Edited By
DAWN KEETLEY & ANGELA TENGA

PLANT HORROR

APPROACHES TO THE MONSTROUS VEGETAL IN FICTION AND FILM

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Dawn Keetley • Angela Tenga
Editors

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Abstracts

1. Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror; or, Why Are Plants Horrifying?

Dawn Keetley

Evoking Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's influential 1996 essay "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," this Introduction maps out six theses suggesting why plants—defined broadly as vegetation, flowers, bushes, trees—have figured as monstrous within horror fiction and film: (1) Plants embody an absolute alterity; (2) Plants lurk in our blindspot; (3) Plants menace with their wild, purposeless growth; (4) The human harbors an uncanny constitutive vegetal; (5) Plants will get their revenge; and (6) Plant horror marks an absolute rupture of the known.

2. The Pre-cosmic Squiggle: Tendril Excesses in Early Modern Art and Science Fiction Cinema

Agnes Scherer

This chapter explores parallels between early modern tendril-arabesques and those plant monsters that send forth tendrils in modern cinematic horror. In both contexts, a beautiful and horrifying impression is grounded in the ambivalence evoked by movements of growth. This horror connects the discourses of inner and outer space, tame and wild, order and chaos, self and other. From the tendril-scrollwork that dominates the margins

of painted books, artistic craftwork, and interior walls from the fifteenth century onwards through to modern plant horror films, vegetal growth and movement have represented an unmanageable wildness. The horror of *The Thing from Another World* (1951) and *The Day of the Triffids* (1962) still bears a residue of the discourse around wildness and tameness out of which the scrollwork of the fifteenth century emerged.

3. Seeds of Horror: Sacrifice and Supremacy in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Wicker Man*, and *Children of the Corn*

Angela Tenga

Although notions of subjectivity and agency are seldom applied to plants in Western thought, narratives that feature menacing plants have enjoyed a certain notoriety. Ambivalence about the plant–human relationship is already evident in the fourteenth-century romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* while, in modern times, this anxiety finds expression in works like *The Wicker Man* (1973) and *Children of the Corn* (2009). In these works, an empowered vegetal dominates the human and demands sacrifice. While human society has often associated sacrifice with fertility, abundance, and renewal, these narratives assert the priority of the vegetal world. Moreover, they connect plant dominance with the tension between Christianity and heathen belief, countering many popular biblical interpretations by suggesting that humankind is neither separate from nature, nor above it.

4. The Mandrake's Lethal Cry: Homuncular Plants in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

Keridiana W. Chez

In J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1999), a monstrous animal necessitates both the care and the depredation of monstrously humanized plants. With its lethal gaze, the basilisk petrifies animal life, which can be revived only by a potion made from the mandrake plant. On one hand, human characters invest energies to ensure the plants'

well-being, implicitly recognizing the shared vulnerability of all life; on the other hand, they are repulsed by their dependence on a "lesser" species. Tracing these contradictions, this chapter explores the affects and practices arising from the recognition and denial of human–plant co-dependency. Drawing on various sources—from the Bible to medieval herbals and nineteenth-century encyclopedias—this chapter contextualizes the *Harry Potter* mandrake in centuries of plant lore that regarded the uncannily homuncular mandrake as an evil spirit.

5. Green Hells: Monstrous Vegetations in Twentieth-Century Representations of Amazonia

Camilo Jaramillo

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6. What We Think about When We Think about Triffids: The Monstrous Vegetal in Post-War British Science Fiction

Graham J. Matthews

John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951) and John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1956) portray the submerged interdependencies between plant and human in ways that question the complacency of human self-conceptions and the logic of cynical reason. Wyndham and Christopher signal the necessary limits of anthropomorphism and

indicate that plant-thought can be known only through the rejection of metaphysical categories, dialectical thought, and traditional ways of seeing. A reading attentive to anthropomorphic language and the logic of cynical reason offers an appreciation of plant life as life in itself. Plant life presents an alternative ontology to instrumental reason, which appropriates nature as a collection of resources and raw materials to be managed and consumed by humans.

7. The Revenge of the Lawn: The Awful Agency of Uncontained Plant Life in Ward Moore's *Greener Than You Think* and Thomas Disch's *The Genocides*

Jill E. Anderson

During the Cold War, the suburban lawn became the symbol of American affluence. At the same time, anxiety about global overpopulation prompted efforts to explore the possibilities of turning non-arable land into farmland. These two contrasting conceptualizations—both based on the human need to control and maintain plant life—replicate narratives of Cold War containment, order, and normalcy. Horror stories from this period feature unmanageable plant life that exists for its own proliferation and violates, with its undisciplined abundance, the strictures of Cold War conformity. Through readings of Ward Moore's *Greener Than You Think* (1947) and Thomas Disch's *The Genocides* (1965), this chapter explores how plants that escape the disciplining mechanisms of Cold War society represent the fragility of American containment by disrupting the primacy of American progress, power, and control.

8. Vegetable Discourses in the 1950s US Science Fiction Film

Adam Knee

The 1950s cycle of US science fiction films is known for its often outlandish representations of all manner of nonhuman others, which articulate a broad range of Cold War fears—fears of national border incursion, of brainwashing or mind control, of violence or mass destruction. This chapter argues that over the course of the decade and into the early

1960s (as the initial Cold War wave of US science fiction subsided), a distinctive and largely negative discourse about the vegetative develops in these films. Of ongoing significance to the genre, this discourse locates in the botanical a particularly threatening form of otherness, characterized by a disposition toward and means for rapid invasion and sometimes actual physical attack, combined with a chilling lack of emotion.

9. Sartre and the Roots of Plant Horror

Randy Laist

The most famous tree in all existential philosophy is the chestnut tree encountered by Antoine Roquentin in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (1964). Roquentin's tree is twentieth-century literature's supreme image of alienation, unknowability, disruption, and primordial horror. Considering Sartre's vast impact on the cultural imagination of the post-war period, it is not surprising that popular films of the period portray vegetation in its Sartrean mode, as a terrifying symbol of the unfathomable absurdity and radical contingency of human being. In fact, the entire sub-genre of plant horror, including such benchmark films as *The Thing from Another World* (1951), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), and *Day of the Triffids* (1962), can be understood as subsequent iterations of Roquentin's disturbing encounter with the chestnut tree.

10. What Do Plants Want?

Gary Farnell

In a situation where plants are invested with the power of speech, there arises the question, "What do plants want?" In turn, plant horror arises from human beings' inability to answer this question. Such is the familiar scenario of killer plant narratives in the era of today's emerging Anthropocene. This chapter examines plant horror, stemming from the phenomenon of talking plants, as represented in *The Day of the Triffids* (1962), *The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960, 1986), *The Ruins* (2008), and *The Happening* (2008). It formulates its question of what it is that plants want from the "*Chè vuoi?*" in Jacques Lacan's account of the "subversion of the subject" in the "dialectic of desire." All this is done for the sake of staging a new encounter with plants within the vegetal turn of today's "humanities."

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Robin Alex McDonald and Dan Vena

After scientist Alec Holland survives a catastrophic explosion, he becomes the humanoid/vegetal hybrid known as Swamp Thing. When Alan Moore and Stephen Bissette took over the comic series in 1984, they added a small but significant twist: initially believing itself to be Alec Holland, Moore and Bissette's Swamp Thing is revealed to be an agglomeration of vegetation that retains only traces of Alec's consciousness. This shift repositions the creature as *thing*—an obdurate entity that challenges rigid classifications. Swamp Thing's unintelligible *thingness* positions it as a threat to traditional human, able-bodied, reproductive, monogamous, cis- and heteronormative modes of relationality. But, unlike traditional horror narratives in which the thing-like creature must be defeated or destroyed, Moore and Bissette's comic champions the liberatory potential of the agential unhuman.

12. "Just a Piece of Wood": Jan Švankmajer's *Otesánek* and the EcoGothic

Elizabeth Parker

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13. An Inscrutable Malice: The Silencing of Humanity in *The Ruins* and *The Happening*

Jericho Williams

In contrast to horror films that rely on angry, animate bodies or supernatural phenomena to elicit fear, *The Ruins* (2008) and *The Happening* (2008) depict quiet ecocentric menaces. This chapter focuses on the cinematic methods and challenges of presenting plant-related monsters to American audiences. *The Ruins* showcases killer vines that use a form of verbal mimicry to terrorize and seep into the minds of their victims, while *The Happening* depicts an elusive terror that moves as slowly and silently as a breeze. Each of these menaces emerges from unassuming quiet spaces and kills indiscriminately. As they operate under the radar of human perception, they expand the possibility that plants present greater threats than previously imagined.

14. The Sense of the Monster Plant

Matthew Hall

What makes the monster plant monstrous? This chapter uses Bakhtin's notion of carnival and Kristeva's abject to decipher the archetypal monstrous plant, the *Triffidus celestus* (the triffid), as depicted in *The Day of the Triffids* (1951). The basis of monstrosity is the overthrow of hierarchy, the fundamental feature of Bakhtin's carnival. *The Day of the Triffids* reveals various characteristics of the triffids that invert the hierarchy which sees plants as passive and inert, and humans as the sole intelligent force. The horror of plant monstrosity is found in this inversion. The triffids are also, though, embodiments of Kristeva's abject—hybrid, boundary crossing, ambiguous. The triffids disturb the identity of humankind, and disrupt the system and order that positions humanity as the pinnacle and purpose of the natural world. This both horrifies human beings and reveals a greater truth, that our position of superiority is a sleight of habit and custom, one that is ultimately fragile and fleeting.

Acknowledgments

Chapter 14, "The Sense of the Monster Plant," by Matthew Hall, is a revised and expanded version of "It's a Jungle out There," published in *Product Magazine* in 2011.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Six Theses on Plant Horror; or, Why Are Plants Horrifying?

Dawn Keetley

At its most basic, plant horror marks humans' dread of the "wildness" of vegetal nature—its untameability, its pointless excess, its uncontrollable growth. Plants embody an inscrutable silence, an implacable strangeness, which human culture has, from the beginning, set out to tame. Not an easy task, perhaps, since vegetation constitutes over ninety-nine percent of the earth's biomass, the "total mass of everything that is alive." Earth is indeed "an ecosystem inarguably dominated by plants" (Mancuso and Viola 2015, pp. 123–124). Plants also embody, however, something more intimate—the mortality intrinsic to all natural beings, to our *own* nature. Most species bloom and die in often relatively short-lived cycles, constant reminders that while life (in general) will be renewed, we (in particular) will die. As T. S. Eliot famously wrote in *The Waste Land*: "April is the cruellest month, breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land." Flowers blossom, but death is never far away, haunting life's fleeting flourishing. And while humans may occasionally become food for predatory animals, we all, whether buried in the ground or scattered on the earth, become sustenance for plants. Ashes to ashes. Flesh to food.

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One of the most enduring figures of plant horror, emblematizing its creeping menace, is the Green Man. Also called the "foliate head," the Green Man was carved into many cathedrals and churches in Britain and Europe between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries. Typically etched in stone on roofs, bosses, and doorways (though sometimes also into the wood of misericords), the Green Man is a face with vegetation bursting from (or perhaps penetrating into) the nose and/or mouth (Fig. 1.1). Initial interpretations of the Green Man suggested that it represented the survival of "pagan nature worship" in Christian culture (Hayman 2010, p. 5). While Green Men certainly have many precursors in pre-Christian antiquity, they only *flourished* within Christianity, were, indeed, *integral* to Christianity, as Kathleen Basford (1978), James Coulter (2006), and Richard Hayman (2010) all argue. Green Men were, Basford (1978) writes, in her pioneering study, part of the "symbolic language" of Christianity (p. 19). Similarly, Coulter (2006) claims that the Green Man's "true identity and significance" lie firmly "within a Christian context" (p. 3), and Hayman (2010) likewise asserts that Green Men were the "product of Christianity," not its antithesis (p. 6). Rather than representing Christianity's banishment of an unambiguously pagan nature, then, the Green Man discloses how Christianity assimilated nature, wove it into its warp and woof. As Michael Pollan (2002) writes: "There can be no civilization without wildness" (p. 58). Christianity may have *aspired* to tame the vegetal, but its relationship with nature was one of co-option not rigid exclusion.

While plants and trees took on many meanings in the context of Christianity, those meanings often centered on evil, sin, and the amorality of everything that was not "human" (where to be human meant "civilized" and Christianized). As the Green Man embodied the ongoing intertwining of nature and Christianity, (its) nature was similarly ominous. Basford (1978) writes of the "horrors" and the "nightmarish spectre" incarnate in many of the Green Man carvings, describing the relationship between human and plant they materialize as "hostile" and "parasitic" (p. 19). The "horrors" of Green Men inhere not least in the important fact that the figure is not actually a "man" but always a head. It depicts the seat of human consciousness, then, but vegetation, not language, bursts from its mouth. Michael Marder (2011b) describes one of plants' most profound differences from humans when he points out that vegetation often signally lacks a head, is defined instead by a profuse "middle" without a clear beginning or end. The human head, on the other hand, is the highest point of the *human* body and thus considered "closest to the ethereal

Fig. 1.1. Green Man from Sutton Benger Church, Wiltshire, UK

sphere of ideas," confirming its "authority as a center of intelligence, the sovereign decision-making organ, and the radial point from which everything properly human emanates" (p. 475). Green Men carvings challenge this vaunted ethereality and rationality of the human: words and ideas, supposedly sprouting from pure consciousness, are supplanted by riotous vegetation. The Green Man suggests that at our most rational (figured by the head), and even in our highest achievements (language, culture, art), we are (already) matter, and will always *become* vegetal matter, matter for vegetation. The Green Man portends our movement downwards, defying the aspiration upwards symbolized by the human head and insisting we are of the earth; it thus stands in pointed tension with Christian iconography (not least, Christ himself) with its countervailing intimations of transcendence and immortality.

That Green Men have sprouted primarily in cathedrals and churches is, of course, significant. But even though they are housed in religious buildings, they are typically located at the margins; they are discrete, undigested, not a

part of the dominant (Christian) narrative of the space. Green Man carvings are without story—which is one reason they have remained notoriously enigmatic. As Hayman (2010) points out, Green Men "are difficult to interpret because there is no literature that describes them, unlike almost every other image in medieval iconography" (p. 8). Green Men remain intransigently anomalous within the context of other carvings nearby. Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, for instance, which has more Green Man carvings than any other building in the UK (over one hundred), has a profusion of carvings that tell traditional Christian stories. The Green Man at the end of a boss in the Lady Chapel, however, is solitary, not narratively continuous with the carvings around it, which often evoke or explicitly re-tell religious stories—for example, the dance of death, the seven corporeal works of mercy, the seven deadly sins, Lucifer's fall, and the crucifixion.[1] Green Men, like the vegetal life they represent, are on the threshold of the stories we tell; they resist narrative incorporation, lurking in strange and uncanny obscurity.

Green Men represent not only our inevitable entwinement with nature, as vegetation weaves violently in and out of the body, and not only the implacable resistance of plants to narrative, but also the ruthless march of time. Carved into the stone of cathedrals and churches centuries ago, and embodying vegetation that inevitably dies and re-grows, Green Men often also become overrun with greenery as those buildings fall into ruin. With their stone-carved foliage overcome with living greenery, Green Men serve as a perpetual reminder of growth and decay, a truth belied by the seeming permanence of the stone in which they are etched. In 1831, William Wordsworth visited Rosslyn Chapel (not for the first time) and was inspired to write a sonnet about his stay in the crumbling church, its interior covered with green foliage, as a storm raged outside. The speaker wonders at the vegetation growing where it should not, on the *inside* of the building: "From what bank," he wrote, "Came those live herbs? by what hand were they sown/Where dew falls not, where rain-drops seem unknown?" Despite the seeming unnaturalness of the interior greenery, the sonnet concludes of these "live herbs":

> Yet in the Temple they a friendly niche
> Share with their sculptured fellows, that, green-grown,
> Copy their beauty more and more, and preach,
> Though mute, of all things blending into one." (Wordsworth 1831)

The speaker describes the "sculptured fellows" of the "live herbs," stone sculptures that are described as "green-grown," a phrase that evokes the many Green Men carvings in Rosslyn Chapel, carvings *of* greenery, as well as the fact that the stone etchings of foliage are now covered *by* greenery—grown over with green, becoming "more and more" like the vegetation they were carved to resemble. While the "live herbs" are mute, sharing the silence of plants, they nevertheless "preach" of "all things blending into one"—of a merging of plant, flesh, and stone. While Wordsworth's speaker seems in awe of the sublime chapel, dread infuses that awe, and "green-grown" contains something of a menacing threat, of all being overrun, overcome, by vegetation—harbinger not only of death itself but of the ruin of culture, of our hard-built world.

The Green Men of medieval architecture, then, serve as some of the earliest renderings of plant horror—and, as Angela Tenga points out (in this volume), they influenced the creation of the Green Knight in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a poem written around 1400 that begins with a strange Green Knight, entirely "grass-green or greener still," who challenges a knight of King Arthur's court to behead him. After Sir Gawain steps up and executes the challenge, the knight picks up his head and gets back on his horse; riding out with blood pouring from his neck, he leaves the court "deadened now with dread" (Armitage 2007, p. 49). The regenerative vitality of the Green Knight, monstrous hybrid of red blood and "grass-green" flesh, induces "dread" at his power, suggesting, like the Green Man itself, the perennial and terrifying ability of vegetal life to swallow, engulf, overrun, and outlive humans.

Why Are Plants So Horrifying?

Evoking Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's (1996) influential essay "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," this Introduction maps out six theses suggesting why plants—defined broadly as vegetation, flowers, bushes, trees—have figured as monstrous within horror fiction and film.[2] Like the essays that follow, these claims locate the horror of plants both in their absolute strangeness *and* in their uncanny likeness, just as the Green Knight, riding into Arthur's court, is both eerily green and yet visibly human. Looming over these particular explanations, moreover, is the stark fact that we become fodder for plants. In an insightful and moving essay that describes her near-fatal attack by a saltwater crocodile, Val Plumwood (1999) explores what it means to realize, as she puts it, "that I was prey," uttering

a visceral protest of this fact: "*This can't be happening to me. I'm a human being, not meat*" (p. 78, p. 88). When Plumwood was attacked, her sense of the world changed, her sense of self becoming brutally wrenched from the familiar: "I glimpsed the world for the first time 'from the outside,' as a world no longer my own, an unrecognizably bleak landscape composed of raw necessity, that would go on without me, indifferent to my will and struggle, to my life or death" (p. 79). That humans are meat, part of a landscape that is not "ethical," as Plumwood puts it, but "ecological" (p. 89), is most starkly visible in accounts (like hers) of human encounters with large animal predators. Plants, though, can also usher in the same terrifying realization. They don't inhabit but *are* the "unrecognizably bleak landscape," even more alien and inimical, even more thoroughly *indifferent*, than the animal predator. In some horror fiction, plants do become carnivorous predators, most famously John Wyndham's triffids, but also, for example, the vines in Scott Smith's *The Ruins* (2006). These man-eating plants only hyperbolize a mundane fact about our relationship with plants, however: in the end, we become their nourishment. Each of us is, finally, what Plumwood (2012) calls a "food-providing self as material body" (p. 11). And each of us becomes the landscape from which we spend our lives trying to distinguish ourselves.[3]

Thesis 1: *Plants Embody an Absolute Alterity*

Plants exist on (and beyond) the outer limits of what we know (and what we have wanted to know): they are the utterly and ineffably strange, embodying an *absolute alterity*. As Francis Hallé (2002) succinctly puts it, "plants represent absolute otherness to us" (p. 37). Nonhuman, non-animal living beings such as plants, Marder (2013) elaborates, populate "the margin of the margin, the zone of absolute obscurity" (p. 2). While humans have long recognized a kinship with animals—indeed, the animal rights movement of the nineteenth century was founded on the solid ground of that affinity—human affinity with plants has for just as long been foreclosed. In the wake of her attack by a saltwater crocodile, it is telling, for instance, that Plumwood (1999) speculates about the creature's "motives," even hypothesizing that they may have been "political, against a species-enemy" (p. 84). Indeed, the thrust of her essay asserts that it is wrong merely to condemn crocodiles for attacking humans, that one must instead enter their world, see through their eyes. There are, in contrast, scant calls to take a plant's point of view.[4] Such a perspective

is often articulated in horror narratives, however, and it involves a blind and unrelenting desire to overrun, assimilate, and dominate. And it is our very foreclosing of the plant's point of view, our suppression of the plant, which drives its emergence within the realm of horror.

Vegetation, plants, bushes, and trees are all thoroughly commonplace and yet, at the same time, "alien" in their being and in their relation to us. Philosophers have a long history of emphasizing plants' alienness. When they speak of plants at all, Marder (2013) writes, it is to declare them not only "deficient" but "alien to human beings" (p. 108). Philosophers confront plants, he reiterates, "as an alien force" (p. 125). Plant neurobiologist Stefano Mancuso argues that it is plants' "modular" structure (whereby essential functions are distributed throughout, not centered in discrete organs) that renders them "very distant from us, alien, to the point that sometimes it's even hard for us to remember they're alive" (Mancuso and Viola 2015, p. 125). When we do stop to pay attention, we often experience dread at the thoroughly uncanny nature of plants—familiar and yet deeply unfamiliar at the same time. In one of the most beautiful renderings of plant horror, Algernon Blackwood's 1907 story "The Willows," the protagonist is stricken with a "vague terror" at the utter alienness of the titular trees: "Their serried ranks, growing everywhere darker about me as the shadows deepened, moving furiously yet softly in the wind, woke in me the curious and unwelcome suggestion that we had trespassed here upon the borders of an alien world" (pp. 23–24). Everywhere taken for granted, when they suddenly loom into view, plants unveil themselves as strange, even terrifying—a fact expertly exploited, for instance, in *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), in which the woods through which three aspiring film-makers at first heedlessly tramp ends up itself as a source of menacing horror. As they find themselves increasingly lost, as they relinquish maps, compasses, and books and start to *see* what is around them, the three protagonists find the woods becoming newly alien because, as for Blackwood's narrator, it is newly called to their attention.[5] In "The Willows" and *The Blair Witch Project*, nature becomes "alien" while remaining itself—becomes alien *because* it remains itself. Other horror texts, of course, turn plants into literal aliens—*The Thing from Another World* (1951), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *The Day of the Triffids* (1962), Thomas M. Disch's *The Genocides* (1965), and the TV series, *Doctor Who: The Seeds of Doom* (1976), to name just a few.

Plants easily become monsters, then, because they *are* the absolute "other," because they exist on and beyond the outer reaches of

our knowledge, because they "silently deconstruct," as Marder (2013) insists, our very system of metaphysics. Never completely accounted for by humans' efforts to categorize them (although we have certainly tried), plants already lurk perilously close to the very definition of the monstrous—which, as two of its preeminent theorists have pointed out, centers precisely on its refusal of known categories. Noël Carroll (1990) defines the monster as embodiment of the impure—"categorically interstitial, categorically contradictory" (p. 32), "not classifiable according to our standing categories" (p. 34), and "un-natural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature" (p. 34). Similarly, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) describes the monster as "the harbinger of category crisis," as refusing "easy categorization" (p. 6), adding that it is "difference made flesh," the very embodiment of "the Outside, the Beyond" (p. 7). In his reading of Sartre's *Nausea* (1964), in this volume, Randy Laist addresses how the horror induced by the novel's famous chestnut tree is fundamentally about the vegetal's evasion of categories. The tree, Laist points out, defies "the capacity of language to capture or categorize it." "Each of its qualities escaped it a little," Sartre writes, "flowed out of it, half solidified, almost became a thing" (Sartre 2007, pp. 129–130). Escaping from what would contain and define it, "flowing" across borders, the tree slips into something else, becomes an uncategorizable "thing."

A "plant" becomes a "thing" (moniker of that which resists categories) in a more popular form in 1951's sci-fi horror film, *The Thing from Another World*, which features a vegetable alien described variously as a "super carrot" and an "intellectual carrot." To return to Marder's (2013) point that plants inhabit "the zone of absolute obscurity" (p. 2), it is telling that while the alien "Thing" looks like a man (definitely a failure of our anthropomorphic imagination), it is repeatedly positioned behind doors—indeed, references to doors proliferate wildly, like plants themselves, in this film: at last viewing, I counted fifty-six mentions of doors, mostly exhortations to shut them.[6] Each time the Thing appears, it does so from behind a door, usually violently thrusting it open, starkly framed within it. While the monster is visually familiar, then, taking recognizable human form, it always emerges from a space that is expressly marginal, obscure, and that the human characters try vigorously to defend against and to shut out. The Thing perhaps perfectly incarnates the life of plants, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the always-known and the intractably inscrutable, and, above all, the thing we can't or won't see.

Plants do not just stand as alien in their profound inscrutability, their strangeness. To the extent that humans have grappled with plant nature, it has unfurled many characteristics that, in their absolute difference, threaten the foundations of human subjectivity—not least an absence of intent and purpose, an orientation to the external environment (not organized around inviolate interior), an implacable indifference, a profound unfreedom, signaled in plants' rootedness to a spot, and a "radical collectivity" (to use Karen Houle's phrase [2011, p. 111]; see also Marder [2013]). These characteristics of plants are behind Marder's claim (2013) that "in its very being the plant accomplishes a lived destruction of metaphysics" (p. 11). Plants suggest alternative ways of being that challenge the inevitability of (human) being—and that are exploited in plant horror narratives to create an external monstrousness.

One characteristic that has featured in plant horror as a particular mark of vegetal alterity is the *indifference* of plants. Marder (2013) has written that plants embody "the kind of detachment human beings dream of" (p. 12). Its implacable indifference renders vegetal life the embodiment of an "*it thinks*" (Marder 2013, p. 12) that takes aim at the "I think" supposedly constitutive of human ontology. (Scott Smith's novel, *The Ruins*, also emphasizes the "it thinks" of the vines, as they dissolve the very humanness of the characters they enmesh [2006, p. 169].) In *The Thing from Another World*, the "super carrot" alien goes about mechanically destroying humans, striving only to survive, coldly unconcerned with anything or anyone else. Not only are humans killed and drained for their blood, but their proximity to this alien force begins to render the humans themselves "plant-like," as they get drawn into the world of the vegetal, drawn perilously close to the "row of cabbages" that figures what the alien thinks of them, how it treats them. The same dynamic emerges in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), in which the vegetal aliens explicitly urge the humans to adopt their emotionless existence, to become "born into an untroubled world," where there is no need for love, no emotion at all: "Love, desire, ambition, faith, all gone," as one of the plant-aliens puts it. In the face of this indifferent threat, Becky asserts to Miles what it means to be human: "I want to love and be loved. I want your children. I don't want to be in a world without love or grief or beauty." Characters in both films, then, must resist the encroaching impersonality—*the reign of the "it thinks"*—as the *very condition* of remaining human. In both films, the central heterosexual plot in the film seems present not least to assert the force of this "human" emotion and desire in the face of the indifferent drive of the alien plant.[7]