, but a reaction to the knowledge I possessed" (160). He is physically led to this book by ancestral ghosts who want to see him use his newfound knowledge to support humanity. The clandestine experiments Gregory is referring to here are on Mexican soldiers who have severe leukemic blood counts without any other symptoms of leukemia. Gregory says "Something wonderful, had occurred to some of the people of Mexico City [they] had been transformed genetically to produce a blood that was able to sustain life in the most polluted conditions on earth" (155). Also, like Victor Frankenstein, Gregory is not fully aware of the implications of creating a solution to a shared problem until the consequences arise. He learns this leukemic blood can cure pulmonary issues, but not an ability to create life.

Upon saving the lives of a young boy and girl through a heterosexual blood transfer, Mexican people with the "special" blood count begin to get hired as live-in donors. Gregory says

---

<sup>20</sup> This public health response, or lack thereof, recalls other epidemics, such as the Coronavirus, Typhoid, and the Bubonic Plague.

the “Los Angeles folks offered a salary and room and board to guarantee their access to MCM blood” (184). As a result, the hired “...would live in privileged enslavement for the remainder of their lives. Their blood was worth lives and Elena Tarn guaranteed herself and her daughter an indefinite supply. She wanted these Mexicans to produce children, for they inherited their parent’s blood chemical qualities” (182). Although this is just one example of a wealthy person, using Mexico City Mexican’s (MCM), Morales makes it clear this arrangement was practiced widely. Eventually, there came a turn towards mass production via blood farms. Morale writes, "There came to exist blood farms. Mexicans were contracted and flown in from Mexico City to live in luxury and produce blood (184). This allowed people who did not have the resources to house an MCM similar access to their blood. Again, this sharing of blood recalls section two as Sandra’s life was saved by a voluntary blood transfusion with blood donated by a group of young Mexican men. Simultaneously, her life was saved, and yet her body ravaged by medical science's inability to control the disease she contracted as a result. There is a parallel between this version of a future America’s inability to control the environment that exacerbates Blue Buster and medical science's inability, and sometimes refusal, to treat those with HIV effectively.

Unlike Marisela and Sandra, Gabriela “Gabi” Chung does not contract the disease but instead works alongside Gregory to quell it. Gabi, Gregory’s Asian American medical assistant and lover, is rendered deviant because of her race, gender, sexuality, and disability. Gabi should be able to access social capital and live a privileged life but is prevented from doing so because of an enhancement that becomes a disability. Gabi is immediately described as having a non-normative body because of her computerized prosthetic arm.

Morales transitions from describing Gabi’s accomplishments and strength as a medical assistant, to the origins of her robotic implant. He describes the prosthetic and surgery as “severing

an arm and hand from the elbow and replacing it with a computerized knowledge bank whose fingertips were laser surgical instruments and knowledge cylinders" (136). He also notes the unpleasant scent of her burning flesh, referring to it as an "inconvenience" (136). When he describes her arm as "hideous" he marks her entire body as unappealing or deviant. Garland-Thomson writes, "representation tends to objectify disabled characters by denying them any opportunity for subjectivity or agency . . . the plot . . . benefits from the disabled figure remaining other to the reader" (11). By depicting Gabi as a hybrid human-machine, or cyborg, it becomes even easier to read her as only a metaphor. In "Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway argues the cyborg is a hybrid "machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149). That neither Gabi nor Marisela or Sandra is described from her own point of view limits their agency. Gabi's decisions to amputate, for example, are discussed only briefly while she is in conversation with Gregory. Any additional motivations are hidden from the reader, rendering her choice professionally mediated and her body "identifiably human but resolutely different" (Garland-Thomson 11).

When Gregory begins researching a cure for Blue Buster without Gabi's arm, he says he misses it: "A computerized arm like Gabi's could have made it easier to test the blood . . . With that arm, everything was at my disposal. I could access whatever information was possibly held in computers" (169). Gregory does not express how much he misses Gabi nor how useful she might be in aiding him in this mission. When Gregory notes having access to Gabi's arm would be beneficial to him, he reduces her to a body part. Gabi's value to Gregory, and thus to the story, lies in her arm's ability to facilitate his discovery of a cure. Morales implies an overdependence on technology reflects a lack of humanity; this is evidenced in Gregory's thoughts: "I would not allow myself to be carved up and shaped into what the Directorate considered a model optimum efficient

doctor” (143). Gregory vilifies Gabi, leading readers to associate her decision to amputate and then use a computerized prosthetic as a set of deviant behaviors until her arm serves him. Of course, like the transformative nature of the text, Gabi will eventually serve as metaphor for the failure of technology and time to mitigate the lasting effects of racism, sexism, and ableism.

Gabi, whose prosthetic can be read initially as an enhancement and later as a disability, is developed to serve Gregory. Her inability to serve him, because of her arm malfunctioning, results in her eventual death. Once her prosthetic can no longer assist Gregory or anyone else, she becomes disposable. Because Gabi's body rejected the computerized arm, "she was not allowed to continue the second stage of the . . . experiment . . . [which] unofficially announced her elimination from her present job" (197). If Gabi is in fact qualified for the position, and only has the surgery to increase her chances of being promoted, then even without a computerized arm, she is, at the very minimum, a competent medical assistant. The decrease in her ability to serve medically owing to the decreased functioning of her arm makes Gregory's view of her as merely a medical instrument painfully clear.

Labeling Gabi's prosthetic as either a disability or an enhancement does a disservice to the complexity of the surgery, her motivations, and her later opinion of the surgery. This discourse requires a materialist analysis because it reveals there is a correct body and that anybody who is disabled or enhanced has no place in Morales's vision of a healthy future. The prosthetic arm is an enhancement at first because it allows her to meet the needs of her profession efficiently and effectively. The arm's failure and Gabi's inability to leverage it as a means of dedication to the profession "disables" her. Thus, whether someone is disabled is not always determined by their corporeal physicality, but instead by their functionality. So, despite having her arm amputated and replaced with a computer, Gabi's able-bodiedness is determined by the extent to which she can

function within society. Oddly, despite the technological advances present in the world of the novel, Morales does not discuss whether replacing the arm is an option.

Stephen Sohn's article "Minor Character, Minority Orientalism, and the Borderlands of Asian America" reveals ways in which Gabi's racialized and gendered characterization can be read as Orientalist and sexist. His approach considers her material characterization and the sociohistorical contexts that shape it. Sohn explains Gabi's characterizations, as ambitious, studious, and intelligent "especially in relation to mathematics and the sciences," are stereotypical expectations of the Asian American model minority (156). According to Sohn Morales depicts Gabi as a hypersexualized figure, another stereotype of Asian women, as she indulges "in a hedonistic lifestyle filled with sex partners, narcotics, and other such vices" (160). For Sohn, analyzing Gabi means acknowledging her racialized and gendered material body.

Sohn relies on rhetoric frequently used to interrogate disability in literature, especially when using the word "deviant." Sohn engages "deviance" to discuss how "Asian immigrants became racialized as exotic and unassimilable foreigners . . . simultaneously constructed within gendered and sexual paradigms" because of a projection of deviance onto their bodies (169). In disability theory, the term is often used as an intersectional approach to describe nontraditional bodies. In "Feminism, Disability, and Embodiment," for example, Kim Q. Hall argues deviant bodies "threaten to blur and, thus, undermine organizing binaries of social life (such as those defining dominant conceptions of gender and racial identity)" (vii). While Morales uses Gabi's prosthetic as a metaphor for dehumanizing technology, Sohn uses Gabi's arm as a metaphor for racial and gendered discrimination.

The difference in usage of "deviance" between Sohn and Garland-Thomson reveals the elision of one aspect of Gabi's identity: her physical body. Garland-Thomson extends her

arguments about deviance to include race, gender, and disability. In not addressing the third corner of this triad, but still using it as a frame to view race and gender, Sohn erases disability as a social category traditionally invoked with the usage of this term. He writes, “Gabi’s robotic arm offers critical opportunities to examine how the text imagines the Asian American as an expendable techno-Orientalist figure” (154). Reading Gabi as a techno-orientalist figure within a gothic dystopia demands her socio-historic environment be examined carefully.

Morales does offer some details to round out Gabi’s characterization and evidence her materiality. Gregory says despite her ambition, education, and experience, Gabi has been passed over for the position of Medical Director at least three times. He reveals, “She had assisted the preceding three directors and had worked on some of the worst natural disasters in recent times” (135). While he did not think he was a viable candidate for Medical Director, he reveals: “I returned to Mexico City to find to my great surprise a job offer waiting there as well . . . the events had planned in themselves their own occurrence” (134). Gregory acknowledges Gabi deserved the position and his appointment as her superior is odd. His decision to accept the appointment, despite his lack of experience, is more than an arrogant decision: it highlights his complicity in Gabi’s disposability.

Gabi consistently sought to prove herself to the directorate, first by working as Gregory’s assistant despite her qualifications, then in her general willingness to undergo an experimental “severing [of] an arm and hand” (136). As Sohn notes, if Gabi is read only from Gregory’s point of view, her professional behaviors—especially her decision to receive the prosthetic— can be read as conniving or overachieving. An overreliance on metaphor erases Gabi’s ability and desire to save lives. Using historic distrust of Asian Americans, especially in professional or economic contexts, Sohn explains Gabi’s specific racial materiality as “Given this racial genealogy,

Morales's novel captures Gabi's menacing nature, particularly revealed by her cutthroat attitude and her willingness to jettison any sentimental feelings for Gregory in her single-minded pursuit of top-notch job positions" (158). He goes on to assert Morales presents Gabi as one who "will do anything to continue her upwardly mobile career, even if it requires amputating body parts and cleaving coworkers and lovers out of her life" (158).

This view of Gabi starkly contrasts with Morales' portrayal of Gabi who, at multiple times, reveals a range of intense emotions. For example, when Gregorio contemplates having the amputation, he says he "touched Gabi's left arm and slid [his] hand down to her fingers. She did not pull away...I let go of her hand and perceived her sadness" (Morales 133). Of course, readers also know Gabi was suicidal and unhappy at the state of her professional life. Moments before her suicide, Gregory recounts seeing her in the laboratory "Gabi's flesh had begun to reveal the damage of her lifestyle, of the pressures of the job, of her arm that required more frequent recharging, and of the constant odor of an elbow that refused to heal and now probably had become a malignant infection" (Morales 186). He goes on to say, upon learning her body had rejected the prosthetic, the news "devastated her desire for professional efficiency and perfection" (187). For some scholars, in choosing to amputate, Gabi decides to become a computerized tool for the state. An alternative reading might view Gabi's decision to receive the computerized prosthetic as an attempt at enhancement so she might be enabled to serve as a well-equipped medical director. For Gabi, this amputation is not initially physically disabling but enabling.

Gabi's work history and dedication are insufficient for her to be promoted by the medical directorate. She cannot gain more consideration from the directorate without having the experimental surgery. In one of the few instances Gabi speaks about having the operation, she tells Gregory, "you don't have a choice . . . if you refuse, I'll have your job. You'll be demoted . . .



because my assistant must have a computerized arm” (142). Here, Morales perhaps offers readers an opportunity to empathize with Gabi’s decision to amputate to advance in a position she has worked hard to earn. Gabi’s amputation can be read materially as a reflection of professionally mediated pressure. When her arm malfunctions, her enhancement is then treated as a disability within her professional environment. Gregory relays to the readers Gabi was unofficially eliminated from her present job. Readers may recall Gabi was efficient, smart, and on track for promotion. There is no mention that she lost any of these attributes, only the function of her right arm. She might have been fully capable of performing the duties associated with the promotion and medical robotics experiment program. Readers glean although there were no other side effects from her body’s rejection of the arm—including her cognitive function—Gabi’s use of just one arm justifies her demotion and eventual termination.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter’s epigraph the woman who threw her child at Gregorio’s carriage is revealed to be a destitute subject of a colonial empire. This woman has lost her child to an epidemic the government blames its new subjects for. Her decision to throw her child at a carriage carrying a doctor and a priest might be understood as a plea and act of defiance. Both the doctor and priest symbolize the failure of Spain to provide this woman anything other than a destroyed social and physical environment. In each section of the novel, Morales asks readers to consider the role of the environment in driving character actions and behaviors. Morales urges readers to consider these actions relative to race, gender, class, and the gothic. Reading these characters metaphorically and materially in Chicana fiction is a valuable endeavor in that it allows readers to trace the historic collusion of racist, sexist, and ableist systems of power. Minich writes “disability and Chicanismo,

both marginalized in dominant US constructions of national belonging, provide vantage points from which to reassess nationhood and citizenship” (7). Alejandro Morales’s *The Rag Doll Plagues* is an exemplar in this regard; it poignantly depicts legacies of colonization from historic Mexico to an imagined Mexico-US nation-state. The women of the novel embody these legacies and their impact. Marisela as metaphor comes to serve as a neocolonial Mexico, her subsequent disability and death mirroring the havoc caused by Spanish conquerors. Centuries later, the consequences of intra-racial tensions circulate as illness in Sandra’s body. Later still, Gabi’s body is changed, albeit on her own accord, to her detriment, as racist and classist systems have facilitated a rampant illness among all the populations of the futuristic LAMEX.

Choosing to analyze only one part of any of these female characters’ identities, or merely as metaphor for broader concepts, distorts the extent to which they allow us to understand and imagine racism, discrimination, national belonging, and miscegenation in the novel. To discern their metaphoric and material significance, these figures must be analyzed through a framework that simultaneously considers their race, gender, and disability. Such a framework is not limited to these three female figures, *The Rag Doll Plagues*, or Chicana fiction. It is most effectively applied to characters who have been fleshed out to some extent by the author. The novel seems to suggest marginalized communities cannot be liberated from social harms such as biohazards and gentrification, until classism and racism are also unstructured. The male protagonists all survive and actively participate in anti-classist and anti-racist efforts, while the female characters are disposed of in the process. Thus, Morales figures men as the champions and beneficiaries of a liberated and environmentally just future. Marisela, Sandra, and Gabi do not have detailed histories extending beyond their having known the Gregory of their respective section. Morales offers enough detail about them though, to glean who these women are beyond their relationship to

Gregory. Analyzing these atypical characters, women from varying backgrounds with nonnormative bodies challenges dominant narratives that privilege the experiences of those who are male and able-bodied.

This study underscores the value of an intersectional approach to multi- marginalized figures and re-evaluating the canon of gothic literature. More specifically, this chapter attempts to explore the value of reading this novel as pandemic literature and a part of Chicana Gothic canon. This is beneficial to Chicana literature, critical race, disability studies, gothic studies, and any medium aiming to rescue figures from scholarly marginalization. This approach can be applied broadly and still serve its purpose of revealing the potential of disabled figures of color to significantly impact a given text, even if they are seemingly minor. Reading with attention to intersectionality allows scholars to redefine which characters are worthy of critical attention and explore the social landscape of literature in greater depth. It is also important to note quelling an epidemic is a state-sanctioned public health process that is complicated when one considers Morales is also writing about colonialism, gentrification, and blood farming, respectively. In this novel, the men heralded as the heroes for their medical efforts are not wholly altruistic. They are working on behalf of nations that do not aim to liberate marginalized figures from the squalor exacerbating the spread of disease. They have been selected to merely prevent diseases from infiltrating upper-class communities.

In Book I, Gregorio is called to New Spain by the Viceroy a figurehead who has been sent to control the recently colonized Mexico. In Book II Gregory works for a hospital, set in a low-income community, which is overrun with racist staff and violent police officers. In Book III, Gregory is hired by the Directorate, a group of individuals who oversee the segregation of the poor and wealthy's medical services. While many rightly assume that gothic literature is primarily

concerned with haunted houses, monsters, and vampires, social terrors like pandemics have a long history. Acknowledging the complexity and inherent value of multi-marginalized peoples is a political project rooted in the works of critics from various literary traditions including Sohn, Minich, and Crenshaw. Reading this novel as gothic also allows readers to explore the inherent horrors of racism and colonialism on public health practices. This will be especially important in chapter two where I discuss Hanya Yanagihara's *The People in The Trees*. In Yanagihara's novel, a series of bioethical dilemmas occur because of ill characters' physical exploitation.

**CHAPTER TWO:**  
**WE BEAR THE MASK: CONSTRUCTING MONSTROSITY**  
**IN *THE PEOPLE IN THE TREES***

Disability as a topic of inquiry merges the profoundly cultural with the material, as the human variations that cultures have designated as disability have helped shape built and social environments (just as those environments have, in turn, shaped bodies).

—Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Disability Studies: A Field Emerged”

In *The People in The Trees* (2013), medical doctor Norton Perina, a fictionalization of Daniel Carleton Gajdusek, uses memoir to discuss his greatest achievements and his eventual professional demise. Perina and his editor, Dr. Ronald Kubodera, attempts to explain how he came to discover the secret to “eternal” life and what led Victor, his adopted son to accuse him of sexual abuse. Beginning in the 1990s, at the height of Perina’s legal battles, the novel turns backward to Perina’s birth in 1924, giving special attention to his collegiate and post-graduate life in Boston and professional work on Ivu’ivu. Writing from prison, Perina slowly details the events leading to his arrival on the uncolonized Micronesian island Ivu’ivu. Perina accepts an invitation to search for a group of people thought to be the inspiration for characters from native lore named Dreamers. The Dreamers are a group of Ivu’ivans who are hundreds of years old and have little to no functioning cognitive abilities.<sup>21</sup> Perina discovers a correlation between the dreamers, immortality, and a turtle, the Opa’ivu’eke. He calls his discovery Selene syndrome; it is a condition “in which the victim’s body remains preserved in relative youth even as his mind degrades” (Yanagihara 3). Eventually, Perina exposes these correlations, relocates several Dreamers, and begins to adopt

---

<sup>21</sup> Here I am referring to their short-term memory, attention span, and ability to communicate using their given verbal language.

children from residents. This series of actions lead to his greatest accolades and eventually, his disgrace from social and academic fame. While the novel certainly has elements of historical fiction, it is loosely based on a true story. A critical disability studies analysis illuminates the novel's ecoGothic elements. Yanagihara relies on and revises gothic elements to detail how Perina constructs the Dreamers and Victor as deviant figures who must be controlled, spoken for, or contained.

### **Critical Framework: ecoGothic, Memoir, Zoe-ification, Asian Studies**

This novel does not fit into any single genre, it operates as historical and science fiction. The most accurate Gothic descriptor for the novel is “ecoGothic” because of the location of the narrative action, a forest that becomes a horrifying place because of Perina’s actions. It is also difficult to categorize in terms of its gothic sub-placement. The ecoGothic is an intersection of fields and sub-fields within ecocriticism and the gothic. Much of the writing scholars accept as Gothic relies on the bodies and terror-filled experiences of people of color haunting white characters, as opposed to characters of color being haunted by ongoing and historical instances of terror at the hands white Americans. Scholars have consistently acknowledged the horrors enacted against people of color in American history; however, more attention must be given to primary literature written by or about those marginalized figures. Despite the field’s development, there is less gothic scholarship being produced by and about people who are indigenous to these places.

*The People in the Trees* is an ecoGothic text foregrounding the horror of colonial practices. A more recent development in the ecoGothic field is reading tropical islands, such as the Ivu’ivu

islands, as ecoGothic landscapes.<sup>22</sup> In “Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century” David Del Principe writes the ecoGothic takes a “nonanthropocentric position to reconsider the role that the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear” (1). Del Principe contends the ecoGothic reveals the growing “ecophoboa – fears stemming from humans’ precarious relationship with all that is nonhuman” (1). Howard L. Malchow, a British literary gothicist, writes about such characterizations in *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-century Britain*. Malchow argues sensationalized media outlets have established South Pacific islands “cannibal field[s] – through the mutually reinforcing stories of early exploration, the white cannibalism associated with convicts and sailors, and the appeals of Fiji missionaries” (80). This is especially salient because Perina’s description of Ivu’ivans as frightful often converges with his description of the island itself as frightful. The fear of the nonhuman Del Principe mentions aligns with ableist renderings of non-normates as neither fully human nor entirely nonhuman.<sup>23</sup> Yanagihara revises this gothic memoir and reveals what power structures construct and constitute the experiences of marginalized characters in the novel. EcoGothic narratives regard unknown and “new” worlds as living breathing horrors, made scarier by the presence of native populations. These people are extensions of these horrors, monstrous figures who might harm invasive protagonists such as Perina.

*The People in The Trees*, like *The Rag Doll Plagues*, spans multiple decades. Both novels feature Indigenous characters, but the authors portray them quite differently. Morales’ Indigenous characters speak to a limited degree; they explain their relationship to other characters and their

---

<sup>22</sup> See *EcoGothic* by Andrew Smith and William Hughes (2013) and *The Forest and the EcoGothic: The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination* by Elizabeth Parker (2020) for contemporary explorations of the ecoGothic in literature.

<sup>23</sup> See *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* by Rosemarie Garland Thomson (2017).

occupied lands. An interdisciplinary reading of *The People in the Trees* illustrates the power dynamics between powerful and disenfranchised bodies. Perina's memoir belies his reliance on the bodies of non-normative characters, especially those with cognitive impairments, to advance his professional goals and assert his exceptionality.<sup>24</sup> Perina, too, embodies US exceptionality, especially in his belief of American intellectual superiority and US citizenship as global citizenship. For Perina, this citizenship extends beyond simply entering other nations, and unfettered access to these environments, manipulation and exploitation being tools of conquest. The novel underscores the horror of gothic disposability, because racialized and ill characters are only necessary so long as they construct Perina's normativity.

The author revealed she was inspired to write *The People in The Trees* after learning about D. Carleton Gajdusek. Gajdusek is a self-described "pedagogic pedophilic pediatrician" (Max 195). Before announcing this perverse moniker, Gajdusek worked with the South Foré tribe in Papua New Guinea to help them eradicate the fatal neurological Kuru Disease. The disease "was caused by a slow-acting prion, which is a kind of virus that can hibernate in the body for years, even decades, before jolting to life" and was passed along via the handling of victim's brain tissue (Yanagihara para. 2). Gajdusek won the 1976 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his discovery of the diseases' cause and cure. After receiving this award, he began to adopt dozens of South Foré children; later, he was convicted of sexually abusing some of them.

This novel exemplifies how the aims of critical disability studies and revisionist gothic studies can align. Both fields identify non-normative figures within texts to explore the cultural aberrations they represent and illustrate the significance of their marginalization. Within *The*

---

<sup>24</sup> In "Doubly troubling narratives Writing 'the oppression of possibility' in Puerto Rico and Cuba" scholar of Latinx Studies, Ylce Irizarry argues that US exceptionality privileges the English language, capitalism, and positions the US above all other nations. Irizarry writes, "...for the US to cohere as a modern nation, it must be defined in opposition to other nations" (203).



*People in The Trees*, illness moves the plot forward but is not the source of horror in the novel. Disability studies, the gothic, and the burgeoning ecoGothic have should incorporate the experiences of non-white and male figures in more of their research. The horror lies in the displacement and experimentation of ill people for capitalist and academic successes, and the speaker's complete unrepentance for the harm he has caused.

Reading the novel from a critical disability studies perspective demands readers privilege the experiences of the exiled dreamers and how their exile and experimentation are more horrifying social actions than their perceived impairments. The horror in the text lies in the overwhelming inability of the Dreamers and their island, Ivu'ivu, to return to their pre-colonial state. The gothic trope Yanagihara revises is haunting but not in terms of facing the same person or situation repeatedly. In *The People in The Trees*, an unrecoverable memory of a space or way of being haunts its characters. The dreamers, their island, and Victor can never return to the way they were before Perina "molests" them; they are forever haunted by the memories of who they were and what they might have been before his invasion.

I am primarily interested with the novel's form and the Dreamers and Victor's bodies as sites of inquiry. EcoGothic scholar Eleanor Byrne posits interrogating the novel's spatial locations, the lab, island, and Perina's home, as the best approach to the novel, but I am especially interested in how Perina wields illness for his gain and the destruction that follows. Byrne argues focusing on these locations allows the reader to "triangulate his behavior" and consider the link between the "clinical gaze that produces a gothic experimental laboratory, the anthropological gaze haunted by the gothic presence of indigenous cultural meanings that animate the island landscape, and that of the domestic home of the abuser, a repellent space of (un)homing that draws it logics from the colonial and the clinical worlds" (Byrne 969). I hope to show how Perina's use of memoir as an

unintentional confessional reflects his reliance on the bodies of racialized and nonnormative figures to prop up his exceptionalism.

Yanagihara structures this story as a gothic tale of failed memories and untrustworthy narrators. She uses multiple interdisciplinary narrative forms to construct her novel, including the memoir, gothic, the confessional, and academic discourse such as footnotes and geographies. This is an intertextual dialogue with the father of American Gothic, Charles Brockden-Brown's short story, "Somnambulism." In the story, a murderer with a sleeping disorder details the events that led to his conviction. Readers learn the facts of the case explicitly but the speaker, Althorpe who suffers from somnambulism still attempts to recount the event. He is, however, an unreliable narrator because his memories are distorted by his inability to parse reality from dream. Brown also includes a character in the story, who is said to be disabled; some argue he might be to blame for the murders. The story opens with two excerpts from newspaper articles published two years apart briefly detailing the novel's events.

Yanagihara uses the gothic to critique the limits of memoir as a reliable genre. Despite their seeming interchangeability, autobiography and memoir differ. An autobiography refers to a full recounting of the author's life from childhood to the present moment. A memoir is an exploration of one period of the author's life stretched throughout the text. Perina begins the book with his childhood memories and recounts his experiences throughout his tenure in medical school; however, this period is quite summarized and he includes it to explain his decision to pursue the "people in the trees." Ben Yagoda, a scholar of journalism and memoir asserts, "A memoir is how one remembers one's own life, while an autobiography is history, requiring research, dates, facts, double checked" (5). What complicates inquiries into these kinds of texts is proving memories versus facts. Yagoda asserts in memoirs "Attention is resolutely focused on the self, and a certain

leeway or looseness with the facts is expected” (2). Perina and his editor Kubodera rely on academic elements -- autobiographical and scientific footnotes -- to assert a sense of factualness about the narrative’s events and interactions. Memoir derives from “the French *memoire*, or “memory,” and is more complicated than autobiography (Yagoda 5). Memoirs are also more complicated because readers must wholly rely on the author. Erica Moore, scholar of gothic and Indigenous studies, writes “Structurally, memoirists present snippets of a life, windows into moments in time, rather than exhaustive accounts with clearly defined roadmaps. We enter the memoir *in media res*, during things, dropped in with little or no context” (Moore 175). So, choosing to begin a work *in media res* destabilizes readers. In *The People in the Trees*, the work appears to follow a chronological order because it opens with Perina’s childhood. However, the work speedily progresses to Perina’s his time in medical school and on the island. Thus, the novel’s action begins *in media res* like the memoirs Moore describes.

Most importantly, Perina uses this form to confess he is guilty of sexually violating Victor. Byrne explains postcolonial novelists such as Peter Carey and J. M. Coetzee use confessionals as a “key mode through which to explore and rewrite colonial histories. Like Coetzee, Yanagihara explores the limits of the confessional mode, voicing a perpetrator whose account of his crimes discursively reproduces much of the violence to which he confesses” (970). Perhaps unintentionally, Perina reveals he is the embodiment of violence unleashed on the islanders, the dreamers, and the children in his home. Perina admitting to sexually assaulting Victor serves as a violent act in and of itself. Perina’s decision to recount his experiences via memoir becomes an unintentional self-indictment.

The scientific elements in the story include academic sources, footnotes, and protagonists with strong social science backgrounds and high intellect. At times, the text resembles more of an

academic journal than a traditional memoir. *The People in The Trees* also uses extensive footnotes and heavy editing. This changes the form from memoir to “academic memoir.” Kubodera’s footnotes serve as emotive and intellectual “evidence” he hopes will shield Perina from being judged too harshly by readers. This writing style links the novel to *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. In both novels, the main characters are concerned with biological experimentation. Dr. Frankenstein builds his creation as practice, so he can eventually resurrect his mother. Frankenstein relies on scientific language to better explain his predicaments and experiments. Perina’s use of scientific language has the opposite effect, it alienates the reader. His and Kubodera’s use of academic sources is not only a tactic to supply evidence but also to project authority over the audience. This alienation dispels Perina’s victimhood.

Moore argues, “Gothic geographies intersect with those of the memoir via haunted and haunting memories” (170). Moore also observes, “Memoir places us in an unfamiliar yet personal geography where, like Frankenstein’s creation, we are both embittered and anticipatory” (170). Anthropologic memoir and academic elements have traditionally been effective in silencing objects of Western science – colonized people – because of the Western scientist’s assumed normativity. Creating this vision of normativity requires a comparison of their bodies to those who are different. While Perina attempts to present himself as guiltless, he occasionally belies his humanity and insecurities. As scholar of gothic literature and gender studies, Jack Halberstam writes, “Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known” (2). Therefore, to present oneself as normal, there must be a subjugated Other.

Merging the academic and autobiographical does not create an irrefutable document. Nor does it render the speaker a hyper-dependable and sympathetic normate, despite Perina and

Kubodera's intention. Perina attempts to re-inscribe his power through this version of memoir and render his victim's silent embodiments constructed for national progress. Beginning in the 1990s, at the height of Perina's legal battles, the novel turns backward to Perina's birth in 1924, giving special attention to his collegiate and post-graduate life in Boston and professional work on U'ivu. Gothic discourse allows the repressed voices in the memoir to resist Perina, despite various limits he and his editor try to impose upon them and readers.

Asian American-Pacific Islander disability studies framework is a useful approach to this novel because it facilitates my contribution to literary focused Pacific Islander-disability research. The late disability studies scholar Christopher Bell writes, "while not wholeheartedly excluding people of color from its critique, by and large focuses on, the work of white individuals" (275). Like other multiethnic disability studies fields, there is relevant peripheral scholarship. Because of this, I will be incorporating a great deal of Asian American disability studies scholarship. In the *Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, Rachel C. Lee writes Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) scholarship ". . . and creative practice, [have] been allied with and co-sponsored by Asian Americanist literary scholarship as much as by the related fields of postcolonial and world literatures" (1). Lee cites several scholarly anthologies that read the traditions together asserting both fields put an ". . . emphasis on alternative circuits and circulations of people, their cargo, and, their cultural and epistemological repertoires of practicing belonging, heritage, and responsiveness toward landing sites and oceanic expanses teeming also with nonhuman life" (5). Expansive notions of colonization and "home" directly influence the relationship between the two fields.

Traditional Gothic texts often figure racial others as terrifying or monstrous figures threatening American progress. For these scholars, the role of Native Americans in the

development of an American Gothic is inextricable. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock asserts Native Americans serve as the monstrous other in Gothic texts: “As was the case with representations of Native Americans, Africans, and their American descendants were imaged either as bestial and dangerous or as childlike and simple. . .” (44). Matthew Wynn Sivils maintains Native American captivity tales actually “. . . resulted in Frontier Gothic, a genre that not only represented a distinctive American literary genre but also – as it slowly evolved into the Western – would come to embody the myth of America itself” (84). To build a comprehensive frame of analysis for historically marginalized works in literary fields such as gothic and disability studies, the scholarship must echo similar experiences. Recently published scholarship on early American Gothic prioritizes texts written by non-Native authors as points of departure. My project avoids what Siobhan Senior cautions against, conflating “different histories and cultures under the flattening rubric *indigeneity*” (124).

The dreamers are already othered by their society and thereby “deserving” of manipulation because of their illness and race. Maisha Wester, scholar of African American Gothic, writes “The gothic is a series of tropes and themes used to meditate upon a culture’s various anxieties, particularly through a discourse of Otherness” (*African American Gothic* 2). Others serve as embodiments of cultural anxieties. The exploitation of the dreamers, by those visiting the island and Americans who learn about them later, is due to their description in the text. Through these descriptions, Yanagihara recalls the way early gothicists relied on Otherness to express anxieties without noting the protagonist’s culpability in oppressing or constructing the Other as monstrous. This is especially prevalent in texts that revolve around uncolonized landscapes.

According to Malchow discusses how 19<sup>th</sup> century gothic literature used distorted images of Pacific Islanders to paint maritime experiences as savage and horrifying. Malchow is referring

to a popular trade in human heads spurred by Europeans in the South Pacific. The trade was “contemporary gothic treatment of the sale of bodies and body parts for medical dissection in Paris and London” (Malchow 73). These “representations of domestic exploitation” helped British readers to “shape” themselves [because they] received deeper confirmation from unfolding ‘knowledge’ of savage peoples abroad” (Malchow 73). British paupers saw themselves as potential victims of figurative cannibalism at the hand of the bourgeoisie. Yanagihara’s novel, based primarily in the Pacific, triangulated with Malchow’s gothic scholarship and Garland-Thomson’s disability scholarship illuminates a historic connection between Pacific Islander history, (post)colonial gothic literature, and disability studies. In Malchow’s case, the primary material was maritime gothic, which prioritized the experiences of white American men perpetuating their sensationalized interactions with Native people.

20<sup>th</sup>-century Asian American writers have also incorporated subject matter from gothic and disability studies, but there is room for stronger connections to be drawn between disability studies, gothic studies, and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Asian American novels.<sup>25</sup> Asian American biopolitics scholar Rachel C. Lee explores similar topics, however her work is concerned with the 21<sup>st</sup> century non-maritime subjects. Zoe-ification is best understood as an “. . . expression in memoirs and films that figure Asians, and other people of the global South, as those whose organs and children (former parts of themselves) are alienable, easy to disentangle from their natal milieu either to serve as transplanted tissues extending the lives of those who can buy or otherwise procure organs” (48).<sup>26</sup> While the texts Lee refers to here may not be explicitly read as gothic or narratives of disability,

---

<sup>25</sup> Lee is referring to Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* (1997), Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), and Yiyun’s Li’s *Vagrants* (2009)

<sup>26</sup> The process whereby the human is reduced to the insect, rodent, bird, or microbe (Lee 48).

they all reflect the consequence of U.S. imperialists asserting biopower over Asian American and Pacific Islanders bodies.<sup>27</sup>

Lee writes although there is a strong relationship between AAPI literary studies, Pacific Islander studies also draws from “. . . critical indigenous studies for its critique of continuing settler colonialisms across the globe” (4). This project responds directly to such scholarly marginalization by exploring similarities between Asian American and Pacific Islander studies. I work to resist conflating between the fields expansive cultural differences by underscoring the fields differences from one another. Pacific Islander Studies “. . . remains aligned with a critical indigenous perspective, an ongoing project of denouncing the U.S. and Asian settler colonialisms [and its] cultural production insists on its own distinctive tropology and system of cultural heritage” (Lee 10).

Quynh Nhu Le, scholar of Asian American and Indigenous studies, writes “Settler racial structures of feeling identify a settler racial common sense that is internally contingent upon the containment of affective formations of communities of difference” (43). In the case of *The People in the Trees*, Perina literally contains the affective formations of the Dreamers, a community that has been marked different by invading Americans and their former tribespeople. Perina invades the island, abducts half of the already Othered indigenous populace for experimentation and then publishes his findings, which leads to an invasion of Ivu’ivu by US pharmaceutical corporations. Of course, the impetus for the book is his abuse of one of the adopted indigenous children he is trying to acculturate into American society. Settler colonialism’s violent displacement tactics, through physical removal and the spread of infectious disease, links it to disability studies. Siobhan

---

<sup>27</sup> The term biopower refers to Michel Foucault’s definition. In *The History of Sexuality* he writes “[A] power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (137). Although in the case of this project, the influence of power only has negative outcomes.



Senier writes settler colonialism is implicated in the production of indigenous disability, discursively and materially” (124). Citing the cases of Canada, Australia, United States, and New Zealand, Senier contends “. . . It is also important . . . to acknowledge that settler colonialism has historically produced many of the same kinds of institutions and violence around the globe, in turn producing similar patterns of disability” (126). Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson argue these reproduced disabilities all make room for the same kind of figure, the “indigenized settler” who can “intercept all that the ill native person can no longer manage” (364).

Disability and illness become tools through which settlers overtake indigenous populations to make use of their lands, resources, and in most cases, their bodies.<sup>28</sup> This series of events might best be understood as neocolonial. Scholar of Chicanx and Latinx studies Ylce Irizarry writes neocolonialism is a “hybrid of imperialism and colonialism” (23). Irizarry asserts “neocolonial subjects acknowledge the subtle economic and political conditions created by US foreign policy resulting in the need for immigration to the United States” (23). This point is applicable to the fictional universe of Yanagihara’s novel since Perina’s mining of the Ivu’ivan island results in an explosion of American capitalists.

---

<sup>28</sup> Despite the wide range of possibilities, overt Indigenous-disability studies have only been published recently. Writers that have engaged with the intentional impairment or the eventual consequences of such impairments of Native American characters include: N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna), Philip Red Eagle (Dakota), Jim Northrup (Ojibwe), William Apess (Pequot) and Louise Erdrich’s (Ojibwe) characters when discussing literary representations of disability (Senier 122). These characters have a broad range of disabilities including physical wounds, blindness, mental illness, and alcoholism.

## The Dreamers

When Paul Tallent, the leader of the initial exploration of Ivu'ivu, meets Perina, he says their mission is to “find another society, another people, one not known to civilization, and, I should say, one that does not know civilization” (Yanagihara 94). Besides Perina, Tallent is accompanied by linguist Esme Duff and local guides Fa'a, Tu, and Uva. Tallent is looking for people who may only exist in local lore defined by their possible connection to a former man named Manu'eke. The gods cursed Manu'eke with eternal life and as a result, he became less “human” as he aged. Tallent tells Perina, Manu'eke had forgotten everything that made him human. The people Manu'eke once knew “became strangers to him. He spoke in a voice no one recognized. He forgot to keep himself clean. He became a creature that was not quite an animal, not quite a man. He was driven from his people and never allowed to return” (Yanagihara 99). As a result of these cognitive changes Manu'eke “wanders the jungles still, not one thing and not another, a memory of a man, an example of the gods' wrath and their warning as well” (Yanagihara 99).

Interestingly, Tallent reveals the subsequent hunt for and experimentation on the Dreamers mirrors his own life. Tallent reveals “[I] what it's like to be reduced to a thing, a series of behaviors and beliefs, for someone to find the exotic, the ritual, in every mundane action of mine...” (Yanagihara 94). In a footnote Kubodera speculates Tallent may have been referring to “a series of experiments that were conducted at St. Joseph's around 1910 by a phrenologist named Murrow Upton, whose theories about skull size and proportion were considered quite fashionable at the turn of the century” (Yanagihara 154). Upton conducted these experiments to “prove” Native Americans were biologically destined to be colonized by Europeans because of their “smaller and lighter” skull sizes. In his footnotes, Kubodera notes Tallent was raised in the St. Joseph orphanage

for boys, which housed many Native American children. Although he cannot confirm, Kubodera suggests Tallent is “thought to have a mother of Sioux extraction” (Yanagihara 152).

Their mission opens with an objective to seek out and study people who are cognitively nonnormative and exiled. Tallent, leader of this mission, is a victim of racist medical practices. Tallent and the other Native American children who were experimented on, mirror the dreamers as their lack of familial and community protection leaves them exposed to harm. The dreamers are exiled to the innermost areas of the island, far away from their village. They are unwanted on the island, which is why they can be removed by Tallent and his crew without any resistance. In fact, the scene where the medical explorers abandon half of the dreamers is due in part to the chief’s commands. To Perina, this means the dreamers are “available” for use. Because the island is a gothic space unfit for living beings, those who inhabit it are susceptible to conquering.

Halberstam claims monsters are “made” and are by-products of sexist and homophobic policies. Perina others the Ivu’ivans using racist and ableist tropes. Gothic fiction is a “technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known” (Halberstam 2). The result of this production are monsters that “embody” deviance. Monsters “. . . combine the markings of a plurality of differences even if certain forms of difference, are eclipsed momentarily by others” (Halberstam 6). In gothic literature, monsters are constructed by their race, gender, and disability, and their comparison to a figure who is the complete opposite. Halberstam also holds Gothic monstrosity is “attuned to the specific technology of monsters [and] demands that identity itself be read as a constructed category, one that depends heavily upon the mutual and interdependent constructions of race, class, and gender” (31). Through memoir, Perina can easily construct a vision of the islanders as monstrous and reconstruct dominant renderings of himself as a sympathetic victim. His

interactions strongly mirror the speaker in Rudyard Kipling's "The White Man's Burden." Not only do both speakers wear a feigned sense of tiredness from being needed by incapable Others, but both also reject their culpability in destroying the social and environmental ecosystems of the othered through their capitalistic pursuits.

Perina invokes gothic conventions of monstrosity to describe their surroundings. While Perina awaiting Tallent and Fa'a, he describes the environment as such "the sun had almost set and the entire forest was awash, ghostlike, with an eerie reddish light, the air seeming to thicken with a bright haze of blood" (117). This description of the environment reflects what ecocritical scholar Elizabeth Parker calls the ecoGothic, which is the concept "nature in itself is gothic" (Parker 16). To render the island gothic, Perina relies on the Dreamers to serve as monsters. Upon meeting one of the dreamers, Eve, for the first time, Perina refers to her as *it*. He says when she "finally stood, it did so in stages, first moving to a sitting position—which it did without the use of its elbows, but at once, from the waist, as if attached to the end of an invisible pulley—and then, after another pause, abruptly to its feet" (Yanagihara 119). Perina's description reveals Eve is unable to speak, seems unaware of her immediate surroundings, and cannot move around with much ease. Perina describes Eve's attempt to exit a tree as "snakelike" and says the hunono worm in the hair above her vulva looked like an "extraneous organ" (Yanagihara 119).<sup>29</sup> Comparing Eve to various kinds of animals and monsters takes a departure from traditional gothic renderings of monstrosity.

---

<sup>29</sup> Upon meeting the rest of the dreamers, Perina learns that Eve is of a group of eight people named Mua, Vanu, Ika'ana, Vi'iu, Ukavi, and fraternal twins Ivaiva and Va'ana. Their neurological exams reveal short term memory loss some ". . . mental impairment, their physical condition was...impressive, their reflexes sharp, their balance and coordination excellent" (136). Perina also notes that they had terrible vision, excellent hearing, and reflexes, despite being over one hundred years old. Although these exam notes appear objective, the remaining discussion about them is infantilizing.

Perina's description of Eve distorts the boundaries of her humanity and animality on the island. Perina's words mark Eve as a horrifying not quite person and not quite animal. The monster "is not human because he lacks the proper body -- he is too big, too ugly, disproportionate . . . He is the body that produces the natural and the human as power relations and his is the body that uses up natural and human remains to recycle flesh into scientific invention" (Halberstam 36). Traditional gothic monsters always "combine the markings of a plurality of differences even if certain forms of difference are eclipsed momentarily by others" (Halberstam 6). Although Halberstam is writing about the monster in *Frankenstein*, their understanding of monstrosity is that it is the merging of the most undesirable parts of a being, which is applicable to Perina's description of Eve.<sup>30</sup>

After entering the Dreamers' former village, Perina discovers a correlation between a 60<sup>th</sup> birthday practice of eating the opa'ivu'eke, a turtle, and eternal life. Upon encountering a swarm of opa'ivu'eke, Perina learns only a person of 60 years of age or older may even touch an opa'ivu'eke. Breaking this rule means the one who touches the opa'ivu'eke "brings a great curse upon his family. One of the wrongdoer's family will reach sixty o'anas and will get to eat the opa'ivu'eke, but after a period that person will slowly lose his ama and will become a mo'okua'au" (Yanagihara 235). Manu'eke, the character from Tallent's fable, had become a mo'okua'au, a "creature who lived without love, without speech" (Yanagihara 235). Perina then decides to smuggle an opa'ivu'eke back with him for research purposes. Perina does not just bring back an opa'ivu'eke: he and the other travelers, Tallent and Esme, decide they will relocate some of the dreamers to the United States for further study.

---

<sup>30</sup> Here the word their refers to Halberstam's pronouns they/them.

In “A Decolonial Disability Studies?” Adria L. Imada claims disability “. . . operated as a flexible and capacious concept and a very useful weapon during the incarceration, elimination, and removal of unfit colonial Others” (1). For Lee and Imada, colonialism situates Others as inherently ripe for subjection and excessive labor practices. Using Hawai’i as an example, Imada writes colonists “. . . tied able-bodiedness to compulsory productivity...” (3). After capturing the dreamers, Tallent and his crew decide, against the wishes of one of their guides Fa’a, to “abandon the dreamers we could not take with us in the more forested part of the jungle, the antechamber of the village” (Yanagihara 278). The Dreamers would not be used for biological investigation were so insignificant they would be tied to a tree and discarded. Although he does agree to leave them, even the emotionally cold and distant Perina is disturbed by this action. He remarks that when tying them to a tree he was “paralyzed by the cruelty of what we were doing” (Yanagihara 280).

Despite the cruelty of their actions Perina, Tallent, and Esme proceed with removing half of the group and abandoning the other half. Upon their return to the United States, Perina houses the dreamers in a lab. Perina describes their new home as “a fifteen-by-fifteen-foot room, windowless so they would not be detected by others, with plain walls and a linoleum floor that had been spread with layers of palm leaves and dotted with buckets of bromeliads and potted trees both approximate (a cycad) and not (a Ficus) to what they would remember from Ivu’ivu” (Yanagihara 294). Back at Stanford, Perina writes the lab where the dreamers would live was “always Ivu’ivu” (Yanagihara 294). The dreamers, who have already lost a great deal of their cognitive function, are drugged to maintain their compliance. Perina writes he had begun “drugging them more or less from the moment we had arrived on U’ivu . . .” (Yanagihara 294). Perina describes the process of sedating them as “a delicate balance, their sedation: too much and they became logy and staggery, and it was difficult to discern how much of their incomprehension was due to their mental state

and how much was artificially induced; too little and they grew anxious, scratching at the walls and wailing at nothing” (Yanagihara 295). Perina continues “The goal was to keep them alert enough that they might notice something curious about their surroundings but disoriented enough that they would not be able to specify what was amiss” (Yanagihara 295). While they were in a drug-induced haze, Perina and his lab assistant Cheolyu Ryu checked the dreamers’ pulses and breathing rates to be sure they were still alive.<sup>31</sup>

The labor required of the dreamers is different from much of the labor discussed in Asian American and Pacific Islander studies. In response to historian Clair J. Kim’s 19<sup>th</sup> immigration archival studies, Lee writes “Asian and Pacific Islander bodies became subjected to American biopolitical schemes not simply as immigrants biomedically assessed, sanitized, and clinically normed as they landed on American shores but as *tropical subjects* never having traveled from their archipelagic homes . . .” (42). Marking people tropical subjects is a biopolitical tool that renders them susceptible to imperialism and scientific experimentation whether they come to the United States. The dreamers’ internal decay is monitored at the same rate as the rats Perina monitored after feeding them opa’ivu’eke. Readers learn the dreamers were “pricked and poked and swabbed and made to urinate in plastic cups” (Yanagihara 297). In response to their treatment, especially the drugging, Perina writes “This was back when you could do such things without ethics boards howling at you, when you could ease a transition that otherwise would have killed with its abruptness and severity” (Yanagihara 294).

---

<sup>31</sup> I will expound more on this process of extreme drugging while relying on marginalized people’s bodies for labor in chapter three.

The reliance on the Dreamers' cells, which are being studied to understand how they halt the physical ageing, calls to mind Henrietta Lacks, whose connection to bioethics begins in 1951.<sup>32</sup> Of course, the bioethical dilemmas of her experience abound, from scientists taking her cells and tissue without permission, and replicating them, to hiding her identity to prevent her family from knowing the duration of the scientific research done with her cells. While Perina's university administration is fully aware of the dreamers' existence, and the medical contributions that abound from their presence, they may only leave their 15x15 environment at night. Typically, under Ryu's care, they can roam the campus grounds when the other occupants "from whom we kept the dreamers' existence—had left for the day" (Yanagihara 295). This is ironic because Perina's fame is growing since he revealed his research findings, which brought the islands into more prominence. Perina wonders if Tallent and Esme are right and that he did "doom" the island (292). Despite this, the dreamers themselves are drifting further into obscurity, in Perina's publications and the university. Corporations saw the value of the anti-aging properties of the opa'ivu'eke only, and not the Dreamers, render a formally unknowable group as disposable.

Perina comments physically the dreamers "became deader and deader with each day" while their cellular development continues to grow in cultures and research (Yanagihara 252). Perina's mistreatment of the dreamers' in his lab is a different exertion of biopower than is usually examined in critical disability studies. Disability studies scholars often explore the physical containment and exclusion of disabled people. For example, Dea Boster's *African American*

---

<sup>32</sup> During a hospital visit a piece of Lacks' cervical tissue was removed without her permission and then placed into a culture where they replicated themselves indefinitely. Her cells were the first "immortal" cells and have been used in a variety of ways, including cloning, in vitro fertilization, and gene mapping.



*Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Property and Power in the Antebellum South, 1800-1860* explores the consequences of immensely demanding physical labor on people's bodies. Lee contends Asian Americanists writing about Hawai'i and other tropical territories "formerly colonized or administered by the U.S. understandably focus on labor history since the large Asian immigrant presence in these islands emerged through plantation owners' importing of Asiatic labor" (43). In the case of *The People In The Trees*, the nature of the dreamers' containment, extractions of their bodily fluids and collecting their vitals as their bodies erode, is unlike the physical labor demanded of people of color usually studied by scholars interested in labor and race.

In the scene where Perina dismembers and then smuggles the opa'ivu'eke into the states, freezing its body and using various pieces over an extended period, a similar fate befalls the dreamers. Yanagihara subtly points to the larger interwoven systems that rely on the bodies of the othered for financial gain. In "Biopolitics and Biopower" Lee argues Asian American and Pacific Island literature ". . . indexes anxiety regarding the extraction of their body parts, the metabolic work of tissue formation constituting the site of a new alienation/extraction of racialized labor and "species-being" (7). This perspective is especially important in the case of the Dreamers because their tissue is extracted for research they cannot consent to. Moreover, racism forecloses their access to financial, ethical, and social capital their hard labor would provide the colonists. Demanding intense physical labor becomes an opportunity to control and maintain nonwhite and disabled bodies are denied financial or moral equity. Furthermore, this intense physical labor destroys their bodies which are then disposed of following their desired production. While the dreamers are not completing any demanding physical labor, their physicality is still mined for the sake of capitalist pursuits.

## **Victor**

Although readers know Victor accuses Perina of sexual abuse, Victor does not appear in the text until the last half of the novel. Victor, like Frankenstein's monster, has a lingering presence that ignites anxiety as readers anticipate his appearance. Perina and Kubodera fail to render Victor, convincingly, a monster to readers. Unlike Frankenstein's physically intimidating and murderous monster, Victor is a frail child. Victor's introduction in the text is as a malnourished child who is being trafficked by his father. Later, his descriptions reveal he is desperate for a sense of culture and tradition. Perina and Kubodera presume the reader will share their racist and xenophobic view of Victor.

Perina and Kubodera repeatedly describe Victor as untrustworthy and unreliable to prevent readers from seeing him as a victim and to occlude the truth: Perina is a monster terrorizing Victor. Perina maintains from their initial interactions, Victor was difficult. He writes "Difficult is such a useful, vague word, but in this situation its lack of specificity is intentional. This is because almost everything about Victor—every interaction, every exchange, every rite of childhood—seemed particularly fraught..." (Yanagihara 328). Immediately following this statement, Perina notes upon "finding" Victor he is malnourished and wholly unkempt. Instead of trying to inspire sympathy for Victor because of his physical state, Perina seeks to mark Victor as less than human and thus, not only susceptible to harm but deserving of it. Perina writes "one was not merely astonished when regarding him but rather repelled. I have, over my years, been privileged to see some of the worst ravages disease can wreak on the human body, and while Victor was not . . . one of the most impressively diseased specimens I had encountered, he was certainly one of the most pitiable"

(Yanagihara 332). Perina and Kubodera's construction of those he has harmed as "monstrous" imply readers should not listen to them even when they do speak.

Perina discloses his desire to extract Victor from the island primarily to study his body, not because he truly pities his physical or social condition. Perina holds when he looked at Victor, he admired the "multitude of viruses and bacteria, the distinct and creative marks they had left on even the smallest, most forgettable parts of his body, how they had mapped his skin with furrows of hot, bubbling welts, each capped with a snowy peak of pus, how they had moved across the whites of his eyes, leaving them as yellow as fat and secreting a mysterious slime that was as thick as wax" (Yanagihara 332). While Perina details his immense pleasure at identifying and treating Victor's illnesses, once his condition improved, Perina begins to believe Victor is inherently flawed. He writes "the greater problem with Victor was his almost complete lack of socialization, his fundamental—and the word is intentional—savagery. For very shortly after I acquired Victor, I realized that I was going to have to teach him how to be a human" (Yanagihara 333). According to Wester "More significantly, misperception created the gothic's grotesque bodies and beings by deforming an image. The image is not materially deformed or manipulated" (24). Perina and Kubodera seek to deform the audiences' image of Victor. Here, Perina continues shifting Victor away from the category of human, made easier by first describing him as a walking petri dish, and later, as deviant. So, even though his body is physically healed, Victor is still fundamentally unacceptable.

Perina's use of disease evokes Halberstam's theory of monsters embodying deviance. Perina also references historically racist theories of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as disease-ridden. Lee writes labeling immigrants as "...carriers of smallpox and tuberculosis justified quarantines, invasive inspections of living spaces, and calls for the wholesale razing of

the “pestilent” dens of Chinatown” (42).<sup>33</sup> Perina’s decision to rely on Victor’s various diseases as his primary descriptor is particularly incendiary because he is aware of the racist medical discourse that has historically informed xenophobic assumptions about the health of non-white immigrants. American gothicist Teresa Goddu writes “If the gothic is informed by its historical context, the horrors of history are also articulated through gothic discourse” (2). *The People in the Trees* bridges historical gothic and historical fiction to unsettle the way Perina tries to wield these racist medical histories against Victor.

Byrne refers to Perina’s relocation of the dreamers and his adopted children from Ivu’ivu to the lab and the domestic home as “body snatching” (969). Byrne posits both locations are sites sharing the “logic of and [are] complicit with an abusive and violating colonial project” (969). Victor tries to resist being part of the social experiments Perina sets up inside his home. The scene where Victor locks Perina out of the house is his opportunity to reject the control and monitoring that Perina conducts in the space. If Perina is on the outside of the home, he cannot monitor or track the children’s behaviors. Of course, he takes this opportunity to depict Victor as not only unsympathetic but also monstrous and dangerous. Perina goes to great lengths to describe Victor as menacing when he is locked outside. He recalls Victor coming close to the glass “... his fierce grin and sharp, bright, pointed teeth and his dark eyes—so moth-dark that it was difficult to determine where the pupil met the iris—he looked like a demon, and I was frightened of him” (364). Perina describes Victor as monstrous to justify his harms. As Lee makes clear, biopower is determined by one’s ability to confine and control the bodies of others. Victor’s alleged refusal to comply with Perina means he was justified in using violence to control him.

---

<sup>33</sup> While Lee is referencing Chinese immigrants in this sentence, immediately after she talks about how Asian Americans and later Pacific Islanders are demonized through racist medical practices at the time of their immigration.

Perina means to exert the utmost control over Victor by first publicly beating him in front of the other children and then by privately raping him. During the beating, he tells Victor, “Your father would have sold you to me for a piece of rotting fruit. I could have done to you anything I wished. I could have taken you with me and kept you chained in the basement and no one would have known or cared. I could have sold you to a man who would first have mutilated you and then chopped you into bits for pigs’ feed” (Yanagihara 367). Afterward, he sends Victor to the basement and forces him to stay there for several days in a row. The 82<sup>nd</sup> footnote that ends this section of the story with Victor finally leaving the basement and being compliant reads, “There is a section following this that I have, as an editor, elected to excise” (Yanagihara 370). With this decision, Kubodera implicates himself and undermines his credibility as a dependable editor, although, he never really was dependable.

Kubodera reveals his limitless and perverse commitment to Perina and his abuses with this description of Victor’s violent rape: “. . . remarkable for its awkward expressions of tenderness, for its openheartedness, for its proud expressions of love and its admissions of fallibility” (Yanagihara 385). According to Kubodera love “at least the sort of pure love that so few of us will admit to feeling, is a complicated, dark, violent thing, an agreement not to be entered into lightly. One can disagree with Norton’s opinions on the matter and still think him a whole, and a good, human being...” (Yanagihara 385). Because he initially removed the section and then put it back, he forfeits readerly trust. Kubodera’s decision is a particularly damning one since he includes the sentence but takes it out of its original context and puts it at the end of the memoir. This act is terrible because it disrupts what the reader should be able to rely on in a memoir, an honest timeline. Once something as simple as the order of events is lost so is readerly trust.

In the postscript, readers learn that following Victor's beating, the tension between him and Perina only grows. After breaking a bowl Owen bought Perina for winning the Nobel Peace Prize, he rapes Victor as punishment.<sup>34</sup> Perina writes he entered Victor's bedroom with "the same sort of anger, of rage, of terrible love and hate, with which I came to Victor. And he, for his part, never stopped struggling, even when I came to him the next night, and then the night after that, and many more nights after, whispering that I would punish him, that I would break him, that I would force him to behave" (Yanagihara 394). Not only does Perina use the rape to exert control over Victor, the manner he and Kubodera reveal it is another attempt to maintain control over the narrative. Perina and Kubodera's decision to push Victor's sexual abuse outside the bounds of the story in a postscript mirrors their attempts to push Victor outside the bounds of humanity.

Victor feels Perina has stripped his culture from him through the adoption and renaming, this is another point of tension between the two. Through bits of their interactions and conversations, readers learn that as Victor ages, he develops a strong interest in his origins and maintaining some connection to his Ivu'ivan roots. He accuses Perina of "whitewashing" him and the other children with their names and asks to be called Vi. Perina responds to this demand by saying "I gave you a name because you were nameless when I found you, I thought. A dog. Less than a dog" (Yanagihara 348). While these conversations annoy Perina and his response to compare Victor to an animal is meant to degrade him, it merely conjures sympathy for Victor as a child longing to better understand himself. Victor recognizes the harm Perina has inflicted by not only removing the children from the island but also by erasing their Ivu'ivan heritage. This interaction between Perina and Victor is further complicated when Perina refuses to call him Vi or Victor but instead calls him Boy, to which Victor responded, "very much like a dog" (Yanagihara

---

<sup>34</sup> Owen is Perina's identical twin brother.

355). Perina's rejection of the name Vi chose for himself is an attempt to emasculate him. This action evokes 19th and 20th law enforcement and employers harassing African American men.

Despite Perina and Kubodera's influence, readers glean Victor is a remarkably resilient child and young man. First, in his decision to lock Perina out of the house, Victor resists Perina's abusive behaviors and his predatory nature. Even though Victor's father and Perina worked to present him as a burden to readers to justify their eventual disposal of him, Victor thrived. Victor was granted judicial justice against Perina with Owen's support. Although this conviction does grant Victor some justice against Perina, it is difficult to imagine what the appropriate punishment could be for his breadth of harms against Victor, his other children, the dreamers, and the Ivu'ivans. Halberstam writes, "Narrative resolution in Gothic fiction, of course, usually resolves boundary disputes by the end of the novel by killing off the monster and restoring law and order but fear lingers on because after all, in *Frankenstein* the monster as subject is produced through the reading of texts" (36). Comparably, in *Frankenstein*, the alleged monster escapes his captivity and lives in exile freely in an unfamiliar space with protection from judicial persecution.

## **Conclusion**

In *The People in The Trees*, the people with the greatest history and knowledge of their island are not only rendered incapable of speech but are also physically displaced. To fully contextualize the displacement of the Ivu'ivans and the terrors resulting from their contact with Perina, this chapter offered critical and historical background on the history of demonizing Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders to justify causing them social and environmental harm. Analyzing this novel helps to situate it within my larger discussion about the process and consequences of Othering in contemporary Gothic texts, but it also situates the novel within the

contemporary Gothic canon. *The People in The Trees* allows readers to grasp the consequences of merely existing in an Othered body when the body can be used towards capitalist gains. While the dreamers were directly under Perina's "care" after they had been taken from Ivu'ivu to Boston, they are a part of a much larger neocolonial system. Perina's space in the lab and funds to provide their meager sustenance came because of university and grant donors desire to align themselves and profit from Perina's incredible discovery. Regardless of the ethical costs, the dreamer's bodies become sites of exploration. Through "eternal" life and their displacement, they can be exploited after their deaths, like Ivu'ivu itself.

This novel is especially useful in challenging the boundaries of disability and gothic studies. One historic example is the lives of Chang and Eng Bunker. The brothers are particularly useful figures to read alongside the dreamers because they too, were transported to the United States to be examined by the American public and medical practitioners. Their racial and bodily differences were used to support Anglo American notions of normativity. In *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture*, literary disability studies scholar Cynthia Wu recounts Chang and Eng's complicated histories. Wu considers how the twins "present a template for a wide range of cultural producers who engage in debates about the challenges of U.S. nation-building at moments in history when the imagined unity of the nation appears most threatened" (2). Wu extends Garland-Thomson's argument that by viewing the twins, audiences could relate the performance to themselves and collective American identity. When discussing the long-standing popularity of American freak shows, Garland-Thomson argues, "highlighting ostensible human anomaly of every sort and combination, Barnum's exhibits challenged audiences to not only classify and explain what they saw, but to relate the performance to themselves, to American individual and collective identity" (96). Chang and Eng were marketed



as “Siamese twins” to audiences because people could measure their normality (Garland-Thomson 96). Unfortunately, Garland-Thomson does not provide a detailed analysis of their experiences as disabled Asian men in 19<sup>th</sup> century America.

Wu’s research also responds to Halberstam’s in that because of their race and anatomy, Chang and Eng *should* have been monstrous to their white southern community members but they were not. Wu writes the twins were “inexplicably” naturalized as U.S. citizens, married into a prominent slave-holding family, built wealth, and were widely respected within the confederacy (4). Full ownership of their bodies allowed them to thrive in a way that the dreamers could not as well as their cognitive and physical functionality and ability to accrue wealth. Garland-Thomson’s focus is primarily on the twins’ role as disabled figures. Similarly, Halberstam does not present an analysis of non-white gothicists despite the claim “. . . racism that becomes a mark of nineteenth-century Gothic arises out of the attempt within horror fiction to give form to what terrifies the national community” (15). Halberstam’s study prioritizes a critical analysis of sexism, after identifying ableism, racism, and sexism as immovable from gothic narratives. Garland-Thomson acknowledges how racism and ableism structure Chang and Eng’s lives as viewers used them to construct American normativity, but she does not offer an extended analysis of their experiences. Wu is interested in the racialized conjoined body of the twins and how their race, and presumed disability, impacted their inculturation into the American South. Each critical approach is enlightening, however the methodology presented in this chapter would consider Chang and Eng’s experiences at the intersections of ableism, racism, and sexism.

Gothic narratives create monsters with non-normative bodies who embody national fears and thus face racist, ableist, and sexist attacks. Applying Chang and Eng’s experiences to those of the fictional dreamers allows readers to consider the marginal possibilities for their lives, unless

they could incur capital at the expense of another oppressed group and offset the ableist and racist structures that encircled them. Unlike Chang and Eng, who were transported to the United States, and later Europe, to be displayed in “freak shows,” the dreamers were always meant to be objects of medical and social experiments. In the next chapter, the owners of the agribusiness Delicious Foods Farm rely on the subjugation of a racialized and disabled other to increase their social and financial capital like Chang, Eng, and Perina.

In chapter three I draw on some of the elements at play in *The People in The Trees*, especially exertions of biopower, displacement, and the devaluation of human life in service of increased capital. While the race of the subjects change, so does the labor they are assigned. The Delicious Foods corporation targets these workers because they all have substance abuse addictions. Their addictions push them to the margins of their communities and making them simultaneously indispensable and disposable to the food corporation supplying them with drugs. In parallel to the tamemes of chapter one and the drug-induced haze of the dreamers in chapter two, the bodies of Delicious Foods laborers are subject to a capitalist-driven power structure that renders them useful only in terms of their physical functionality or their ability to complete specified labor, they are disposable otherwise.

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### PAPA'S MAYBE, MAMA'S CRACK BABY: LABOR AND ADDICTION IN *DELICIOUS FOODS*

*Partus sequitur ventrem*

—Enactment of Hereditary Slavery Law Virginia 1662-ACT XII

*Delicious Foods* is the story of a family buckling under the weight of drug addiction and deplorable migrant labor conditions. The novel details how mother and son, Darlene and Eddie, came to provide slave labor for the Delicious Foods corporation, and how Eddie lost his hands. When Darlene becomes a laborer on the farm she is immediately indebted to the corporation for lodging, food, and drugs. Eddie follows her onto the farm and spends several grueling years as an enslaved laborer. Hannaham inserts a third voice to track the familial transition. “Scotty,” crack cocaine and Darlene’s drug of choice, participates in the retelling of their family’s experiences. He disrupts and complicates the retellings, acting as narrator of Darlene’s sections in the novel and rejecting blame for the small family’s predicament.

Hortense Spillers’ article “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” (1987) inspired this chapter’s title and epigraph. “Partus sequitur ventrem” translates to “That which is brought forth follows the belly (womb).” The epigraph references an antebellum law which decreed a child born to an enslaved mother was to follow her “condition” as either enslaved or free. In 1807, the legal declaration was reestablished following the Act to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves. The epigraph is disturbingly ironic when juxtaposed with *Delicious Foods*, wherein Eddie literally follows his mother Darlene into the underbelly of modern slavery.

Structural ableism, racism, and sexism engender the horrors Darlene and Eddie face. Legal policies, inspired by social attitudes about people at the intersection of race, addiction, and

disability render characters “deserving” of the abhorrent labor destroying their bodies. Despite the myriad horrors stemming from the Crack Epidemic, there are few explicit connections drawn between the period and the gothic genre. While the novel engages with traditionally gothic elements including familial discord, spectrality, and frame narratives, it ultimately revises these and other gothic elements to create horror, just as the gothic functions in the other novels I have discussed in this study. The premise of this chapter’s argument is that drug addiction is an illness often treated like a social aberration, not the health crisis it is. Policy makers’ refusal to treat increased crack cocaine use among African Americans in the 1980s-1990s as an epidemic, and not as a predilection for deviance, contributes to the Black and addicted migrant labor force fictionalized in Hannaham’s novel.

### **Critical Framework: Addiction, Disability, African American Studies, Labor Exploitation**

Addiction Studies has by and large dismissed the experiences of those connected to crack cocaine usage. Critical scholarship on addiction has historically been preoccupied with 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century representations of addiction in American literature. Susan Zeiger’s *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (2008) is a contemporary example. While both the time periods Zeiger investigates, from 1852-1921, and subject matter range a great deal, her subjects are predominately white. Understanding the crack epidemic in cities nationwide might also be understood in terms of ecoGothic as the built and figurative environments of marginalized communities become sites of horror. This chapter begins with a historical and social context of The War on Drugs and migrant labor practices. I then turn to a discussion of the novel’s characters to illustrate how *Delicious Foods* unites disability, addiction, and contemporary enslavement. Darlene’s addiction and initial enslavement creates the

conditions under which Eddie's double amputation occur. Discussing her condition as an enslaved drug addicted mother in the 1980s demands a close study of the interworking systems that guide her to transition into a spectral laborer. I close the analysis with a discussion of Eddie's amputation and life after enslavement.

Crack cocaine usage spread rampantly across the nation in the mid-1980s because of the low cost and extremely addictive properties of crack. Scholars of public health, Beverly X. Watkins and Mindy T. Fullilove, compare the failure to create an effective response to the AIDS epidemic to the crack epidemic. They argue the inability to respond to the AIDS epidemic is due in part to it being "an infectious disease spread through highly stigmatized, voluntary behaviors that were prevalent in marginalized communities...Response to AIDS was slowed by its identification as a problem affecting only homosexuals, minorities, and drug users" (374). The inability to provide an effective response was informed by social attitudes about the "voluntary" behaviors contributing to the spread within already marginalized communities at greatest risk of infection. Watkins and Fullilove argue the crack epidemic required a broad intervention from public health officials, but this did not happen for two reasons. First, drug abuse was considered a "voluntary" behavior, not a physiological dependence. Watkins and Fullilove also posit because rates of crack usage were especially high in marginalized communities, especially amongst poor Black and Latinx users, researchers and policy makers did not care what happened to them. According to the public health scholars, a potential solution might have been "a broad public health intervention that identified the natural history of the disease, developed effective treatment, and instituted appropriate prevention" (373). Instead of a public health response, dealers and users experienced increased surveillance and legal punishment.

Former President Ronald Reagan's militaristic War on Drugs initiative only further decimated the already marginalized populations as his responses to the growing addiction linked impoverished Black communities, violence, and drug use. Udodiri Okwandu, history of medicine and public health scholar, argues Reagan intentionally racialized the crack epidemic. Racialization is "ascribing ethnic or racial identities to a relationship, social practice, or group, [which] has the power to shape narratives surrounding drug epidemics, rendering particular aspects of substance abuse and addiction visible or invisible" (Okwandu 4). Consequently, such a process dictates whether a population is guilty or innocent, and/or "deserving or undeserving of sympathy" (Okwandu 4). The War on Drugs rendered crack usage a crime, meaning it could only be addressed with harsh carceral punishment.

Framing drug addiction as a marker of deviance did not begin with Reagan. Reagan succeeded former President Richard Nixon and his ideals about increasing federal funding and support for drug-control. In 1973, Nixon approved the development of the Drug Enforcement Administration, which merged the Office for Drug Abuse Law Enforcement, the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and the Office of Narcotics Intelligence ("Drug Enforcement Administration"). During his administration, Reagan's War on Drugs only exacerbated the problems of crack users because they found themselves being arrested at the same rate as dealers. Moreover, there were massive disparities between sentencing rates for possession or sale of crack and powder cocaine. Reagan characterized drug use in the inner city as "war" and "contagion" and stated the potentially devastating effects of this contagion might eventually contaminate suburban white American neighborhoods (Okwandu 23). Reagan and other public officials relied on language that suggested without punitive responses, violent drug addicts would eventually devastate America.

Dr. Charles Schuster, then Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse and Dr. James O. Mason, then Director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, failed to prioritize developing useful measures for preventing and treating crack addiction. Their negligence contributed to the positive reception of Reagan's militaristic response to addiction. One of the consequences of the War on Drugs' overreliance on law enforcement was an increase in surveillance and violence in low-income Black neighborhoods. According to Watkins and Fullilove "[using] the courts, the police, and the prisons as solutions to the problems, has been a pattern of morbidity and mortality that is directly related to crack sales and use, particularly in poor African American communities" (387). This chapter investigates another consequence of a nationwide failure to respond to crack addiction, the kidnapping and exploitation of addicted, Black, southern, migrant laborers.

In 1989, Peter T. Kilborn published "Drugs and Debt: Shackles of Migrant Worker." He identified a history of "invisible" labor forces in agribusiness, which were reliant on addicted and indebted migrant Black workers. Kilborn writes, "The long history of migrant labor in America's orchards and fields has been a chronicle of debt, dependency and fear" ("Drugs and Debt").<sup>35</sup> Records of laborer debt called "Wine books" detailed the transactions of laborers, creating a system of continuous indebtedness laborers would find it difficult to escape. This system of indebtedness was and is still used against Black migrant workers, especially in the US Southeast. According to Kilborn, "investigators say evidence of the abuse is all but impossible to obtain. The emergence of crack, displacing marijuana, simply reinforces the system. . ." ("Drugs and Debt"). Kilborn's article highlights the terrible experiences of workers. Methods for recruiting laborers included targeting rural Southerners with substance abuse addictions and desires to travel and earn

---

<sup>35</sup> Kilborn, "Drugs and Debt: Shackles of Migrant Worker", *New York Times*.

meaningful employment (“Drugs and Debt”). Once laborers have been lured onto the farms with promises of fair pay, lodging, and drugs in exchange for hard labor, it is difficult to escape the isolated and well-guarded camps.

Joyce Grant, a labor camp escapee inspired Hannaham’s novel. Grant barely escaped a labor farm in South Florida in 1992. A former alcoholic and drug addict, Grant found herself “getting drunk, high, and locked up each night in compounds ringed with barbed wire and guarded by pit bulls and pistol-whipping guards” (Bowe, *Nobodies* 60). The disturbing details of Grant’s experiences impacted Hannaham so intensely he made modern slavery the topic of his second novel, *Delicious Foods*. While Grant’s individual experiences are horrifying enough, it is critical to understand that she exists within historically exploitive conditions. In *Nobodies*, Bowe identifies multiple instances of exploitive migrant labor practices entrapping and enslaving Southern, Black, and addicted laborers.

Bowe identifies crew leader Michael Allen Lee who “pled guilty to keeping twenty-four African American orange pickers indebted throughout the nineties by providing them with crack cocaine” (*Nobodies* 62). He also exposes a family of contractors, the Evans Family, who lured homeless African Americans to a remote barbed-wired enclosed camp in northeastern Florida. The laborers were given crack, alcohol, and cigarettes on credit, which kept them attached to the farm (Bowe, *Nobodies* 62). Central Florida journalists have published first-hand interviews with escapees as recently as 2007, 2010, and 2012.<sup>36</sup> While crack cocaine is a more contemporary means of entrapping laborers, my research reveals a timeline of over 30 years of exploitation.

---

<sup>36</sup> See “Labor camp owner sentenced” by The Associated Press (2007), “One Person Behind The Numbers” by John Pendygraft (2010), and “Florida farm workers tell how drugs, debt bind them in modern slavery” by Ben Montgomery (2012).



*Delicious Foods* is the story of a specific type of migrant labor: that which is extracted from poor, Black, Southern, and drug addicted people.

Spillers' germinal article, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," bridges theoretical discussions on Black women, enslavement, family structure, and language. Most relevant to this discussion about disability, labor, race, and addiction is Spillers' argument: captivity is the total objectification of another's flesh. The purpose of the destroying any flesh is to make *it* labor effectively, as in productively and without dissent. Spillers writes, by dividing 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" (261). In *Delicious Foods*, Hannaham explores one corporation's development of a migrant labor force, objectified without dissent, despite the modern legal and social protections that should be available to the laborers. Spillers posits, "the procedures adopted for the captive flesh demarcate a total objectification, as the entire captive community becomes a living laboratory" (261). This is a broad reference to American chattel slavery and the demonization of Black American women in matriarchal families and communities. I do not intend to collapse the experiences of the enslaved with the experiences of kidnapped migrant laborers of Hannaham's story; Black Americans and migrant laborers exist under systems of violence made possible by dehumanizing corporate practices and political support.

Darlene and Eddie's experiences reflect the captivity in Spillers' article. Myriad players derive profit and pleasure by rejecting the laborer's humanity and ensnaring them in captivity. Luring the laborers onto the farm by promising them money, drugs, and maternal reunification, to increase profit, reflect the corporation's lack of ethics. Furthermore, the procedures adopted to

maintain the laborers' captivity results in their total objectification. The captive workers exist within a living laboratory, not unlike the Dreamers in the lab and the children in Perina's home.

Understanding how such a practice could be made possible or remain possible for so long is related to the existing structures available to exploit undocumented migrant laborers. It is possible for agribusiness owners to develop "captive workforces" because of centuries' old legal policies and social attitudes enabling the maltreatment of primarily undocumented migrant laborers. Chicana and Latina studies scholar, Ylce Irizarry, cites to Herbert Hoover's "Good Neighbor Policy", the sterilization and mass employment of dark-skinned Puerto Rican women and the Bracero Program as examples of exploitive U.S. mandated labor policies. According to Gilbert Gonzalez, the Bracero Program is the "historical antecedent" to current guest worker programs (35).<sup>37</sup> According to Irizarry, "The redistribution of foreign populations as sources of cheap labor, however, remains the hallmark of US neocolonialism." (25). Irizarry and Gilbert underscore how neocolonialist American extraction of foreign labor and resources were supported by legal doctrine. These harmful legal practices are supported by xenophobic social attitudes.

Julie A. Minich, scholar of Latina and Chicana disability studies, asserts the U.S. prioritizes safeguarding itself from "pollutants" – non-able-bodied citizens and noncitizens. Prohibiting "external pollutants justifies the political marginalization not only of immigrants but also of citizens, including those with disabilities and diseases (whose bodies challenge the image of the healthy national body) and racialized and sexual minorities (whose claims to social and political rights are seen to imperil national unity)" (Minich 2). The image of a healthy national body reflects the greatest qualities of the nation's best citizens. What then, should be done about those already living within the nation, whose bodies and citizenships statuses do not align with a

---

<sup>37</sup> The Bracero Program was a culmination of agreements between Mexico and the United States that allowed millions of Mexican men to come to work in the United States to work on limited, mostly agricultural job contracts.

grand American vision? These people are systematically marginalized through the denial of access to social and political rights.

Immigration historian Jonathan X. Inda writes a “host of knowledges, stemming from a variety of ‘experts’ such as social scientists, politicians, INS/DHS bureaucrats, policy analysts, and the public, have represented “illegal” immigrants as threats to the well-being of the social body” (2). Inda’s point illuminates the racialization of crack usage because those who do not support the vision of the United States are potential threats to the nation and should either be prevented from entering the country or marginalized within it. Watkins and Fullilove present similar arguments about Black crack addicts as harbingers of violence and drains on public services. Inda argues labeling immigrants “illegal” means they become targets of governmental surveillance.

Ultimately, the legal structures allowing the exploitation of undocumented migrant laborers and the punitive measures taken against crack users, put both groups at risk of disappearing entirely from public view. *Delicious Foods* is both a product and revision of the gothic genre. The historic and racially motivated terrors haunting the gothic genre includes the maltreatment of undocumented Chicana and Latina migrant laborers. While the Southern Gothic is traditionally thought to be “haunted” by the experiences of African Americans and Native Americans, *Delicious Foods* also includes the historic maltreatment of migrant laborers.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock relies on the more well-known discussions of African Americans in Poe and Melville to assert Native Americans also serve as the monstrous other in Gothic texts. Matthew Wynn Sivils argues Native American captivity tales “. . . resulted in Frontier Gothic, a genre that not only represented a distinctive American literary genre but also – as it slowly evolved into the Western – would come to embody the myth of America itself” (84). For these scholars, the role of Native Americans is inextricable to the development of an American Gothic.

## **Disability and Exploitation: A Gothic Primer**

*Delicious Foods* utilizes elements from the Southern Gothic tradition. While both African American Gothic and Southern Gothic often share topical concerns and setting, the African American Gothic is not relegated to the South, and Southern Gothic does not necessarily privilege the experiences of African Americans. Hannaham employs the Southern Gothic while simultaneously revising the narrative. Christopher Lloyd, Southern Gothic scholar, maintains, “Cultural memories from the South are thus engaged by the gothic form and transformed in the process; dark traumas from the regions past are lodged in and substantiate the culture” (81). Of course, the inverse is true and the dark traumas from the region also influence and shape the form.

The academic perspective of these literarily relayed traumas is primarily authored by and written about white people. Some of the authors most associated with the field include Flannery O’Connor, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Carson McCullers, and Truman Capote (Lloyd 82). Again, this is ironic because the “dark traumas” are related to the experiences of African American, Native American people and as I argued in the preceding section, Chicanx and Latinx people. Southern Gothic scholars often argue what haunts the area is the violent enslavement of African Americans and the violent displacement of Native Americans. However, the exploitation of Chicanx and Latinx migrant laborers, especially in the Southeast and Southwest should also be included in such discussions. Not acknowledging more national haunts and in varying regions, erases important parts of America’s national history.

American gothic scholar Teresa Goddu asserts, “The South’s oppositional image – its gothic excesses and social transgressions – has served as the nation’s safety valve: as the repository for everything the nation is not, the South purges contrary impulses” (82). Goddu’s language

echoes the language of feminist disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson about disabled people's bodies. Garland-Thomson argued, "Constructed as the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and deviance, the physically disabled becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity" (29). Both writers point to a legacy of directing ire towards those who inhabit bodies that are not white, male, and able-bodied. While both Goddu and Garland-Thomson acknowledge the horrors inflicted upon the "Othered," neither reaches across their disciplines to include examples from the other scholar's area of study, gothic studies or critical disability studies, respectively. For example, Goddu clearly notes the race and gender motivated horrors American gothicists have identified in their works. Garland-Thomson presents actual and fictional examples of women of color who have been physically exploited by white male capitalists. The bridge between the gothic and critical disability studies lies in the body of the laborers being exploited, primarily Darlene and Eddie.

Scholar of African American Gothic, Maisha Wester, argues the African American Gothic literary tradition is subsumed not only within historical and national conditions of Black people but also within the intimate relationships among families and communities. As in traditional gothic texts, "both community and families are haunted by their own misdeeds, ideological conflicts, and destructive acts that impede their own concept of stable identity" (Wester 1041). *Delicious Foods* tells a familiar gothic tale of how discrimination has historically terrorized the experiences of African Americans inside of their families, within their communities, and within the larger nation. The gothic is penultimate disruption of literary or visual façade. The gothic reveals long-buried truths about American history. As I have noted elsewhere, the gothic has traditionally centered the experiences of terror and horror of white men supposedly incited by non-white people of color.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> See page 13 of this dissertation.

People of color have long been written figuratively and literally as monsters within these stories. Halberstam asserts, “A reading of Gothic monstrosity attuned to the specific technology of monsters demands that identity itself be read as a constructed category, one that depends heavily upon the mutual and interdependent constructions of race, class, and gender” (31). Ironically, gothic narrative and theoretical approaches have consistently failed to include the voices of the Othered, especially those who are not white, male, heterosexual, and Christian.

*Delicious Foods* prominently features gothic themes that have not been widely applied to contemporary African American fiction and film, especially those about drug addiction. Some overt Gothic literary elements include ancestral spirits, poltergeist, tormented communities, madness, and rape (Wester 378). *Delicious Foods* features some of these elements and more. For example, Hannaham utilizes, haunting, isolation, confusion, and violence to drive the plot forward. Wester refers to Charles Chesnutt, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Randall Kenan as gothicists, or as writers reliant on gothic themes despite their resistance to being included in the gothic canon. In *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* Goddu describes Toni Morrison and Alice Walker’s rejection of having their work categorized as Gothic because their work is related to *real* life. Goddu contends the rejection is a result of the gothic’s association with the “unreal and sensational” (139). One such example of gothic writing inspired by real life is Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Like his gothic forebearers, Hannaham rejects categorizing his work as Southern Gothic (Hankin). Interestingly, Hannaham and Morrison were both inspired to write their novels after doing research on actual Black women ensnared in the tangles of slavery.<sup>40</sup> Hannaham, like the

---

<sup>40</sup> Toni Morrison was inspired to write *Beloved* after reading a 19<sup>th</sup> century newspaper article about Margaret Garner. Garner was an escaped enslaved woman who, upon facing capture and return to captivity, committed infanticide.

other gothicists in this study may not explicitly align with the gothic, but gothic elements are explicitly present in his works.

In the opening chapter, Eddie's response to seeing The Great River of Minnesota has a gothic tone. The narrator says, "it didn't fill him with the same panic as it had back home—it had less to do with death. The past didn't slither through this shallower water; he didn't imagine any drowned ghosts staring up from the riverbed or bobbing out of culverts, their googly eyes asking Why?" (11). Hannaham quickly reveals familiar gothic elements including the uncanny, personification, drownings, specters, and hauntings. As the novel proceeds, Hannaham reveals other elements including familial discord, legacies of haunting, and terrifying domestic settings. Hannaham, not unlike other African American gothicists, relies on the elements of the gothic, perhaps unintentionally, to relay tales of horror and terror. *Delicious Foods* reminds readers the practice of enslavement has not ended; instead, capitalists have revised its form to suit the needs of agricultural corporations.

More explicit connections between *Delicious Foods* and the gothic form include Hannaham's cyclical retelling of the same experiences to reflect the Gothic elements: familial discord and frame narratives. Clayton Carlyle Tarr asserts frame narratives typically "demarcate and contain the central narrative, making embedded content less threatening to readers" and thus, "Gothic frames exploit the more devious formal possibilities of the device, making readers victims as much as voyeurs" (13). Hannaham relies on and revises the traditional Gothic narrative, framed stories.

## **Delicious Foods Farm**

Wester contends early American gothicists wrote expressions of their anxiety over the “question of American utopianism” (“Headless Brides” 379). For early gothicists, it seemed improbable the nation could progress towards an exceptional status while also containing so many non-white figures, despite their aiding in America’s development. The land itself, the maintenance of the land, and the innovations it required to grow into exceptionality has historically been produced by multiracial people of color.

Eddie’s mother, Darlene, recalls being drafted by Jackie, an “outreach coordinator” for the farm. Jackie’s role is to entice local Black Southern drug addicts to voluntarily labor on the farm for an undisclosed amount of time. Bowe asserts contractors exploited crew members struggling with addiction (*Nobodies* 60). The farm’s undisclosed location models a sense of overwhelming surveillance and inescapability. On her way to the farm, Darlene says the riders “turnt off Interstate Something and start down a state or a county route, one without no streetlamps nowhere, maybe without no number” (Hannaham 83). Darlene and other laborers stay up late into the night trying to figure out where in the United States they are. Readers learn the workers thought they were in the “hinterlands of God knows where, way out in Louisiflorida” (Hannaham 158). As Jackie passed around drugs to the future crew members on the ride, it became more difficult for Darlene to recall how long they had been on the road.

Darlene recalls, “This minibus trip had only one turn, it felt like, a left turn that had happened some time before, she couldn’t remember how long ago. Then the road got real rough . . .” (86). The unpaved road signals their leaving behind crowded Houston neighborhoods and entrance into an isolated rural area. While Delicious Foods appears to be a pastoral haven for those



who want to continue their drug use and align themselves with American tenets of respectability, hardworking capital earners, laborers quickly learn this vision is not possible. Like any gothic element, a dark underside lurks beneath that which appears positive. Addicted Black laborers on the farm are free to use drugs and are protected from the social and legal ramifications of their substance abuse. Wester describes the American landscape as a gothic location of “lurking nightmares offering blacks defilement and death” (“Headless Brides” 385). Delicious farm workers are not free from violence and their defilement occurs daily.

The Delicious Foods farm is an amalgamation of American exceptionalism and Otherworldliness.<sup>41</sup> In her analysis of Toni Morrison’s fictional town Ruby, Wester likens the small city to America. Wester writes both places rely on myths of exceptionalism to create a “self and other” binary (“Headless Brides” 385). Such a binary presents one group as monstrous and the other as a potential victim. Wester’s reading of how Ruby reflects American ideals of exceptionality is especially useful here because Delicious Foods Farm proprietors are aware of and proud of its differences from other cities. Scotty recalls how Jackie described living and working on the farm, making “the farm sound like the kinda place where Darlene and I could go together and wouldn’t nobody stop us from hanging out and doing our thing, and that seemed so perfect that we wondered if we mighta made it up ourself” (Hannaham 77). The place seems perfect because Darlene can earn a living and continue to get high “with” Scotty. Upon Darlene’s arrival, she quickly realizes the place is far from perfect and Jackie’s promise of elegant accommodations was a lie. Darlene learns she and the other newly hired laborers will be forced to sleep in a chicken coop. Their mattresses had “rusty springs poking through the tops, and the tops was ripped up. Them beds was close together as you could get beds without making it one big bed. The concrete

---

<sup>41</sup> Inhabited by the Othered refers to people who are racialized, gendered, and/or disabled.

floor and the walls had a ton of layers of paint all over em. . . and white patterns crawling up the paint and moldy-ass smears of water damage. . . It's some small windows up by the ceiling, but they got wooden boards over em" (Hannaham 114). When Darlene protests the uninhabitable living conditions, Jackie gives her a threatening look and suggests Darlene does not deserve a habitable living condition. When humiliation is not enough to silence her, Jackie reminds her she is now indebted to the farm for \$600. Jackie tells Darlene "You'll pay it back by working" (Hannaham 117).

The farm seems to offer unknowing laborers redemption. They do not have to stop using drugs, and in Darlene's case, can "succeed" at mothering. Successful mothering includes providing care and financial support for her son Eddie. Darlene describes working on the farm as improvement from her previous sex work. She says "At least now I'm doing good work— hard work, but honest work. Darlene flexed one her arms, which had got thinner and more muscular from tossing around so much produce, and also from doing drugs. . . Work I'm proud of, she said. Can tell people about. And I don't have to run all over the world dealing with shady people when I'm trying to get high. It's one-stop shopping around here" (Hannaham 162). Wester writes of Ruby, the vision of the isolated city becoming a utopia fails. While "it [Ruby] seems to offer peace to blacks, its peace relies upon abjecting and exorcising an (unruly) other" (Wester "Headless Brides" 381).<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the unruly others on the Delicious Foods farm are the laborers whose abjection makes their enslavement possible. Savoy argues, "The abject signifies a domain of impossibility and uninhabitability, associated with betwixt-and-between conditions where death keeps invading life" (170). The laborers are subject to abjection because their addiction keeps them tethered only functionally to life. Although she attempts to disassociate herself from the other

---

<sup>42</sup> Sweet Home is the name of the fictional plantation in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

laborers, Darlene describes her crack addicted crew members as zombies. Darlene contends “A crackhead is an individual who has lost all sense of the outside world, they’re like a zombie, closed off to the whole of existence. . . That is not me” (Hannaham 162). This group of captive migrant laborers existence is precarious because of their physiological rejection of normativity, sobriety, and their entrapment within a system of slavery that should be in America’s distant past but haunts its daily present.

Wester’s theory is useful because both the laborers and convent women outside of Ruby were excluded from various aspects of life because they disrupted utopian visions. Relegating the addicted labor force to a distant farm outside the view of a more densely populated urban landscape provides a reprieve for non-addicts who desire to be rid of those who are addicted to drugs. The War On Drugs was fueled by a desire to contain and relocate addicts and dealers alike into prisons and out of the sight of the public. Thus, their exclusion from one area of public life facilitates their being tricked into another kind of life. The situation calls to mind the Dreamers I discussed in the previous chapter who, after their faculties began to fade, are expelled from their community, and left to fend for themselves in the forest. While in the forest, the group was “discovered” and later kidnapped by Perina.

## **Darlene**

Harriet E. Washington, scholar of African American biomedical experiences discusses the criminalization of Black addicted mother’s during the War on Drugs in *Medical Apartheid* (2006). Washington writes during the crack epidemic, media outlets and some researchers reported inaccurately on the long-term effects of children born to addicted Black mothers. Washington advances media outlets used this opportunity to paint African American women as bad mothers,

an already prevalent idea in the popular imagination. Washington argues, “The myth of the crack baby also helped to fuel criminal prosecutions against pregnant drug abusers, three-quarters of which have been filed against women of color” (215). In “Construction of the Crack Mother Icon” Tracy R. Carpenter asserts “the collateral consequences of war-on-drugs policies instituted during the Regan era continue to disproportionately affect African American communities” (264). Carpenter contends the Crack Mother or Crack Whore incorporates the characteristics of the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire (265).<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the “Crack Mother” “embodies the sassiness and anger of the Sapphire, spewing obscenities and emasculating anyone who gets in her ways” (265). The crack addicted mother in media is a culmination of the limited representations of Black women who have been shaped by and have shaped legal and social policies.

Many of the representations of Black drug addicted mothers in literature and film feature one-dimensional portrayals that align with Carpenter’s template of the Crack Mother.<sup>44</sup> Hannaham portrays Darlene with a great deal of depth. He shares what motivates Darlene, even before she becomes addicted to drugs. Readers learn she and her late husband Nat moved to Ovis, Louisiana to organize residents. To Darlene and Nat, Ovis “[seemed] like the sort of place where he could organize and mobilize small-town black folks (Hannaham 71). The couple fought to help local community members resist racial oppression and register to vote. Readers learn about her background prior to her marrying Nat and Eddie. Even before this information is revealed, Hannaham spends time discussing Darlene’s life before drugs. Readers learn she struggled to fit in with her college peers and family. The narrator notes “Darlene felt she couldn’t return to her

---

<sup>43</sup> Carpenter contends the Crack Mother is “Like the Mammy, her features are so distorted she is asexual, almost subhuman. She is at once lascivious and manipulative, like the Jezebel” (265).

<sup>44</sup> Examples of one-dimensional characterizations of addicted Black mothers include: *New Jack City* Dir. Mario Van Peebles (1991), *South Central* Dir. Stephen Milburn Anderson (1992), *Fresh* Dir. Boaz Yakin (1994), and *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah (1999).

family's her college-girl habits and aspirations" (Hannaham 68). These early struggles with loneliness change once she meets Nat. Following his murder, at the hands of a local white mob, Darlene turns to drugs to cope. While this backstory may seem immaterial to Darlene's current state, narrative forms about crack use and sales often marginalizes addicted Black mothers. Darlene's portrayal is part of a small lineage of films that explore addicted mother's experiences.<sup>45</sup> Reading *Delicious Foods* and other addiction narratives like it from a critical disability studies perspective offers the field new primary material to explore. Although she is often distracted and neglectful of him, Darlene's sober thoughts are peppered with questions about Eddie's safety and how she might provide for him. Upon her arrival at the farm, Darlene repeatedly asks for access to a phone so she can call Eddie and tell him what is going on. Darlene's preoccupation with Eddie annoys Scotty. Scotty desires to monopolize Darlene's thoughts constantly. Hannaham uses Scotty's controlling desires to personify the affect crack cocaine has on its users.

## **Eddie**

At the beginning of Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred*, the main character tells readers, "I lost an arm on my last trip home. My left arm. And I lost about a year of my life and much of the comfort and security I had not valued until it was gone" (1). Butler uses a jarring amputation to initiate readers into the horrors of the following chapters. Dana is drawn in and out of 1970s California and antebellum Maryland against her will, experiencing increasingly dangerous physical and emotional turmoil each time she time travels to the past. *Delicious Foods* reproduces *Kindred's* opening tone with the line "After escaping from the farm, Eddie drove through the night. Sometimes he thought he could feel his phantom fingers brushing against his thighs, but above the

---

<sup>45</sup> Other three-dimensional literary and filmic depictions of addicted Black mothers include *The Corner* Dir. Charles Dutton (1999) and *Holiday Heart* Dir. Robert Townsend (2000).

wrists he now had nothing” (6). Like Butler, Hannaham relies on the shock of an amputation to unsettle and prepare readers for the story that follows.

In an interview, Hannaham asserts Eddie’s dismemberment was necessary to show the impact of total ownership (Hankin). In their germinal disability studies essay, “Narrative Prosthesis,” David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder argue “Disability serves as an interruption to cultural truisms, and so the representation of a disabled body acts as a metaphor and examples of the body’s resistance to normalcy” (204). The disabled character’s body becomes a metaphor for some larger point, such as control over another, flattening all other aspects of their identity. Mitchell and Snyder argue the primary issue with such narrative representation is “...while stories rely upon the potency of disability as a symbolic figure, they rarely take up disability as an experience of social or political dimensions” (206). Eddie’s lived experience challenges this part of Mitchell and Snyder’s argument. Hannaham includes thoughtful discussion about how Eddie’s new neighbors respond to his body and these interactions determine Eddie’s economic and social standing.

Eddie raises questions about the nature of labor and disability. At the opening of the novel, readers learn he recently lost his hands. Eddie asks a pitying waitress if she can help him find work. Her expression is doubtful and Eddie “thought he could almost read her mind: Now how can this boy do that in his condition” (Hannaham 10)? In response to her expression, Eddie brightly reveals he can do anything he set his mind to, so long as he is faithful to God. Disability rights and labor historian Sarah Rose notes, “In many cultures, disability has been characterized as the inability to do productive labor, a charge that has limited the citizenship and social standing of people with disabilities” (“Work”).<sup>46</sup> Eddie and Darlene share a desire to prove themselves valuable within a

---

<sup>46</sup> Rose, “Work,” *Keywords for Disability Studies*.

capitalist society, which understands capital producing bodies as worthy. To solidify his worth, Eddie asserts his ability to earn a living “in spite of” his disability.

Eddie takes an apprenticeship with a carpenter and improves his dexterity in the process. After months of intense physical therapy, which appears to have been completed alone, his supervisor helps him build a prosthetic rivaling expensive options advertised in magazines. By first noting Eddie has gained employment “despite” his physical disability and then trained himself, Hannaham employs elements from common “supercrip” narratives. The term supercrip “is often leveraged as a predetermined marker for critical dismissal rather than engagement” (Schalk 84). To dismiss outright all representations of supercrips as “bad” is to potentially disregard entire genres of popular cultural productions. Schalk argues when disability studies scholars reinscribe positive/negative binaries in their work, they limit the “scope and complexity” of the field (84). Examining Hannaham’s choices, especially in the context of a gothic novel, provides a potentially useful framework for exploring similar works.

Supercrip narratives are generally about a person with a cognitive or physical disability being praised for “overcoming” their disability in some way and in turn providing inspiration to normates. The term supercrip does not have a singular meaning and its definition and examples of it varies across mediums and genres. Disability rights activist Eli Clare offers some useful examples: “An adolescent girl with Down’s syndrome learns to drive and has a boyfriend. A guy with one leg runs across Canada. The nondisabled world is saturated with these stories” (2). Clare states this kind of representation does not also include analysis of the legal, material, or social conditions making achieving these feats difficult for people with disabilities (2).

Schalk argues there are generally three distinct types of supercrip narratives. The first is the most common and it features a disabled person who accomplishes everyday tasks, reflecting

the low standards placed on disabled people's lives. Glorified supercrip is an apt descriptor of the second type as it features a disabled person accomplishing tasks most people could not, such as scaling Mt. Everest. The glorified supercrip stories often elide the successful person's race and class privilege. Lastly, the superpowered narrative, is usually about a character with fictional abilities and powers. Eddie's sections in the novel oscillate between the first two kinds of supercrip narratives. As Eddie's dexterity improves, he and his supervisor build a prosthetic. The device they created had "two short cups, each with a pair of pincers attached, a simpler model of a prosthetic hook" (Hannaham 22). Made of wood and covered in polymer, the prosthetics are attached to a harness Eddie wears around his back. Not only do the prosthetics make Eddie feel better about his prospects, they give him the idea to open a business as the "Handyman Without Hands" (25).

To earn a living, Eddie begins to do electrical work, much like he had done on the farm. While he eventually becomes well known in St. Cloud for his ability to fix anything his customers bring him, Eddie's initial customer base enjoys the spectacle of watching him work. The narrator reveals "customers would watch him until it seemed rude—fascinated, he assumed, by the fact that a physically disabled man could make a profession of such precise work, by the added hardship he could accomplish using only the curved wooden hooks of his prosthetic hands" (24). In this description, Hannaham upsets the supercrip narrative. Eddie is aware of his status as spectacle in his customers' eyes, not only as a handless handyman, but as a Black handless handyman.

The very first line of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography" reflects the conspicuous position disabled people occupy by merely existing in public. Garland-Thomson writes, "The history of disabled people in the Western world is in part the history of being on display, of being visually conspicuous while politically and socially erased" (56). In her germinal disability studies work, *Extraordinary Bodies*,



Garland-Thomson uses the first half of the book to explore the ways disabled people have had to rely on this ableist gaze for profit and acting as spectacle. Everyone involved in the myriad freak shows Garland-Thomson explores could not make different choices because they were forced into exhibitions. Meanwhile, ableism prevented their access to adequate legal and social options. Eddie reveals his awareness of his early customers only coming to him to stare at his body. Customers “viewed him as a novelty, but he didn’t have the luxury of begrudging them their reactions. Instead he sought to translate the amazement in their faces into a stable income” (24). Hannaham’s narrative choice, to reveal Eddie’s internal monologue, shows his frustration at and dependence on his customers’ staring.

Garland-Thomson declares “Staring at disability choreographs a visual relation between a spectator and a spectacle” (“Visual” 56). Staring at a disabled person can also constitute an exchange of services. For example, Eddie is aware his customers initially come to him because they enjoy the spectacle of watching him fix their items. Although he does not appreciate it, he allows them to watch because he can earn more money. This type of transaction, exchanging money for permission to stare at a non-normate’s body has a lineage in disability history.<sup>47</sup> A critical disability and race studies analysis demands readers acknowledge Eddie is precluded from lashing out at his customers, not only because he needs their money but also because he lives in a predominately white town, St. Cloud, Minnesota. For his own safety, he cannot be read as dangerous or violent. Eddie says as much when he avoids interacting with police officers following his escape from Delicious Foods Farm. Eddie “feared the police would notice [his swerving], pull

---

<sup>47</sup> See *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* by Robert Bogdan (1988), *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1999), and *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* by Janell Hobson (2005).

him over to find that he had no license, and arrest him for stealing the car” (7). Despite his being an escapee and not having hands, he knows he might be read as a threat.

Even though Hannaham challenges ableist renderings of Eddie by offering readers a peek into his emotional responses to being stared at, the following descriptions place readers squarely back into the first two categories of the supercrip narrative. The narrator reveals “Eddie didn’t let his disability get in the way of an active life...” (26). This line is problematic as it suggests he “overcame” his disability, or the presumptuously low standards set for him by maintaining a cheerful outlook. Eddie eventually opens his own storefront and becomes engaged to a paralegal with whom he has a son, Nathaniel (27). The section on Eddie’s accomplishments, “despite” his disability, turns back towards to the gothic when readers learn he is haunted by his memories at Delicious Foods Farm. Sometimes Eddie “snapped awake in the earliest-morning hours, convinced that he was back at the farm. Shrouded in pitch-black, the memories would return, alighting on his bed like dark birds poised to attack him” (27).

## **Conclusion**

While *Kindred* is now widely recognized as speculative fiction, Butler rejected categorizations of her work as science fiction. Butler, like Morrison, Walker, and Kenan, rejected labeling her work in ways that limited its reach. These categories are useful descriptions and while their works may not fit firmly in either category, they rely on varying genre elements. For example, Dana’s inexplicably emotionally driven time-traveling is certainly understood as having speculative undertones. According to Butler “*Kindred* is fantasy. I mean literally, it is fantasy. There’s no science in *Kindred*” (495). Fantasy is a sub-area of speculative fiction. Hannaham’s decision to endow an illicit drug with narrative control and speaking abilities shifts this novel well

beyond the confines of any one genre designation as well. Furthermore, most of the authors rely on physical disability to underscore the violence of racist and abhorrent labor exploitations, impressing their work within the borders of Black critical disability studies approach.

Already on the fringes of society, the Delicious Foods farm serves as a convenient location for those who might disdainfully interact with them, to simply forget about them. Whatever horrors laborers embody are silenced so long as they are hidden away from the everyday American milieu. This desire to displace drug addicts onto non-visible landscapes, for their sake, and the rest of the populations is not new. In a 1932 speech Margaret Sanger suggested “illiterates, paupers, unemployables, criminals, prostitutes, [and] dope-fiends” be segregated on “farms and open spaces as long as necessary for the strengthening and development of moral conduct” (“My Way To Peace”). In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019) archivist and African Americanist Saidiya Hartman locates several early 20<sup>th</sup> newspaper clippings recounting the segregation of opium users. The primarily young Black female addicts of Hartman’s studies were placed in prisons and reformatories on pastoral landscapes far away from urban cities. Sanger’s call for segregating “dope-fiends” and “unemployables” onto pastoral landscapes suggests an inability to maintain steady work is a signifier of non-normativity. The relocation of the convicted young women in Hartman’s research exposes a legal commitment to excluding the girls from public view. Part of the reason Delicious Foods appeals to Darlene is because she is assured she can participate in a capitalist defined normativity, work hard, and earn a living, without altering her drug habits. She believes Delicious Foods Farm will not demand sobriety and she can earn a living wage to support Eddie.

Ben Montgomery published the article, “Florida farm workers tell how drugs, debt bind them in modern slavery” in 2013. During an interview LeRoy Smith, a recovering addict and labor

camp escapee, described his time on a farm like Delicious Foods. Smith recalled “Slavery. Abuse. Overwork. Deplorable, unsanitary conditions. Drugs” (Montgomery).<sup>48</sup> Smith noted laborers were not “shackled” to the farm through any physical measures because farm supervisors use crack cocaine to control laborers. In a *Los Angeles Review of Books* interview Hannaham notes, “I noticed there was plenty of nonfiction work on modern-day slavery, but no one had yet tackled the emotional history, or the emotional costs” (Bowe, “It’s Not”).<sup>49</sup>

While writing the current chapter, I observed immense gaps in scholarship about addicted, Black, Southern characters and people. There is a great deal of scientific and statistical research on drug addiction, especially crack usage, which overlaps with migrant labor history. The emotional histories of these people, which would be found in creative responses to the Crack Epidemic, users, relatives of users and more, are much more difficult to find. Hannaham says writing the novel revealed a “continuum” of labor abuses extending from slavery through today. He believes “...slavery, for instance, is continuing to happen to the same demographic: the same people, African Americans, and the same location, the South” (Bowe, “It’s Not”). Interrogating Hannaham’s novel reveals a decades long history of disposable migrant laborers, selected because of their addiction and rejection from acceptable social mores. This chapter is my scholarly response to the understudied experiences of exploited Black Southern drug addicted characters.

---

<sup>48</sup> Montgomery, “Florida farm workers tell how drugs, debt bind them in modern slavery,” *Tampa Bay Times*.

<sup>49</sup> Bowe, “It’s Not Even Past: John Bowe interviews James Hannaham,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*

## CONCLUSION

These communities, structurally, they're breeding grounds for the transmission of the disease. It's not biological.

—Dr. Sharrelle Barber, *New York Times*

Reports on the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) increased rapidly in February 2020. Doctors and medical researchers worked quickly gain control over the spreading disease. Public health officials and some news outlets tried to combat waves of misinformation about how the disease spreads, who is most vulnerable, and how it effects the human body. Many of the early claims about COVID-19's impact on people's health reflected America's history of biomedical racism. Examples of such misinformation included claims that African Americans were immune and Asian Americans "caused" the spread.<sup>50</sup> Some of these claims were propped up in the media and reiterated by America's incompetent political leaders, especially former President Donald Trump. While responsible public health officials contested these falsehoods, some also asserted Americans were in the fight against COVID together. These messages of a unified front against the epidemic, while positive, flattened the very real disparities of COVID's impact on marginalized populations.

Ongoing studies show low-income people of color are at the highest risk of contracting and dying from the disease. The COVID mortality rate for African Americans in Illinois was forty-three percent in 2020 ("COVID-19 Statistics").<sup>51</sup> These statistics are staggering because African

---

<sup>50</sup> See the articles "Coronavirus outbreak revives dangerous race myths and pseudoscience" by Janell Ross and articles "Trump Officials Emphasize That Coronavirus Made in China" by The Associated Press.

<sup>51</sup> "COVID-19 Statistics," Illinois Department of Public Health.

Americans only make up fifteen percent of the Illinois population (Eligon 1). Medical journalists Christina Animashaun and Dylan Scott found similar statistics across the United States. African Americans, regardless of population size, typically account for more COVID related deaths than white residents in the same area (Animashaun & Scott).<sup>52</sup> Dr. Sharrelle Barber, epidemiologist and biostatistician, argues historically racist policies are to blame for these wildly disproportionate rates of COVID infections and deaths. Barber contends “the effects of government redlining policies that began in the 1930s linger. Many Black residents live in segregated neighborhoods that lack job opportunities, stable housing, grocery stores with healthy food and more” (Eligon 1). Barber’s researched also revealed, prior to COVID-19’s deadly spread white Chicago residents could anticipate an 8.8x longer life span than Black residents (Eligon 1). Native American and Latinx peoples COVID rates of infection and comparative life spans mirror the African Americans in Barber’s study.<sup>53</sup> Low-income nonwhite people of color are generally at greater risk of contracting and dying from treatable diseases, not because of individual failure, but because structural racism leaves them vulnerable to health harms. Moreover, they are often frontline, nonessential workers, at low-paying and densely populated jobs. Thus, their ability to “fight” the virus is causally related to the affordability of quality public healthcare, underlying health conditions, and adequate treatment from medical professionals. The likelihood of surviving COVID, as a low-income non-white person of color, is primarily determined by medical history, socioeconomic status, and whether your healthcare provider is racist.

---

<sup>52</sup> Animashaun and Scott, “Covid-19’s stunningly unequal death toll in America, in one chart, *Vox*.”

<sup>53</sup> The following articles provide more examples: “CDC data show disproportionate COVID-19 impact in American Indian/Alaska Native populations” by CDC, “Study: COVID-19 Mortality Twice as High Among Native Americans” by Chelsea Cirruzzo, “Hellish’: Covid deaths have struck younger Latinos” by Suzanne Gamboa, and “Coronavirus Case Rates and Death Rates for Latinos in the United States” by Cliff Despres.

Other 2020 studies on COVID-19 and its relationship to race revealed a history of using Asians and Asian Americans as scapegoats when government officials cannot contain diseases. Rachel C. Lee writes about a 19<sup>th</sup> century example of aligning Chinese immigrants with disease as a political tool used to justify their harassment. Chinese immigrants were described as smallpox and tuberculosis carriers (Lee 42). According to Lee this “justified quarantines, invasive inspections of living spaces, and calls for the wholesale razing of the “pestilent” dens of Chinatown (Lee 42). Trump insisted COVID-19’s deadly streak was China’s fault (Jackson).<sup>54</sup> Following his repeated remarks that China was to blame for his own mishandling of the virus, there was a surge in racist and xenophobic attacks against Asians and Asian Americans on and offline (“Covid-19 Fueling”).<sup>55</sup> Another historic flashback occurred when news broke about an ICE detention center not adequately treating or preventing detainees from contracting COVID. The story took a horrifying turn when former ICE detention center nurse Dawn Wooten claimed primarily Chicana and Latina detainees were being forcibly sterilized (OIG Complaint). Wooten asserted doctors had performed mass hysterectomies on these women without requesting their informed consent. These terrifying reports are part of America’s biomedical legacy of eugenics aimed at Mexican and Puerto Rican women. While the experiences of these various ethnonational groups are terrible in and of themselves, their historic roots reveal with or without COVID-19, America can be a truly horrifying locale for those living at the intersections of a gendered, disabled, and racialized existence.

Despite these and other reports about how the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 extended beyond contracting the disease, anti-lockdown protestors swarmed city streets. Primarily

---

<sup>54</sup> “Trump uses China as a foil when talking coronavirus, distancing himself from criticism,” *USA Today*.

<sup>55</sup> “Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide,” *Human Rights Watch*.

white conservative Americans demanded lawmakers reopen non-essential locations so they could shop, dine-in restaurants, and “get haircuts.”<sup>56</sup> These protests followed news reports that those with the highest risk of contracting the virus were not white conservative Americans. Anti-lockdown protests mirrored the core of this dissertation’s argument: low-income non-white people of color are useful as far as they can labor productively, and they are at risk of disposability in service of their tasks.

My study and media reports on the coronavirus highlight, broadly, the constitutive nature of ableism, capitalism, and racism. While conducting research for this study I returned to two questions most often; What are the consequences of presupposition of biological inferiority or superiority? What is the consequence of existing in a body that is only valuable insofar as *it* can labor effectively? Each chapter endeavors to locate answers to these questions. While I did not come to a conclusive answer, a pattern of disposability traceable as far as the timelines in the novels revealed itself. This cross-cultural pattern revealed horrifying connections between multiethnic characters from different regions and periods in history.

The aim of this dissertation is to uncover interworking systems of racial, ableism, and gendered forms of oppression portrayed in U.S. multiethnic Gothic literature. Because Gothic literature is preoccupied with recovering what haunts American history, it is the most effective form through which to investigate my topic. *The Rag Doll Plagues*, *The People in The Trees*, and *Delicious Foods* are gothic novels that illuminate the experiences of disabled, gendered, and racialized people targeted for labor and subjected to social and state sanctioned disposability. In each of these novels characters struggle to survive against these intertwined modes of systemic oppression. *The Rag Doll Plagues* follows a member of the Revueltas family as he cares for

---

<sup>56</sup> Dareh Gregorian explores these protests in “Anti-lockdown demonstrators trade guns for scissors at Michigan 'haircut' protest.”



different women in vastly different eras. Every section reveals how illnesses and means of oppressing marginalized groups evolve. *The People in The Trees* focuses on how researchers might exploit an illness with little concern of legal intervention. *Delicious Foods* examines what happens to exploited migrant farmworkers when they are socially ostracized.

Each chapter in this dissertation is focused on a different ethnic tradition and its relationship to disability studies. Each chapter informs the next and exemplifies the relationship between one ethnic literary tradition to the next. To discuss these novels accurately and effectively, I explore multiethnic literary studies and U.S history, especially as it pertains to Chicana, Pacific Islander, Asian American, and African American perspectives, respectively. Laurie Grobman claims multiethnic literature “. . . merges the political with the imaginative and the culturally-specific with the cross-cultural . . . (83). Like all Gothic texts, the novels in this dissertation address watershed moments in American history while attending to individuals’ specific inter-cultural experiences. Unlike traditional Gothic texts, these novels give voice to those experiencing gendered and racially motivated harms alongside national atrocities.

Garland-Thomson writes “deviant” bodies or deviant behaviors were often assumed to be a result of some cognitive disorder or intentionally negative or non-normative behavior. She also notes deviance could be projected upon any female and/or non-white normate. The consequence of this label could lead to a person's confinement or ostracization. Displacement is a theme in every novel. From dispossession and displacement to the removal of Native peoples from their homes into laboratories, and then luring people from their homes onto “farms.” Each novel addresses some forced relocation or kidnapping that is only possible because the displaced character has previously been labeled deviant by some larger social force. Other recurring gothic elements in the novels include reliance on the physical labor of the Other, familial discord, and latent horror.

Much of the writing categorized as Gothic relies on the bodies and terror-filled experiences of people of color haunting white characters, as opposed to characters of color being haunted by a legacy of terrorizing experiences. In *Screams from Shadowed Places: African American Gothic* Wester argues some contemporary gothic works revise the form. She writes African American gothicists rarely produce traditional Gothic texts “. . . which present various problems and threats for the black writer . . . [but instead] appropriate and revise the genre’s tropes in unique ways to both speak back to the tradition’s originators and to make it a capable and useful vehicle for expressing the terrors and complexities of black existence in America” (2). The value of this revisionist approach to Gothic literature is that (1) it allows a greater amount of writing to be read as a part of the Gothic tradition and (2) explains more ways in which the form can be subversive for African American writers. The potential to subvert is important because Gothic as a genre has traditionally been quite conservative and often takes the position of telling stories from the perspective of those who are afraid of the Other. Scholarship on revisionist gothic, then, should acknowledge traditional approaches to Gothic elements but reimagine their possibilities for subversion and or ability to respond to national anxieties.

Part of what “haunts” each novel in this study, and American history, are the cycles of labeling bodies as nonnormative and then rendering those bodies disposable. Specifically, in *The Rag Doll Plagues* Morales’s vision of the past and future converge in the experiences of the tamemes, “homeboys” and blood donors. Each group of nonnormative people are repeatedly mistreated and disregarded according to social and legal policies. Morales demonstrates the ways systems of labor and exploitation can be created once its victims are stripped of their humanity. In a longer study I would analyze the blood “donors” in section three with greater detail. The donors primarily live below the borders of the restructured California-Mexico and hire out their bodies to

wealthy families. Pairing their decision to hire their bodies with Garland-Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies* would generate interesting research questions about agency, capitalism, and illness.

In *The People in The Trees* Yanagihara highlights the larger interwoven systems that rely heavily on the bodies of the Othered for financial gain. This academic memoir relies on scientific elements including academic articles, footnotes, and biographies of scientists. Such elements have aided non-fiction anthropologic memoirists in silencing those labeled "subjects" of Western science. Within a longer project I might bridge this novel with Randall Kenan's *A Visitation of Spirits*. Each novel relies on scientific elements and behaviors to (de)construct the bodies of the Other. Both novels also feature gay male protagonists, whose experiences would benefit from a Queer Gothic studies analysis. Analyzing this novel from a Queer Gothic studies framework would allow me to situate it within my larger discussion about the consequences of Othering in contemporary Gothic texts in terms of sex and sexuality. This match would be particularly interesting because Yanagihara's protagonist aims to deconstruct another population literally and figuratively, while Kenan's protagonist wants to deconstruct himself.

An extended analysis of labor and sex in *Delicious Foods* might prove quite fruitful. Studying Darlene through a framework converging Black women's history of sex work in the U.S. might reveal an interesting interdisciplinary point of research for scholars interested in race, gender, labor, and feminist studies. I currently interrogate how addiction, disability, and race leave characters at-risk of being exploited via abhorrent labor practices that destroy their bodies. A broader study would allow me the space to consider how Darlene uses sex work to combat the restrictions on the Delicious Foods farm. Darlene and Eddie are kidnapped from busy Houston Texas and relocated onto an isolated farm on the outskirts of Louisiana. They completely disappear

from one aspect of life and reappear as spectral laborers in another, without drawing any major interest or investigation. This is possible because, like most migrant laborers, they are both disposable and indispensable.

Much like the other novels in this dissertation, *The Beet Queen* takes multiple shifts towards the gothic. A thread of mental and emotional instability pulls Louise Erdrich's *The Beet Queen* through forty plus decades of North Western American history. Beginning during the Great Depression, the story tracks the development of the recently abandoned Adare children, Mary, Karl, and Jude. Laced with an undercurrent of a fear of abandonment and displacement, Erdrich reveals the impact of a disparate matriarch on an entire extended family. Using polyphonic narration Erdrich takes readers through the complex relationships of the disconnected family. My inquiry would prioritize the experiences of the town's Native American characters. Thus, adding the novel to my analysis would allow me to examine narrative production of four major ethnonational groups. Andrea Juranovszky writes Gothic narratives read as if ". . . through a series of flashbacks, always reviving deeds of the past in order to point out a problem, which, however strongly rooted in some ancient heritage, prevails in the present and calls for immediate resolution" (1). Erdrich uses this "Gothic loop" to effectively destabilize any progress the character or reader may think they have made in the narrative and forces them to confront an issue from their past. *The Beet Queen* employs supernatural events, spectral figures, recurrent figures from the past, and a setting embedded with national horror.

With more space I would expand my primary texts—to include film as well as fiction—while deepening the disability studies framework I foreground in the study. My dissertation currently examines novels from Chicana, Asian American, and African American traditions; to expand my analysis, I would include a film that explores the lives of First Nations people in Canada

such as Jeff Barnaby's *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2015). This film would fit well in my study of nationally mandated horrors I argue should be read within the gothic tradition. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* explores themes of displacement, familial discord, substance abuse, and non-traditional means of labor. *Rhymes* shares such characteristics with the novels in this dissertation as well as a penchant for the experimental. For example, the film utilizes animation and hallucinatory techniques to replicate the distortion many characters experience. *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* oscillates between multiple genres including adventure, comedy, and drama. Thus, it aligns with the novels in this dissertation, as they also defy genre boundaries. *The Rag Doll Plagues* might be categorized as historical fiction, romance, or speculative fiction. *The People in The Trees* is what I refer to as academic memoir because it relies heavily on academic notations and references. *Delicious Foods* is a family drama narrated by crack cocaine which arguably marks the family drama as speculative.

In a substantial revision of this project I would expand my theoretical framework to include scholarship on labor studies. I imitated this discussion in chapter one when discussing the tamemes and continued it chapter two's section "Zoeification of the Indigenous Other." In chapter three I integrated some discussion of migrant labor exploitation, however there is still room for more robust study. A more intensive labor studies integration, that directly engages either part of the disability-gothic-race studies triad, would illuminate a great deal of my arguments. In each succeeding chapter marginalized groups are displaced for colonialist land development, capitalist exploitation of their island, or in service of increasing agribusiness capital. Each of these scenarios are situated at the intersection of disability, gothic, labor, and race studies. Such an approach would further challenge traditional notions of "productive" labor in the context of disability studies. The journal, *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*'s recent issue "The Ecology of Labour" could prove

especially useful in a revision of chapter's one and three. Sarah F. Rose's *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s–1930s* would also be especially useful in connecting disability and labor studies.

The novels in this dissertation do not all directly engage with disability studies at large. Despite this, they all allow readers to better understand the experiences of those whose lives are mediated by intersecting modes of oppression ableism, racism, and sexism. By choosing these novels, I aimed to reconstruct gothic and literary disability canons into inherently diverse ones. Connecting these three novels helps readers glean how malleable systems of oppressions can be when marginalized figures have been rendered deviant in some way. Each chapter in this dissertation explores the “requirements” for marking a deviant character disposable and indispensable/ble through various time periods. Many institutions are directing concerted effort towards building disability studies programs as scholars uncover more opportunities for interdisciplinary research. I hope my dissertation on ableism and racism in U.S. Multiethnic Gothic fiction will generate more opportunities for interdisciplinary studies across fields.

## REFERENCES

- Altschuler, Sari. "The Gothic Origins of Global Health." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography*, vol. 89, no. 3, 2017, pp. 557–590.
- Animashaun, Christina and Dylan Scott. "Covid-19's stunningly unequal death toll in America, in one chart." *Vox*, 2 October 2020, [www.vox.com/coronavirus/covid19/2020/10/2/21496884/us-covid-19-deaths-by-race-black-white-americans](http://www.vox.com/coronavirus/covid19/2020/10/2/21496884/us-covid-19-deaths-by-race-black-white-americans). Accessed 1 February 2021.
- Bell Chris. "Introducing White Disability Studies: A Modest Proposal." *The Disability Studies Reader*. Edited by Lennard J. Davis, Routledge, 2006, pp. 275-283.
- Bienstock-Anolik, Ruth, editor. *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010.
- Bost, Suzanne. *Encarnación: Illness and Body Politics in Chicana Feminist Literature*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.
- Boster, Dea H. *African American Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Property, and Power in the Antebellum South 1800-1860*. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Bowe, John. "It's Not Even Past: John Bowe Interviews James Hannaham." *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 24 Mar. 2015, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/even-past/>. Accessed 25 January 2021.
- . *Nobodies: Modern American Slave Labor And the Dark Side of the New Global Economy*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2007.
- Butler, Octavia. E. *Kindred*. New York: Doubleday, 1979.
- Byrne, Eleanor. "Ecogothic Dislocations in Hanya Yanagihara's *The People in the*

- Trees.*” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 19, no.7–8, 2017, pp. 962–975.
- Carpenter, Tracy R. “Construction of the Crack Mother Icon.” *Western Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2012, pp. 264–275.
- Clare, Eli. *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*. Cambridge, South End Press, 1999.
- “Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide.” *Human Rights Watch*. 12 May 2020, [www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide#](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide#). Accessed 1 February 2021.
- “COVID-19 Statistics.” Illinois Department of Public Health, 7 Apr. 2020, <https://www.dph.illinois.gov/covid19/covid19-statistics>. Accessed 27 January 2021.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1241–1299.
- Davidson, Carol Margaret. *Anti-Semitism in British Gothic Literature*. Berlin: Springer, 2004.
- Del Principe, David. “Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century.” *Gothic Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2014, pp. 1-8.
- “Drug Enforcement Administration.” *The United States Department of Justice*, <https://www.justice.gov/jmd/organization-mission-and-functions-manual-drug-enforcement-administration>. Accessed 5 January 2021.
- Eligon, John, Audra D. S. Burch, Dionne Searcey and Richard A. Opiel Jr. “Black Americans Face Alarming Rates of Coronavirus Infection in Some States.” *New York Times*, 7 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/us/coronavirus-race.html>.



- Erevelles, Nirmala and Andrea Minear. "Unspeakable Offenses: Untangling Race and Disability in Discourses of Intersectionality." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2010, pp. 127-145.
- Fiedler Leslie. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Uncanny*. New York City: Penguin Random House, 2003.
- Garay, R. Joyce. "Reading Alejandro Morales's, *The Rag Doll Plagues* through Its Women: Gender, Sexuality, and Nationalistic Complexity." *Bilingual Review/La Reviste Bilingüe*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2012, 41-165.
- García-Martínez, Marc. *The Flesh-and-Blood Aesthetics of Alejandro Morales: Disease, Sex, and Figuration*. San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 2014.
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. "Disability Studies: A Field Emerged." *American Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 4, 2013, pp. 915-926.
- . *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- . "The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography." *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, edited by Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Rosemarie Garland Thomson, Modern Language Association of America, 2002, pp. 57-75.
- Gonzalez, Gilbert G. *Guest Workers or Colonized Labor?: Mexican Labor Migration to the United States*, New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.
- Goddu, Teresa. *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

- González Tanya. "The (Gothic) Gift Of Death in Cherríe Moraga's 'The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea (2001).'" *Chicana/Latina Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, Oct. 2007, pp. 44–77.
- Gregorian, Dareh. "Anti-lockdown demonstrators trade guns for scissors at Michigan 'haircut' protest." NBC News, 20 May 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/anti-lockdown-demonstrators-trade-guns-scissors-michigan-haircut-protest-n1211366>. Accessed 5 February 2021.
- Grobman, Laurie. *Multicultural Hybridity: Transforming American Literary Scholarship and Pedagogy*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 2007.
- Hall, Kim. "Feminism, Disability, and Embodiment." *NWSA Journal*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2002, pp. vii–xiii.
- Halberstam, Jack. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham: Duke University, 1995.
- Hannaham, James. *Delicious Foods*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2015.
- Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991.
- Hedrick, Tace. "'The Spirits Talk to Us': Regionalism, Poverty, and Romance in Mexican American Gothic Fiction." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 49, no. 3, Sept. 2017, pp. 322-340.
- Hening, William Waller. *Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia*. New York, R. & W. & G. Bartow, 1823.
- Hermesen, Lisa. "Knights of the Seal: Mad Doctors and Maniacs in A.J.H. Duganne's Romance of Reform." *Demons of the Body and Mind: Essays on Disability in Gothic Literature*. Edited by Ruth Bienstock-Anolik, McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2010, 157-170.
- Herrera-Sobek, María. "Epidemics, Epistemophilia, and Racism: Ecological Literary Criticism and 'The Rag Doll Plagues.'" *Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1995,

- pp. 99–108.
- hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. South End Press, 1984.
- Hortense J. Spillers. “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2, July 1987, pp. 65–81.
- Imada, Adria L. “A Decolonial Disability Studies?” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2017.
- Inda, Jonathan Xavier. *Targeting Immigrants: Government, Technology, and Ethics*. New Jersey: Wiley, 2008.
- Irizarry, Ylce. *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction: The New Memory of Latinidad*. Champaign: University of Illinois, 2016.
- . “Doubly Troubling Narratives: Writing ‘the Oppression of Possibility’ in Puerto Rico and Cuba.” *Comparative American Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, June 2006, pp. 197–217.
- Jackson, David, Courtney Subramanian, and Nicholas Wu. “Trump uses China as a foil when talking coronavirus, distancing himself from criticism.” *USA Today*, 20 March 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/03/20/coronavirus-trump-blames-china-distancing-himself-fallout/2876983001/>. Accessed 5 February 2021.
- “James Hannaham author of *Delicious Foods*.” The Avid Reader Show, from Sam Hankin, 3 June 2015, [www.podomatic.com/podcasts/avidreader/episodes/2015-06-03T18\\_29\\_25-07\\_00](http://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/avidreader/episodes/2015-06-03T18_29_25-07_00).
- James, Jennifer and Cynthia Wu. “Editor’s Introduction: Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature: Intersections and Interventions,” *MELUS*, vol. 31, no.3, 2006, pp. 3-13.
- Jarman, Michelle. “Coming Up from Underground: Uneasy Dialogues at the Intersections of Race, Mental Illness, and Disability Studies.” *Blackness and Disability: Critical*

- Examinations and Cultural Interventions*. edited by Christopher M. Bell, Michigan State University Press, 2011, pp. 9-30.
- Juranovszky, Andrea. "Trauma Reenactment in the Gothic Loop: A Study on Structures of Circularity in Gothic Fiction." *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse*, vol.6, no.5, 2014.
- Kenan, Randall. "An Interview With Octavia E. Butler." *Callaloo*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1991, pp. 495–504.
- Kilborn, Peter T. "Drugs and Debt: Shackles of Migrant Worker." *New York Times*, 31 Oct. 1989, [www.nytimes.com/1989/10/31/us/drugs-and-debt-shackles-of-migrant-worker.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/31/us/drugs-and-debt-shackles-of-migrant-worker.html). Accessed 24 January 2021.
- Le, Quynh Nhu. "States of Arrest The Affective Temporalities Structuring Canada's Public Apologies." *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 42, no. 1, 2016, pp. 41-65.
- . *Unsettled Solidarities: Asian and Indigenous Cross-Representations in the Américas*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2019.
- Lee, Rachel C., "Biopolitics." *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, editor Rachel C. Lee, Taylor & Francis, 2014, pp. 68-80.
- . *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America: Biopolitics, Biosociality, and Posthuman Ecologies*. New York City, New York University Press, 2014.
- Lloyd, Christopher. "Southern Gothic". *American Gothic Culture: An Edinburgh Companion*, edited by Joel Faflak and Jason Haslam, 2016, pp. 79-91.
- López-Lozano, Miguel. "The Politics of Blood: Miscegenation and Phobias of Contagion in Alejandro Morales's *The Rag Doll Plagues*." *Aztlán*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2003, pp. 39–73.

- Lyles, Timothy. "Tryin' to Scrub that "Death Pussy" Clean Again: The Pleasures of Domesticating HIV/AIDS in Pearl Cleage's Fiction." *African American Review*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2017, pp. 153-168.
- Malchow, Howard L. *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-century Britain*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Marez, Curtis. *Farm Worker Futurism: Speculative Technologies of Resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
- Martinez, Danizete. "Dismemberment in the Chicana/o Body Politic: Fragmenting Nationness and Form in Oscar Zeta Acosta's *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* and Alejandro Morales's *The Rag Doll Plagues*." *disClosure*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2012, pp. 38–53.
- Martín-Rodríguez, Manuel M. "The Global Border: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridism in Alejandro Morales's *The Rag Doll Plagues*." *Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1995, pp. 86–98.
- Max, D. T. *The Family That Couldn't Sleep: A Medical Mystery*. London: Portobello Books, 2008.
- McCreery, David J. *The Sweat of Their Brow: A History of Work in Latin America*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Minich, Julie Avril. *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014.
- Mitchell, David T., and Sharon L. Snyder. *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- Mogen, David, Sanders, Scott P., and Karpinski Joanne B., editors. *Frontier Gothic: Terror and*

- Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992.
- Montgomery, Ben. "Florida farm workers tell how drugs, debt bind them in modern slavery." in 2013. *Tampa Bay Times*, 12 May 2012, <https://www.tampabay.com/news/publicsafety/crime/florida-farm-workers-tell-how-drugs-debt-bind-them-in-modern-slavery/1229662/>. Accessed 8 February 2021.
- Moore, Erica. "Haunting Memories: Gothic and Memoir." *Gothic Landscapes: Changing Eras, Changing Cultures, Changing Anxieties*, edited by Sharon Rose Yang and Kathleen Healey, Palgrave, 2016, pp. 169-198.
- Morales, Alejandro. *The Rag Doll Plagues*. Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1992.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the American Literary Imagination*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- . "Recitatif." *Leaving Home*. Ed. Hazel Rochman and Darlene Z. McCampbell. New York: HarperCollins, 1997, pp. 201–227.
- Mouat, Ricardo Gutiérrez. "Gothic Fuentes." *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, vol. 57, no. 1/2, 2004, pp. 297–313.
- Neff, Maja, and Alejandro Morales. "Approaches to a Hemispheric America in The Rag Doll Plagues." *Iberoamericana*, vol. 6, no. 22, 2006, pp. 173-178.
- Okwandu, Udodiri. "Invisible (Black) Epidemiologies: The Function of White Hegemony in Drug Epidemics." *The Opioid Epidemic in Historical Perspective: An Anthology*, 1 December 2018, <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/historyopioidepidemic/okwandu>. Accessed 10 January 2021.
- Older, Daniel José. "Gentrification's insidious violence: The truth about American cities." *Salon*,

8 Apr. 2018,

[www.salon.com/2014/04/08/gentrifications\\_insidious\\_violence\\_the\\_truth\\_about\\_american\\_cities/](http://www.salon.com/2014/04/08/gentrifications_insidious_violence_the_truth_about_american_cities/) . Accessed 11 February 2021.

O'Toole, Corbett. *Fading Scars: My Queer Disability History*. Fort Worth: Autonomous Press, 2015.

Rose, Sarah F. "Work." *Keywords for Disability Studies*. edited by Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss and David Serlin. New York: New York University Press, 2015.

Samuels, Ellen. *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.

Sanger, Margaret. "My Way to Peace." Speech presented at the New History Society, Park Lane, 1932.

Savoy, Eric. "The Rise of American Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge University Press, pp.167-189.

Schalk, Sami. *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)Ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

---. "Interpreting Disability Metaphor and Race in Octavia Butler's 'The Evening and the Morning and the Night.'" *African American Review*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2017, pp. 139-151.

Senier, Siobhan and Clare Barker. "Introduction." *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 7 no. 2, 2013, pp. 123-140.

Sivils, Matthew Wynn. "Indian Captivity Narratives and the Origins of American Frontier Gothic." *A Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Charles Crow, 2013, pp. 84-95.

Sohn, Stephen Hong. "Minor Character, Minority Orientalisms, and the Borderlands of Asian America." *Cultural Critique*, vol. 82, 2012, pp. 151-185.

- Stavans, Ilan. "The United States of Mestizo." *HUMANITIES*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2010.
- Stoddard Holmes, Martha. *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.
- Storm, Anna. *Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Zora Neale Hurston, and the Creation of "Authentic Voices" in the Black Women's Literary Tradition*. 2016. University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, PhD dissertation.
- Tarr, Clayton Carlyle. *Gothic Stories Within Stories: Frame Narratives and Realism in the Genre, 1790-1900*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2017.
- Treichler, Paula A. "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification." *The MIT Press*, vol. 43, 1987, pp. 31-70.
- . *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS*. Durham: Duke University Press: 1999.
- Titchkosky, Tanya and Rod Michalko. *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press: 2009.
- Vandevyer, C. "Homosexuals and AIDS: A New Approach to the Illness." *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1993, pp. 319–328.
- Vázquez, David J. "Memory, Space, and Gentrification: The Legacies of the Young Lords and Urban Decolonial Environmentalism in Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams*." *Latinx Environmentalisms: Place, Justice, and the Decolonial*. Edited by Sarah D. Wald, David J. Vázquez, Priscilla Solis Ybarra, and Sarah Jaquette Ray, Temple University Press, 2019, pp. 203-226.
- Wald, Priscilla. *Contagious Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.



- Washington, Harriet A., *Medical Apartheid The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*. New York: Doubleday, 2006.
- Watkins, Beverly Xaviera, and Mindy Thompson Fullilove. "The Crack Epidemic and the Failure of Epidemic Response." *Temple Political & Civil Rights Law Review*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2000, pp. 371–386.
- Wester, Maisha. *African American Gothic: Screams from Shadowed Places*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- . "Haunting and Haunted Queerness: Randall Kenan's Re-inscription of Difference in *A Visitation of Spirits*." *Callaloo*, vol. 30, no.4, 2007, pp.1035-1053.
- . "Toni Morrison's Gothic: Headless Brides and Haunted Communes." *A Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Charles L. Crow. By John Wiley & Sons, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2014, pp. 378-391.
- Weinstock, Jeffrey Andrew. "Introduction: The American Gothic." *The Cambridge Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 1-14.
- "Whistleblowing Nurse from Detention Center in Georgia Reports Unsafe Practices that Promote the Spread of COVID-19 in ICE Detention." *Project South*, <https://projectsouth.org/whistleblowing-nurse-from-detention-center-in-georgia-reports-unsafe-practices-that-promote-the-spread-of-covid-19-in-ice-detention/>. Accessed 25 January 2021.
- "Who Was Ryan White?" HRSA, [hab.hrsa.gov/about-ryan-white-hiv-aids-program/who-was-ryan-white](http://hab.hrsa.gov/about-ryan-white-hiv-aids-program/who-was-ryan-white). Accessed 20 January 2019.
- Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide*

*Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, pp. 387-409.

Wu, Cynthia. *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture*.

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012.

---. "Disability." *Keywords for Asian American Studies*. Editors. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Linda

Trinh Vĩ and K. Scott Wong. New York: New York University Press, 2015.

Yagoda, Ben. *Memoir: A History*. New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2009.

Yanagihara, Hanya. "A fascinating, flawed mind." Bookpage, 16 August 2013,

[bookpage.com/the-book-case/2013/08/16/a-fascinating-flawed-mind/#.YCwYE2hKiIM](http://bookpage.com/the-book-case/2013/08/16/a-fascinating-flawed-mind/#.YCwYE2hKiIM).

Accessed 10 October 2020.

---. *The People in the Trees*. New York: Doubleday, 2013.