

Darwin and the Nautical Gothic in William Hope Hodgson's *The Boats of the 'Glen-Carrig'*

By Luz Elena Ramirez, Ph.D., California State University

Abstract: William Hope Hodgson's *Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* takes the form of the 1757 travelogue of John Winterstraw who recounts his peregrinations of the wastes of the 'land of lonesomeness' and the suffocating confines of the 'weed continent'. Hodgson's early contribution to science fiction is, I propose, embodied by Winterstraw's documentation of monstrous organisms that have adapted to life in remote marine ecologies - murky, transitional spaces between land and sea. There are depths to plumb in the *Boats of the 'Glen Carrig.'* Winterstraw pens his 1757 account at the height of global exploration and in the age of scientific observation. With its characterization of the gentleman naturalist, I argue that *Boats* "anticipates" moments of discovery in Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* (1845), *Insectivorous Plants* (1875) and *Origin of the Species* (1859).

Keywords: Literature; Nautical Gothic; Science Fiction; Charles Darwin; William Hope Hodgson; natural philosophy

"The writer about the sea has a wealth of archetypes to draw from: the initiation; the voyage; the ship as microcosm; the phenomenal beast; a cosmology of constant flux; the uneasy division between order and chaos . . . the conflict between human and nonhuman."

From Patricia Carlson, *Literature and Lore of the Sea*

I. Introduction

Set in far-away southern seas, *Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'* (1907) takes the form of protagonist John Winterstraw's 1757 chronicle, which recounts his perilous journey to the 'land of lonesomeness' and the suffocating confines of the 'weed continent.' *Bookshelf's* 1907 review contends William Hope Hodgson's novel is "so entirely unlike any existing and popular class of fiction. . . we doubt whether, since Edgar Allen Poe wrote his famous tales, there has been a stronger achievement in the line of mystery and

horror" (81-2).ⁱ The claim of *Boats* being "unlike any existing and popular class of fiction" arises from Hodgson's contribution to a genre that is recognizable to us now, but was only incipient in the early 1900s: science fiction. Though the foundational moment continues to be debated by scholars, Stephen R. L. Clarke sees science fiction as having emerged from Enlightenment thought, a period when Western thinkers insisted on evidence-based reasoning and the collection of data, which combined to make our natural world both known and new (96). What Clarke helps us appreciate is how the impulses to explore and quantify

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features of the earth—as in, for example, Linnaeus’s botanical research in the eighteenth century and Darwin’s theories of evolution and adaptation in the nineteenth century—get replayed in the literary imagination.ⁱⁱ Winterstraw’s 1757 cataloging of peculiar marine, botanical, and terrestrial forms of life seems to signal Hodgson’s awareness of the eighteenth

-century influence on science fiction; this self-referential move is, I would say, a key feature of science fiction generally and, even more specifically, of what Dennis Berthold and Emily Alder call the nautical gothic.ⁱⁱⁱ Following their critiques, I see the nautical gothic as encompassing stories set in transitional spaces between land and sea, as expressing cross-species encounters taking place on or below the water’s surface, or narrating spectacular contests that pit human technologies and our ability to think analytically against the uncannily familiar, highly adaptive and monstrous ‘other.’ But this self-referential act of writing, the liminality between land and sea, and the cross-species contest could apply to many kinds of science fiction and don’t characterize the “gothic.” For this reason, Kelly Hurley’s oft-cited analysis of the abhuman and of the influence of naturalist Charles Darwin on writers like Hodgson is invaluable.^{iv} Hurley recognizes that Darwin explained processes and deeply described nature in ways that were incorporated in the modernist gothic writer. She writes:

Theories of the evolution of the species meant that any combination of morphic traits, any transmutation of bodily form, was possible. . . . The modernist Gothic thus stands in an opportunistic relation to the nineteenth-century sciences that while demolishing the idea of a stable human identity yet gave imaginative warrant to the richly loathsome variety of abhuman

abominations that the Gothic went on to produce. (p. 205)

Hurley’s insight allows us to understand the gothic character of Hodgson’s weed men, slug-like creatures who are familiar to us with their pale, humanoid faces, ability to stand upright, and removal of dead from scenes of battle, but sinister and otherworldly in their consumption of human blood. So from Hurley we have a clear line of inquiry from Darwin to the gothic imagination of science fiction writers like Hodgson.

Having outlined the nautical gothic as the context into which we can place *Boats of the Glen Carrig*, in what follows I seek to illustrate how Winterstraw’s eighteenth-century travelogue fictionally “anticipates” moments of discovery in Charles Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle* (1845), *Insectivorous Plants* (1875), and *Origin of the Species* (1859). In juxtaposing Darwin’s naturalist writing and Hodgson’s rendering of the weed continent, I’m struck by the shared vision and vocabulary, a point on which I shall elaborate. But, briefly, we can readily compare the four-foot-long black lizards Darwin observed in the Galapagos and writes about in *Voyage of the Beagle*—lizards that swim in the ocean and dive down among the weeds—with the amphibious webbed-feet weed-men in *The Boats of the ‘Glen-Carrig’*.^v Or, similarly, we can see parallels in the predatory *Drosera* Darwin studies in *Insectivorous Plants* and the ambulatory “cabbage heads” of Hodgson’s mud-flats. These are only two of many correlations that reveal Hodgson’s entry into a conversation with Darwin in his imagination of the weed continent as an alienating, surreal, and terrifying transitional marine ecology. There are depths to plumb in the *Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig’*, a masterpiece inspired not only by conventions of the mariner tale and the gothic, but by aspects of the author’s life.

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One of Lissie Brown and Samuel Hodgson's twelve children, William Hope Hodgson (1877-1918) grew up in an educated family with limited financial resources, which may explain his gravitation to the merchant marine as an adolescent.^{vi} Arguably the most formative moment in the author's youth was his four-year apprenticeship and certification as a mate, both of which exposed him to the expanse and profundity of the world's oceans and gave him ample knowledge of ships, their quarters, masts, lines, and devices as well as the specialized tasks of the crew. Biographers such as Alain Everts have commented on the connection between Hodgson's experiences at sea—as when he saved one of his compatriots from being taken down in the shark-infested waters of Australia—and his fiction. We find numerous episodes in which humans are snagged by mysterious adversaries of the deep in *Ghost Pirates*, *From the Tideless Sea*, "The Thing in the Weeds," and other stories in the Sargasso Sea cycle. In *Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'*, tenacious predators include colossal crabs, menacing devil-fish, and tentacled, amphibious weed men, all of which express Hodgson's equal measure of fascination with and antipathy toward the sea.^{vii} Another important aspect of Hodgson's early life was growing up as the son of a clergyman and reckoning with the great Victorian divide between Creationism and Darwinism's theory of evolution. We might wonder, as science fiction historian Brian Stableford does, whether Hodgson's vision of antagonistic ecologies may stem from being, like Darwin, a free thinker who used writing and the study of nature to challenge fundamentalist conceptions of human life on an earth believed to be six thousand years old.^{viii} Darwin and Hodgson express curiosity about the natural world and convey with spectacle and suspense the struggle of diverse organisms inhabiting the transitional zone between land and sea, and both acknowledge adaptation, inter-species communication and co-

operation as essential to the preservation of life. In what follows, I'd like to correlate Darwin's writing with Hodgson's, keeping in mind the concept of the nautical gothic.

II. Voyage of the Beagle

Voyage of the Beagle, *Insectivorous Plants*, and *Origin of the Species* work as a canon to show how organisms are related to one another in a complex web of life; the naturalist observes adaptations that take place in the animal and vegetable world in the epic and daily struggle for survival. Darwin teaches us that careful investigation of aquatic and terrestrial environments leads to understanding of the synergies and confrontations that take place between species. Each book is based on the naturalist's tireless observation of phenomena and years devoted to collection of data. Darwin made our natural world real, quantifiable, and strange. As a collection, Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* (1851), *Insectivorous Plants* (1875) and *Origin of the Species* (1859) sensationalize hybridity, the idea of being neither this nor that, marine nor terrestrial, botanical nor zoological, but at the same time both. With its elegant prose, rich imagery, and lucid arguments, Darwin's study of nature is at the same time a triumph of scientific inquiry, a library of ideas, and fertile ground for the imagination of fiction writers. In the passage below from *Voyage of the Beagle*, Darwin reflects on what impressed him the most in circumnavigating the globe for five years.

In calling up images of the past, I find that the plains of Patagonia frequently cross before my eyes; yet these plains are pronounced by all wretched and useless. They can be described only by negative characters; without habitations, without water, without trees, without mountains, they support merely a few dwarf plants. *Why*

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then, and the case is not peculiar to myself, have these arid wastes taken so firm a hold on my memory? . . . I can scarcely analyze these feelings: but it must be partly owing to the free scope given to the imagination. The plains of Patagonia are boundless, for they are scarcely passable, and hence *unknown*: they bear the stamp of having lasted, as they are now, for ages, and there appears no limit to their duration through future time. If, as the ancients supposed, the flat earth was surrounded by an impassable breadth of water, or by deserts heated to an intolerable excess, who would not look at these last boundaries to man's knowledge with *deep but ill-defined sensations*?

In this moment, Darwin compares the unfolding of human time, which can be parceled out in the notations of a journal, with the vast, nearly incomprehensible passage of geological time manifest in the "arid wastes" and "boundless" plains of Patagonia. He imagines the earth as it was perceived by the ancients—flat and surrounded by water—and yet assures us through his own voyage that the terrain can be navigated, ecosystems studied, strange new organisms classified. Does Darwin foresee his own role in inspiring future writing about nature—whether real or imagined? I would say he does - for what is Hodgson's work if not an examination of remote boundaries that fill the reader with "deep but ill-defined sensations"? Let us probe how, specifically, *Boats and Voyage of the Beagle* can be read in conversation with one another.

After his astounding journey on the *Beagle* in 1831, Darwin imparted a perspective that helped readers to understand humankind's place in the natural order. He shared with his readers a curiosity, scientific vocabulary, and explanation of ani-

mal, marine, and vegetable organisms that made more visible the highly differentiated and remarkable life forms of earth. It is this inquisitiveness that unites Darwin and Winterstraw as narrators of their respective voyages. In the land of lonesomeness—which has much in common with Darwin's Patagonia—Winterstraw pauses to observe an odd excrescence on a tree, and he is tempted to cut it off as a "curio." Similarly, when a weed man dies in battle, Winterstraw is curious about its anatomy and tries to get a closer look at the pale, maimed, floating body. This impulse to inspect "anticipates" Darwin's extensive collecting of fish, coral, animals, birds, insects on his voyage from 1831-1835—the hundreds if not thousands of unfortunate specimens that were fished, bottled, shot, or pinned, transported to England, and housed in the Darwin Centre of the Natural History Museum.^{ix}

So too does Winterstraw's description of the weed continent offer a striking parallel to Darwin's writing about kelp beds. In his systematic and careful way, Darwin looks with a broad perspective at the great islands of seaweed before examining more minutely the ecosystem they sustain. He writes "The number of living creatures of all orders, whose existence intimately depends on the kelp, is wonderful. *A great volume might be written describing the inhabitants of one of those beds of seaweed*" (Darwin *Voyage of the Beagle*, 169). This is followed by description of the leaves and a view of the roots, which reveals:

a pile of small fish, shells, cuttlefish, crabs of all orders, sea eggs, starfish, beautiful Holothuridae, *Planariae*, and crawling nereidous animals of a multitude of forms all fall out together. Often as I recurred to a branch of the kelp, I never failed to discover animals of new and curious structures." (*Voyage* 169, italics mine).

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Hodgson has written that “great volume” with *Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig.’* As Darwin notes, kelp islands give rise to a variety of marine organisms such as crabs and cuttlefish, both of which appear as predators in *Boats*. Hodgson adds to the mix the perplexingly familiar yet bizarre weed man, which shares traits of two notable species mentioned in *Voyage of the Beagle*: the leech of Argentina and the aquatic lizard of the Galapagos. Like the leech, which engorges itself to spectacular proportions, the weed men suck the blood out of their prey and leave suction marks. Like the four-foot-long black lizards that Darwin observed in the Galapagos diving down into the ocean, Hodgson gives readers the amphibious webbed-foot weed men. Darwin writes of this aquatic lizard: “When in the water this lizard swims with perfect ease and quickness, by a serpentine movement of its body and flattened tail—the legs being motionless and closely collapsed on its sides” (386). While *Journey of Voyage of the Beagle* correlates with many aspects of the weed continent in Hodgson’s work, the hybrid organisms of the land of lonesomeness—sentient, mobile, botanical creatures—resonate with the findings of Darwin’s *Insectivorous Plants*.

III. Hybridity, Mobility, and Sentience in *Insectivorous Plants*

Along with the transitional ecologies and weed islands surveyed in *Voyage of the Beagle*, I contend that processes explained in *Insectivorous Plants* get reworked in the mudflats of the land of lonesomeness in *Boats of the ‘Glen Carrig.’*^x It is these transitional zones that give life to creatures indeterminate in structure, neither wholly vegetable nor mammalian. Such hybridity is disturbing, and it emerges on three occasions. First, Winterstraw, the bo’sun, and crew find themselves navigating a wasteland of primordial mud and stop to explore an abandoned derelict. They

board the vessel and appropriate its stores to replenish their own; sated on rum and a good meal, they prepare to sleep when they hear sounds of invasion. An amorphous creature tries to gain entry into their cabin and the ever-capable bo’sun jumps into action:

Then, even as he made sure of the fastenings, there came a cry of fear from some of the men; for there had come at the glass of the unbroken window, a reddish mass, which plunged up against it, sucking upon it, as it were. Then Josh, who was nearest to the table, caught up the candle, and held it towards the Thing; thus I saw that it had the appearance of a many-flapped thing shaped as it might be, out of raw beef—but *it was alive.* (Hodgson p. 19)

While we might think of this “many-flapped thing” that searches with sucking appendages and an unwavering appetite for human flesh as marine or mammalian, it is most likely a spongy tree that invades and probes the openings of the vessel^{xi}. Winterstraw figures out the habits of this predator by observing, collecting and putting into order clues on the ship: gold coins that no one would willingly leave behind, the broken shuttle, and notes written by a young English lady who embarked on a journey with her fiancé only to be left marooned. He assesses these traces of human existence to figure out that the fleshy, many-flapped creature is a “monster after the fashion of trees.” What Winterstraw expresses here is the idea of botanical organisms that are mobile and predatory, a conclusion that offers a parallel to the intricate studies of plants Linnaeus conducted at this time and predates—according to the 1750s setting—Darwin’s study of protein-eating plants.

The idea of mobility and consumption of protein are key concepts in Darwin’s *Insectivorous*

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Plants, which focuses primarily on species of the sundew, pictured in Figure 1. Published in 1875, the volume begins with Darwin's reflection on what led him to this research: "During the summer of 1860, I was surprised how large a number of insects were caught by the leaves of the common sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*). I had heard that insects were thus caught, but knew nothing further on the subject" (p. 2). In the following chapters, Darwin goes on to study the number and kinds of insects caught in various species of the sundew; how plants trap prey, how their tentacles move, and how they break down and absorb nourishment. He explains that owing to the consumption of insect protein rather than absorption of nutrients in the soil, these plants can thrive where other botanicals cannot. My proposition is that Hodgson elaborates on the idea of a protein-eating plant in the attack of the cabbage-head episode and in the encounter with the two faced tree.

In the land of lonesomeness--where botanical growths are largely stunted--the bo'sun directs the crew to mount a riverbank to search for a spring of fresh water. This is accomplished. While return-

ing to the lifeboat, the adventurous apprentice, George, leaves the safety of the crew to retrieve a sword that has been left behind. On his way back to the boat, George is pursued by a cabbage-headed shrub, a monstrous vegetable that has a lot in common with the fly trap and sundew that Darwin studies in *Insectivorous Plants*. In his botanical study, Darwin acknowledges the challenge of writing about the Sundew and the Venus Fly Trap. The challenge lay in the kinds of words to use to describe these species, to convey accurately their movement and appearance. Of the structure of the seemingly innocuous Sundew, Darwin writes: "Several eminent physiologists have discussed the homological nature of these appendages or tentacles, that is, whether they ought to be considered as hairs (trichomes) or prolongations of the leaf" (*Insectivorous Plants*, p. 5). Here, Darwin uses the words "appendage" and "hair," which are mammalian, as well as 'tentacle,' which is associated with marine organisms, and 'leaf,' which is botanical. A similar problem surfaces when Darwin describes the processes and movements of the Venus flytrap in Chapter XII (Figure 1):

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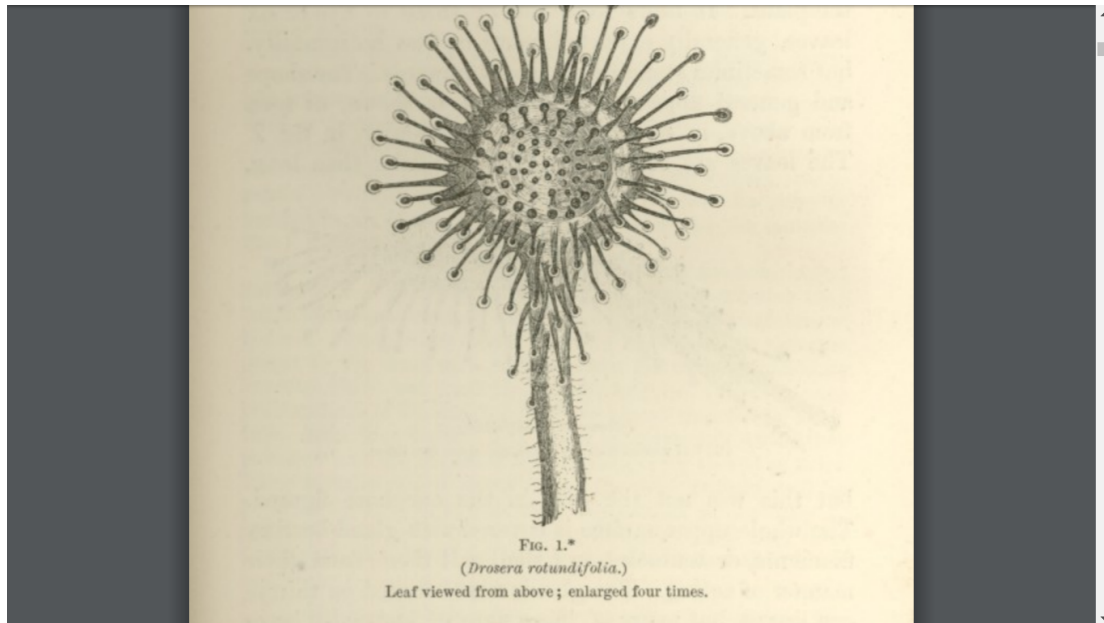


Figure 1: Drawing of a Sundew from Darwin's "Insectivorous Plants," p. 3

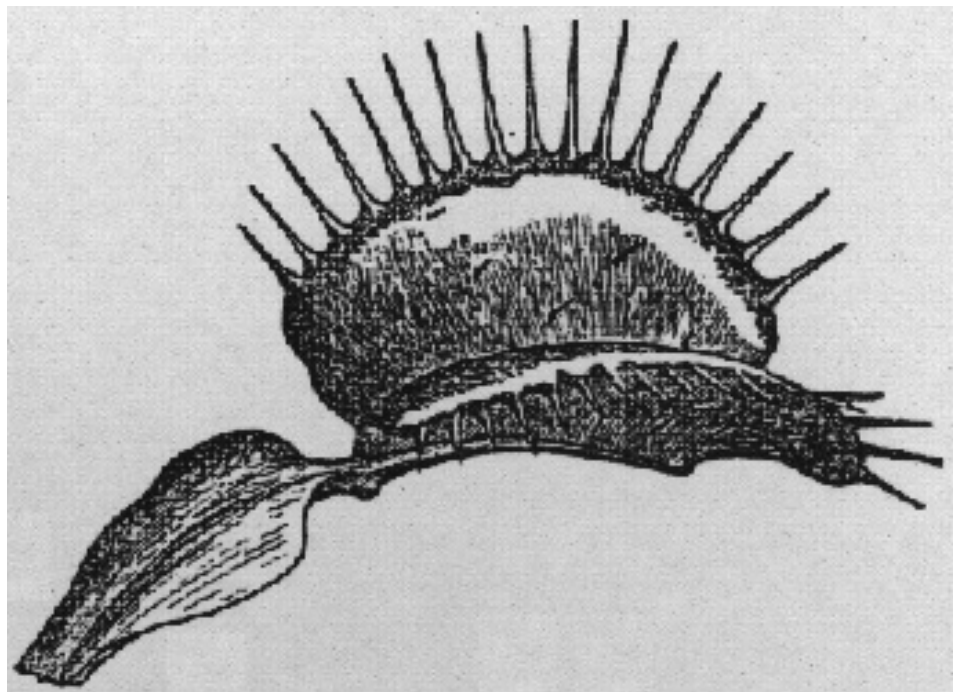


Figure 2: *Dionaea muscipula* (Darwin, *Insectivorous Plants* 287)

Darwin elaborates on the "rapid movement of the lobes caused by irritation of the filaments" as

well as "slow movement caused by the absorption of animal matter" in the flytrap (Figure 2; *Insectiv-*

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orous *Plants*, p. 287; 297). Like the sundew, the flytrap snares its prey and absorbs the insect protein.^{xii} Similarly, Hodgson's cabbage-headed plants thrive in mudflats; they are mobile and able to readily identify and pursue their prey, in this case the apprentice: "... George cried out, and ran around upon my side of the bo'sun, and I saw that one of the great cabbage-like things pursued him upon its stem, even as an evil serpent; and very dreadful it was, for it had become blood red in colour" (25). The cabbage heads are sentient *and* communicative; they halloo to their vegetable kin, in preparation for a concerted attack.^{xiii} Along with the cabbage-headed plants in the land of lonesomeness is the equally mobile, sentient, and two-faced tree which Winterstraw describes below:

We made out a tree some twenty yards away, which had all its branches wrapped about its trunk, much as the lash of a whip is wound about its stock. . . we. . . walked each of us around the tree, and were more astonished, after our circumnavigation of the great vegetable than before. Now, suddenly, and in the distance, I caught the far wailing that came before the night, and abruptly, as it seemed to me, the tree wailed at us. . . At that I was vastly astonished and frightened; yet, though I retreated, I could not withdraw my gaze from the tree; but scanned it the more intently; and suddenly, I saw a brown, human face peering at us from beneath the wrapped branches. At this, I stood very still, being seized with that fear which renders one shortly incapable of movement. Then, before I had possession of myself, I saw that it was of a part with the trunk of the tree; for I

could not tell where it ended and the tree began. (p. 15-16)

Intelligent with sentience and mobility, the tree is a synthesis of mammalian and botanical features. Hodgson imagines a tree that moves—as plants can in nature—as a botanical-zoological hybrid. At this moment, we might remember the lady passenger who was the last survivor of the abandoned vessel. The lady's note Winterstraw references earlier—one of many she leaves in the ship—states: "But I hear my lover's voice wailing in the night, and I go to find him; for my loneliness is not to be borne. May God have mercy upon me!" (Hodgson 26). It is her face embedded within the tree—a compelling example of how Hodgson repurposes myth of Baucis and Philemon and modifies it with the fabulous detail of the naturalist. In so doing, Hodgson poses for us the problem of scientific classification: is the tree botanical or mammalian? Is it a male or female, victim or predator?

With this spectacle of the tentacle, which unites the botanical and zoological, Hodgson enters into a rich literary conversation with his contemporaries. His compatriots George Griffith, H.G. Wells, and Frank Aubrey all rewrite, to varying extents, Darwin's ideas into their botanical and mammalian hybrids, dramatizing the human fear of the tentacle.^{xiv} Wells uses the invasive, sensing tentacle to characterize the alien creatures in *War of the Worlds*; Griffith uses it in *Honeymoon in Space*, where lagoon-dwelling predators with long tentacles seize humanoid Martians. Similarly, Aubrey uses the tentacle in his vegetable nightmare, *Devil Tree of El Dorado*. All of the writers tap into a fear of being grabbed, squeezed, and devoured.

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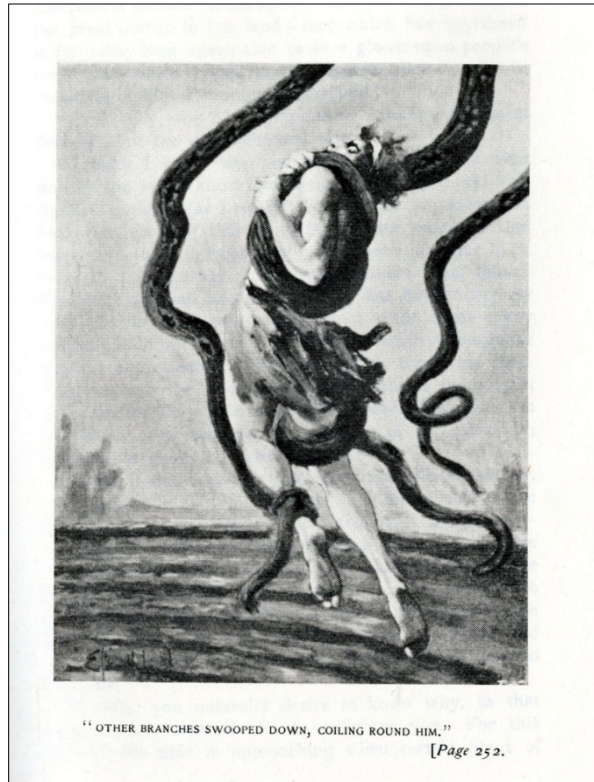


Figure 3: On the left, Lawrence Sterne Sterling's illustration for Hodgson's *Boats of the 'Glen-Carrig.'* Right: plate from F. Aubrey's *The Devil Tree of El Dorado.*

In the image illustrating Hodgson's novel on the left, we see Lawrence Sterne Sterling's interpretation of the hybrid tree with its aggressive, phallic tentacles entrapping the naked, female figure. A similar scene, on the right, can be found in Aubrey's novel, one in which the devil tree catches its prey with tentacle-like branches, depositing the blood-drained corpses into its gaping "mouth." Once in its clutches, no creature can escape—the tree is used as a form of execution/sacrifice as cruel priests order human victims to be directed into its aperture. In *Boats of the 'Glen Carrig,'* nature is impartial, the same perspective that Darwin conveys in his body of work. In both Darwin and Hodgson, those who think quickly and adapt to the hazards of their environments survive while others perish.

IV. The Origin of the Species

In *Origin of the Species*, Darwin argues that survival depends on an organism's ability to adapt to its terrain, its climate, and its relation to other organisms. In *Boats*, Winterstraw points out several instances in which humans fail to meet the challenges posed by nature. First, the unseen casualties associated with the "ship cemetery"; then the ordinary seaman Job is attacked by a devil-fish and later "be-bled" by the weed men; later Tompkins disappears in the fray with the weed men; and finally the captain's wife on the *Seabird* is snatched by the weed men. These casualties reveal the individual inability to anticipate, fend off, or adapt to predators.

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With the gaze of the naturalist and very much in concert with Darwin's chapter on Natural Selection in *Origin of the Species*, Winterstraw chronicles the way that organisms adapt and evolve in ways that are favorable to their survival. He describes the humongous crabs that deploy their strong claws to grab prey and the devil-fish that senses movement and light above the surface of the water in its quest for food. The weed men are another horrifying adaptation, moving easily between the subterranean caverns that give entry into the volcanic island and the beds of sea kelp in the weed continent. Hodgson makes it deliberately unclear if weed men represent an evolutionary ancestor or a terrifying future. When fending off these hybrid creatures, Winterstraw has a "clear vision of many white, hideous faces stretched out towards me, and brown, champing mandibles which had the upper beak shutting into the lower". . . "the clumped, wriggling tentacles were all a-flutter." They could easily represent the obscure origins of life on earth as translucent, tentacled, amphibious creatures. So too could they represent the future of the human race with the evolutionary loss of hands and feet and the acquisition of appendages useful in a marine, transitional ecology.

In *Boats*, humans learn to adapt too, and that is the triumph of this epic adventure. Winterstraw and his companions learn from the mistakes of others and are resourceful in removing provisions from the derelict vessel. When the mariners establish camp on the volcanic island, they fend off colossal crabs by poking their eyes out and catch some of the smaller ones to eat. Botanical abominations sprout throughout the land, but the bo'sun and Winterstraw learn to manage these extraordinary growths. For example, the seaweed, though pervasive and menacing in the sea—as it traps ships and camouflages predators—can be dried and burnt as fuel. Reeds growing on the island are cut and fashioned into weapons—as cut

and thrusts. Even the gigantic odiferous mushrooms can be burnt as a deterrent to the advances of weed men. The bo'sun figures out that the weed men dwell in the murky depths of the valley, and he therefore finds safety on higher ground:

Presently, we were come to the top, and here we found a spacious place, nicely level save that in one or two parts it was crossed by deepish cracks...but apart from these and some great boulders it was, as I have mentioned, a spacious place; moreover it was bone dry and pleasantly firm under one's feet, after so long upon the sand.

I think, even thus early, I had some notion of the bo'sun's design; for I went to the edge that overlooked the valley, and peered down, and finding it nigh a sheer precipice, found myself nodding my head, as though it were in accordance with some part formed wish...Then I put it straight to the bo'sun that here would make indeed a very secure camping place, with nothing to come us upon our sides or back; and our front, where was the slope, could be watched with ease. (Hodgson 66)

This adaptation to a hostile environment represents the human ascension in the evolutionary ladder, for by establishing camp on a hill, the crew is able to survey the land and sea and fight off predators. Most importantly, their ascension allows them to view and establish communication with the *Seabird*, a ship engulfed by weeds.

Darwin points out in *Origin of the Species* that cooperation between members of the same species—notably ants and bees—is critical to its survival.^{xv} Reworking this idea, Hodgson shows

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how the crew of the *Glen Carrig* and *Seabird*, an English vessel that has been wedged in the weed continent for seven years, instinctively regard each other as allies. They recognize each other through the trademark technology of humankind: a light on the ship made from distilling fish oil and fires on the hill, fueled by dried weed. The mission to rescue the party of the *Seabird* is accomplished through the casting of a line between the boats and the correspondence that develops between Mary Madison, the *Seabird*'s scribe, and Winterstraw. Working together, the two crews defy the fate of the vessels that we see earlier in the narrative, the ones that make up the "ship cemetery." They communicate effectively and share resources and strategies.

The *Seabird* has resisted attack for seven years because its passengers understand that the devil-fish associate light and movement with prey; consequently, its crew erects a great superstructure of canvas to prevent the creature from monitoring human movement. This tango of mutual adaptation represents the genius of Hodgson's novel, which ends after passengers from both boats combine forces to free the ship from the weeds, to enjoy each other's company, and to prepare for the voyage home to England. Moments such as eating biscuits or being fortified with rum as well as letter writing allow for humans to pause, reflect, and develop relationships—as with the friendship between Winterstraw and the Bo' sun; and romance between Maid Mary Madison and Winterstraw. This romance—and eventual marriage and son—could be considered a triumph of natural selection where two humans who skillfully adapt and survive become parents to the next generation. The young couple overcome nature's fierce obstacles, and their union creates a readership for the story itself, passed on as it is to their son and a wider audience.^{xvi} Thus writing be-

comes another—though different—legacy to be enjoyed by future audiences.

Writing as a cultural inheritance plays out in Hodgson's own life. After his untimely death in WWI—in Ypres in 1918 at the young age of 40—Hodgson's work might have fallen into obscurity. As noted by Jeremy Jessen in a recent edition of *Boats*, it was Mrs. Hodgson who struggled for the next twenty-five years to keep his work in print. By the 1930s, Hodgson's fiction earned the praise and attention of H.P. Lovecraft, who could be considered the master of the weird with the—now familiar—monstrous creature of *Call of Cthulhu* or the tentacled hybridity of the Old Ones in *At the Mountains of Madness*. While it is outside the scope of this paper to excavate the artistic vision uniting Hodgson and Lovecraft, it would not be controversial to say that Lovecraft succeeded in promoting his work, while Hodgson fell into relative obscurity. A mere twenty years between them accounts for the difference, and in this time, we find the publication of magazines such as *Amazing Stories*, which provided an outlet for science fiction writers. These, in turn, have been excavated and studied by genre historians Everett Bleiler, Richard Bleiler, Sam Moskowitz, and Brian Stableford. More recently, we can find parallels between Hodgson and the botanical attack on humans in John Wyndham's *Day of the Triffids* and with New Weird writer China Miéville's publication of *Kracken*, an absurdly weird novel centered—if there is a center—around the disappearance of a giant squid from the Darwin center of the Natural History Museum. Given the scientific discourses that Hodgson engages and his likely influence on other writers—not yet fully revealed—there is certainly much more critical work to be done with *Boats of the 'Glen Carrig*.' It is this novel that understands the origins of the classic mariner tale and offers a twist with the nautical gothic; it is this novel that pays tribute to the eighteenth-century origins of

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science fiction and elaborates on the newly sub-genre of the nautical gothic by playfully "anticipat-

ing" Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, *Origin of the Species* and *Insectivorous Plants*.

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Notes

ⁱ Praise of Hodgson's work—notably *Boats of the 'Glen Carrig,' Ghost Pirates, and House on the Borderland*—is reiterated in 1919 by C.S. Evans in "The Lure of The Occult," in *Bookman* (vol. 57). In his study of the ghost story, Evans provides one literary context for Hodgson's work, including stories by E.A. Poe, H. James, E. Bulwer-Lytton, and M.R. James.

ⁱⁱ Linnaeus's work is probably a point of departure for Darwin's research of insect eating plants. Linnaeus sent out a number of "apostles," many of whom never returned. Along with Linnaeus, Alexander Humboldt is probably the most important naturalist and explorer of the eighteenth century in the Southern hemisphere. La Condamine is also important; see M.L. Pratt's account of the ill-fated La Condamine expedition in South America in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge, 1992).

ⁱⁱⁱ D. Berthold seems to have coined the phrase "nautical gothic" in his essay about stories of adventure and discovery set around Cape Horn, in P. Carlson's edited volume *Literature and Lore of the Sea*. More recently, E. Alder adopts the concept of the nautical gothic in her reading of the role of the ship the *Demeter* in Stoker's *Dracula* (in *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies*).

^{iv} A. Camera and E. Alder recognize, as does K. Hurley, the Darwinian elements of Hodgson's fiction. See E. Alder's "Always Sea and Sea: *The Night Land* as Sea-scape". See also A. Camera's "We who had been human became—? Some Dark Ecological Thoughts on William Hope Hodgson's 'The Voice in the Night.'" In this brilliant study, Camera uses his training as a biologist to explain the perplexing relation between fungus and humans in Hodgson's short story.

^v Thanks to Victorian scholar J. Arnold for pointing out the connection between *Voyage of the Beagle* and Hodgson while reading a draft of this essay.

^{vi} An Anglican clergyman, Samuel Hodgson faced the herculean task of supporting his large family, which accompanied him on his missions throughout England and Ireland; he died in middle age (Everts). Hodgson's mother, Lissie Brown, attended finishing school in Belgium and was the daughter of a prosperous engineer. She advocated for the education of her sons and daughters, especially after her husband died.

^{vii} The connection between Hodgson's time spent asea and his writing is manifest in the only critical journal devoted to Hodgson's work, *Sargasso*.

^{viii} Brian Stableford makes this connection between Darwin and Hodgson in *Science Fact and Science Fiction*. Yet while Hodgson and Darwin embrace scientific thought, both writers express their vision within a narrative which calls on God for deliverance or acknowledges the infinite majesty of nature as divine creation.

^{ix} Many of these specimens can be viewed at the Darwin Centre in the National History Museum in London, which the author of this essay has had the privilege to view.

Darwin and the Nautical Gothic, continued

^x In her analysis of Ursula LeGuin's "Vaster than Empires and More Slow," L. Schneekloth argues, rightly, that "Plants are the ultimate alien." C.B. Price examines the imagery of carnivorous plants in "Vegetable monsters: Man-eating trees in fin de siècle fiction."

^{xi} Thanks to the reviewer of this essay for pointing this out.

^{xii} See, again, C.B. Price. Price uses Darwin's *Insectivorous Plants* to inform a reading of, among other texts, F. Aubrey's *Devil Tree of El Dorado*.

Hodgson's cabbage-headed plants anticipate, by forty-four years, J. Wyndham's 1951 masterpiece of science fiction, *Day of the Triffids*.^{xiii} In Wyndham's novel, made into classic film, the English grow Triffids as a food source and allay fears about being able to feed an increasingly growing population. The tall, spikey plants rebel and launch a deadly and effective full-scale counterattack made possible by the fact that they communicate with each other, are ambulatory, and use their stingers to deadly effect.

^{xiv} *Boats*'s weed men and devil-fish precede the tentacles of H.P. Lovecraft's "Call of Cthulhu" (1928) and China Mièville's *Kraken* (2010). Lovecraft and Mièville admired Hodgson's fiction.

^{xv} See Darwin's discussion of mistletoe and woodpecker in Chapter 3 and interspecies cooperation (albeit hierarchical) in bees and ants in Chapter 7 of *Origin of the Species*.

^{xvi} I thank M. Popescu for pointing out that romance is the ultimate expression of survival of the human species, what she calls 'triumphant adaptation.'