Chapter Thirteen

Atavistic Trolls and Christian Immorality in Nordic Ecogothic

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The opening sequence of Roar Uthaug's *Troll* (2022) depicts the Norwegian scenery as a sublime, mountainous space that overwhelms the two, tiny human characters climbing over it. Trolls are introduced as part of the landscape: according to local folklore, they are frozen in stone on the mountain face. This representation draws on the characterization of Nordic Gothic as defined by wilderness, and trolls as creatures of that wilderness. Both land and trolls are shown to pre-date civilization—and concomitantly the arrival of Christianity. This chapter will explore how the Ecogothic is aligned with religion through the figure of the troll and the implications of this association. The aforementioned film is ambivalent, if not openly critical, of the role of Christianity in the shaping of Nordic nations. The loss of the troll is aligned with industrialization and imperialism as a consequence of Christianization. However, despite this, the film still ends with the death of the troll. This, alongside the use of military force, suggests that trolls are still anathema to contemporary society.

Sofia Wijmark has identified a rise in "troll fiction" to the extent that the term is used to describe a corpus of key texts.[1] Despite this, troll literature and films have not received the analysis or critical engagement of other supernatural creatures such as the vampire or the werewolf. Even the comparatively popular *Trolljegeren* (*Troll Hunter*, 2010) received a limited release with interest growing steadily since then. In comparison, the release of *Troll* was more akin to a Hollywood blockbuster evidenced through decisions made regarding both production and release. The director Roar Uthaug was known for his prior work on the remake of the action film *Tomb Raider* (2018), a Warner Brothers/MGM production steeped in the tropes of American action

films. Netflix promoted the film heavily through regular trailers on the streaming site. The title of the film does not need to be translated, further suggesting the aim of appealing to an international audience. These more generic elements mean that *Troll* becomes an interplay between action film and creature feature, while drawing on specific cultural aspects such as folklore and national heritage. The later qualities are used to reinforce the contentious relationship between troll and Christianity.

The film follows the emergence of a troll from a mountain during the construction of a railway. Both the explosion at the construction site and the footprints left by the troll lead to an emergency meeting convened by the Prime Minister Berit Moberg (Anneke von der Lippe). To discover the cause of the damage, a paleontologist Professor Nora Tidemann (Ine Marie Wilmann) is consulted. Alongside the Prime Minister's assistant, Andreas Isaksen (Kim Falck), and an officer in the Norwegian army, Kaptein Kristoffer/Kris Holm (Mads Pettersen), she discovers the existence of trolls. During the process, she reconnects with her father Tobias Tidemann (Gard B. Eidsvold), a disgraced professor of folklore. The troll travels toward Oslo. Military attempts to control its movements fail. Instead, Professor Tideman and Andreas try to prevent the destruction of the city while understanding the motivations of the troll. The end of the film unearths the violence at the heart of the Norwegian state and Christian church through the annihilation of the troll population, and the troll dies by sunlight.

In many ways, then, *Troll* conforms to the paradigms of millennial and post-millennial troll fiction in its use of this creature as a symbol of the Nordic landscape. The connection between trolls and nature has become politicized and the ecological implications made more explicit. Wijmark asserts the popularity of "questions of environmental destruction and human aggression against nature" in recent trollish texts.[2] In Johanna Sinisalo's *Not Before Sundown* (2000)**[AQ2]**, set in Finland, trolls have been rediscovered as a new species.[3] Their reemergence is described by one character in the following way: "They're coming because they have to. Large-scale forest industry, pollution and the diminution of game have cornered them."[4] The return of the trolls signifies the damage done to the natural world. As Skord, the troll in Kerstin Ekman's *The Forest of the Hours* (*Rövarana i Skuleskogen*), lies dying he thinks "the time will come when the Earth will scrape off everything human like scabs."[5] Humanity is aligned with visceral pain and damage in the form of "scabs." Both these and other millennial and post-millennial texts represent trolls "as a dying species on the verge of extinction, which has been exploited, excluded or imprisoned by humans."[6] In this sense, they are implicitly connected with the Ecogothic as an expression of, as Elizabeth Parker suggests, "a more complicated human/nonhuman relationship: here, Nature is something precious, to be protected—but it is also something

terrifying, to be destroyed."[7] In these texts, trolls represent that which has been lost, or is continually just about to be lost.

This ongoing tension between nature-as-threat and nature-at-risk finds expression through the Ecogothic. The term is generally identified as starting in a discussion between Simon C. Estok and Tom J. Hillard about the negative depiction of nature. Estok used the term "ecophobia" to describe the "contempt" that humanity has for nature which fuels representations of nature as a hostile opponent.[8] In a response, Hillard identified fear as being significant in humanity's relationship with nature and connected this with the Gothic through the term "Gothic Nature."[9] The introduction of the term Gothic allows for the presence of the supernatural within nature, and humanity's sense that nature, either as we perceive or depict it, contains an element of the uncontrollable. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wyn Sivils identify control as a significant element in humanity's fear of nature arguing that "control, or lack thereof, is central to the gothic."[10] Where humans may fear losing control of the natural world, the Ecogothic readings can return control to nature. David Del Principe defines the Ecogothic as an "approach" which "poses a challenge to a familiar Gothic subject—nature—taking a non-anthropocentric position to reconsider the role that the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear."[11] Subjectivity is potentially returned to the nonhuman world by centralizing its role. These definitions return to the ambivalence surrounding our depictions of nature in Gothic texts, as a site of both fear and freedom. Ambivalence is central to William Hughes and Andrew Smith's definition in *EcoGothic* where "Gothic's representation of 'evil' can be used for radical or reactionary ends becomes an important consideration within this context."[12] Ecogothic readings can confirm or counter these depictions of "evil" in the natural world and unpick the social and cultural forces that inform such representations.

Thematically, the Ecogothic overlaps with tropes in Nordic Gothic texts. Yvonne Leffler's work in this area identifies a relationship among wilderness, paganism, and Christianity.[13] She argues that what "characterizes the fantastic tradition in Scandinavia is that the gothic castle, monastery or spooky ruin is replaced by the wilderness."[14] This wilderness is, as befits the Gothic tradition, an ambivalent space. Emerging from the increasingly industrialized nineteenth-century, the Nordic Gothic expresses "a fear of and a lack of control over the external environment, the landscape and the climate," and "a kind of nostalgia" for the disappearing wilderness and its connection to national identity.[15] Much like the Ecogothic, the Nordic Gothic vacillates between a reactionary fear of the natural world as the Other and a recognition that nature is intrinsically connected to human identity, including cultural markers such as national and regional difference. However, unlike the Ecogothic more broadly, Leffler identifies the role of Christianity as a key

feature of Nordic Gothic. The use of history in these texts recalls "prehistoric times further back in history, a pagan premedieval era before Christianity was brought to Scandinavia."[16] This pagan past is connected to the natural world as a site of reconnection; as well as a being a threat, the wilderness offers freedom from the claustrophobia of Christianization.

Elizabeth Parker's work on the Ecogothic and forests provides further foundation for the connection between Christianity and humanity's ambivalent relationship to nature. Drawing on Lynn White Jr.'s essay "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," she writes: "Though [. . .] it is widely held that Nature's disenchantment is due to secularization, an alternative and also enduringly popular view is that centuries of demonization and exploitation of the natural world should be blamed on Christianity."[17] Despite centering her analysis on forests, the word "wilderness" recurs as a central concept in regard to the natural world as devilish. Wilderness is a mutable term that is used to describe a broad range of environments. From a Christian perspective, however, it has been used to conceptualize landscapes that are beyond the control of Christianity—the abode of wild animals to be etymologically precise. The wilderness is a postlapsarian state evocative of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Its usage has served as a reminder of the exhortation for Christians to make the land fruitful returning control over the wilderness.

The figure of the troll is of significance, then, as both an embodiment of the wilderness and an anti-Christian figure. Analysis of the troll has acknowledged the connection between this figure and the natural world. John Lindow states that they "were 'nature beings' [. . .]. Their home environment was a preindustrial society," connecting them to the past evoked in the Nordic Gothic.[18] In her introduction to a selection of Asbjørnsen and Moe's fairytales, Joan Roll-Hansen describes them as "associated with the dangerous, blind forces of nature."[19] Trolls, then, are innately connected to wilderness and unspoiled versions of nature. As Christianity became more prevalent in Scandinavia, the association between trolls and wilderness expanded to include anti-Christian motifs. This is included in *Troll* through the confirmation that trolls can smell the blood of Christians and hate the sound of church bells. Canonically, Gothic literature used Christian spaces such as churches, cathedrals, and priories as Gothic locations; these spaces were often ambivalent rather than purely negative.[20] Troll fiction transforms these spaces into symbols of colonial, Christian control. The anti-Christian quality of trolls bleeds into the depiction of historic figures so that the line between historical fact and folk belief becomes blurred.

Lindow describes the tension between the spread of Christianity in the Nordic countries and trolls which is transcribed in medieval sagas and manuscripts, concentrating on the "missionary" Kings of Norway, Olaf Tryggvason

(c. 964–1000) and Olaf Haraldsson (c. 995–1030).[21] Both had incidents with trolls during their endeavors. However, Haraldsson was canonized after death, becoming St. Olaf, and is popularly recognized as consolidating Christianity in a more forceful manner. In folk traditions, he is referred to as a troll slayer—a narrative that is intrinsic to the ending of *Troll*, and the reason for both their destruction and the titular troll's wrath. There is a parallel between St. Olaf the troll slayer and St. George the dragon slayer: both are venerated as protectors of the Christian faith through the destruction of supernatural, and concomitantly, Satanic entities. The folkloric and legendary elements of these stories are reinscribed through literature. Lindow argues that in the incorporation of trolls into Christian literature, they:

> side with Satan, and their ethical status is clear. We should, I think, take seriously the dualistic world view this kind of classification implies: one the one hand trolls, devils, magic, the dead and the uncontrolled supernatural; on the other humans, angels, the empirical world, the living and controlled encounters with the sacral (as in church) or the supernatural (as in miracles).[22]

Though speaking about the medieval period, the language and reference to dualism engages with ongoing concerns within Ecogothic and Nordic Gothic texts. Lindow's comparison between the controlled versus uncontrolled supernatural recurs in ideas surrounding the control of nature through scientific and technological endeavors, and the control of human behavior through the Church. Though ostensibly expressions of anxiety around these dichotomies, trolls also dissolve clear categories through their presence in a text and challenge human-made systems of understanding. Creatures of both folklore and the wilderness, they reassert the mutability of nature as a category. The dissolution of these boundaries can cause fear or panic, as depicted in reactionary Gothic texts, but there is also the possibility of challenging anthropocentric perspectives. As Leffler argues "conceptions of supernatural creatures [in this case trolls] and powers activate a repressed memory of a past condemned by the Christian church."[23] Where trolls previously threatened the church as an example of the uncontrolled supernatural, their continued presence in folklore suggests an ongoing desire to connect to a preindustrial past. The return of the troll has two effects: they are sources of horror through violent returns that threaten human protagonists, and symbols of nostalgia that reinforce a sense of cultural identity that pre-dates Christianity. Beyond the obvious destruction in *Troll*, the film invites nostalgia in multiple moments, including in a scene set in Lillihammer, where families play among models of trolls and people dressed in troll outfits. The engagement with trollishness is depicted as an important part of identity.

The film's opening combines both elements. The aerial shots of rugged mountains and fjords plays on cultural expectations of Norway and the importance of the landscape within these expectations. Without the ominous soundtrack, the visuals could form part of a tourism advertising campaign. With the soundtrack, *Troll* the landscape is transformed into an Ecogothic space suffused with supernatural potential—and possible threat. On screen text tells us that we are in the Trolltindene (Troll Peaks). The location metonymically associates trolls with mountains. In *Landscapes of Fear*, Yi-Fu Tuan classifies mountains as "under the category of willful and uncontrollable nature beyond the human domain and, even in a sense, beyond God's purview."[24] They are irreligious spaces and a suitable "home" for trolls. Yet, ambivalence returns through the films' introduction of the human characters. Among the sublime scenery, a father and daughter (later revealed to be a young Professor Tidemann and Tobias) are rock-climbing. They exchange playful conversation as they climb, and the scene becomes one of wholesome familial bonding. Within the narrative of the film, this scene is used as a nostalgic lynchpin within Professor Tidemann and Tobias's later relationship. However, it also functions as a form of nostalgia more broadly. The moment is one not only of connection between father and daughter, but also between generations and Norwegian identity. National identity is shown to exist in the interplay between wild landscapes and folk belief. At the top, the two characters look upon Trollveggen (the Troll Wall) and Tobias reminds his daughter of the folk tale that says that this wall is created from ossified trolls who failed to leave a wedding early enough. In the tale, trolls hold a wedding—these enormous, stone-like representatives of mountains and wilderness get married like humans, highlighting the complexity of representing trolls as both "other" and yet also part of cultural identity. Reinforcing this, Trolltindene is a real location in Norway and the folk tale is part of the area's mythology rather than being devised for the film. *Troll*'s use of metatextual references to real-world locations intertwines folklore, belief, and trolls in a self-conscious way.

Similarly, the site of the emergence of the trolls seems specifically to connect it within both the realm of the Ecogothic, religion and Norwegian identity. His arrival is precipitated by mining explosions in the Dovrefjell (Dovre mountains) as part of the construction of a railway. Dovrefjell is part of the pilgrimage route to Nidaros Cathedral, the site of St Olaf's tomb. The area surrounding Dovrefjell, Dovre, and Lesja, were also significant in his missionary activities. In *Heimskringla* (*The Chronicles of the Kings of Norway*), Snorri Sturlson writes "he laid hold of all the best men, and forced them [. . .], either to receive Christianity or suffer death, if they were not so lucky as to escape."[25] Dovrefjell has significant Christian connotations. However, the location is also associated with Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (1875)**[AQ2]**.

Dovrefjell is the location of the Dovregubben or troll king who Peer Gynt visits underground to ask for his daughter's hand. To do so, the troll king asks Gynt to relinquish his "Christian clothing" so he can become a troll as "in the Dovre / All's mountain-made."[26] Trolls, then, are of the mountain and thus beyond Christian control, and Dovrefjell is a trollish locale. Ibsen's play coalesced previous troll folklore and presented it to an international audience. The real-world setting hints at the connection between trolls and Christianity. Emerging from beneath Dovrefjell, the troll's appearance suggests an unearthing of this knowledge in a way that will challenge dominant narratives about Norwegian identity, religion, and its relationship to the environment. The addition of the railway introduces the notion of progress and its potential cost.

Railways have historically been associated with industrialization and modernity, particularly since the nineteenth century, evidenced in Jonathan Harker's complaint in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) that trains become unpunctual the further East one travels suggestive that Britain's efficient train system denotes its "civilized" qualities. It is during this period that Leffler locates the emergence of Nordic Gothic. Outside the construction site are groups of protestors trying to protect the mountain. The presence of protestors frames this construction as "progress" at the expense of nature. Following the opening sequence, particularly the ominous use of music, it is evident that there will be consequences to this ecological violence. While this draws on Ecogothic themes, the railway is also associated with religion in the scene. One of the protestors holds a sign reading "To hell through the tunnel." The slogan connects the act of going underground to traveling to hell conforming to Christian frameworks, but it also evokes a sense of hubris on behalf of humans. Later in the film, Tobias, acting as an unofficial advocate for the troll, admonishes governmental representatives for allowing this engineering work. He states that they thought only about whether they could build the railway rather than whether they should. Implicitly, there is a sense that technology has gone too far in its encroachment on the natural world.

Once the troll has emerged, further attention is drawn to contemporary ecological concerns. During the ensuing emergency meeting, a theory is put forward to explain the troll's footprints, streamed in via satellite. It is suggested that they could be sinkholes which sometimes occur in karst landscapes and have been exacerbated by climate change. The minister of defense (Fridtjov Såheim) quips that they should call in Greta—a reference to the climate campaigner Greta Thunberg and her highly publicized calls for action. If the opening scenes drew on the combination of nostalgia for and fear of the wilderness in Nordic Gothic, this moment draws on the increasing anxiety around human impact on the natural world which is expressed in the Ecogothic. Discussing *Troll Hunter* and *Thale*, Höglund writes that these

"films thus contrast the forested wilderness with the demands and desires of the modern Nordic state."[27] Though *Troll* depicts mountainous wilderness rather than forests, the troll's presence still reveals the violence being committed against the land. Given recent depictions of and engagements with trolls, I would argue that trolls have become Ecogothic warriors as the nature they represent is destroyed.[28] The film *Troll* also fits within this reading but also explicitly connects it to the rise of Christianity in Norway.

The film centralizes this in part using intertextual references to other films. During the narrative, the troll is compared to both King Kong and Godzilla. Though these allusions draw attention to generic tropes of *Troll*, the two "monsters" referenced can be read as Ecogothic creatures offering a more sympathetic interpretation of their monstrosity. More significantly, reverberating throughout the narrative are repeated allusions to *Jurassic Park* (1993) and the implications of prehistoric and supernatural monsters to the Christian faith. In one visual reference to *Jurassic Park*, the arrival of the troll is preceded by the surface of a cup of coffee rippling, echoing the juddering glass of water that heralds the Tyrannosaurus rex. The cup of coffee denotes the film's use of Hollywood tropes but with a regional flavor. This scene takes place in a rural house, nestled in a valley, and the coffee is *kokekaffe* or "steeped coffee" made in a metallic pot. A few scenes later once the troll has moved on, Kaptein Kris reinforces the intertextual reference by asking if the footprints marking the valley were created by a rampaging "T. Rex." This joke occurs more than once in the script. Footprints become another connection between trolls and dinosaurs, used as evidence of the existence of both. Moreover, throughout the film trolls are depicted as troglodytes living below the ground—the domain of fossilized remains of dinosaurs.

Furthering this comparison is Professor Tidemann, a paleontologist, who is introduced to the audience while searching for dinosaur bones. As a scientist, Tidemann's presence denotes one meaning of the film in terms of the tension between the rational and the supernatural, a recurring theme in Gothic texts. Troll and dinosaur are depicted as atavistic entities whose return (fossilized or not) challenges anthropocentric temporality. But, by comparing *Troll* to *Jurassic Park*, a complex depiction of belief, science, and religion becomes evident. John O'Neil reads Steven Spielberg's film as "ostensibly a creation story with a modern science fiction event at its center, Jurassic Park is actually a repetition of the biblical story of 'man's' inability to repeat the Divine creative act."[29] The innate hubris of humanity in trying to copy God's creation is echoed in Tobias' critique of those building the railway. In both films, the attempts at creation lead to unforeseen circumstances and destruction. This destruction extends beyond the physical. The comparison of the films could simply suggest the validity of the exhortation "not to play God." Yet, troll and dinosaur similarly challenge the Christian perception of the world.

The discovery of dinosaur fossils undermined the Creationist depiction of the world and led to a crisis of faith during the nineteenth century. In comparison, trolls were buried by the Christian church, first by depicting them as devil-like and then by depicting them as superstition. There is a parallel here between the dismissal of trolls by the church and the scientific community, and the potential threat to both.

Professor Tidemann's scientific acquisition of knowledge stands in direct contrast to her father, who is depicted as a disreputable scholar whose unorthodox techniques have led to a nervous breakdown. Tidemann's attempts to identify the creature lead back to him. Tobias's home is full of artwork featuring trolls by Theodor Kittelsen, and he is critical of the negative portrayals of trolls in folktales, particularly Asbjørnsen and Moe, the Brothers Grimm of Norwegian fairy tales. The use of cryptozoology, pseudoscience, and folklore to explain the existence of trolls is present in other troll texts. Eva Hoffman states that this technique "draws attention to the very textual fabrication of the troll-figure, which is always already impacted by cultural assumptions of belonging and otherness, of humanity and animality, while simultaneously shaping these attitudes."[30] The film *Troll* similarly draws attention to the tension between real and unreal, and the interest in and threat of trolls. As Lindow identified with medieval trolls, they continue to challenge the limits of humanity's power, of particular concern to the Christian church. Early Norwegian laws, put in place by the church, prohibited associating with trolls.[31] Trolls offer a way of engaging with the world that falls outside the purview of Christian control. Faith in Christianity is countered with belief in the supernatural, accessed through folklore. Yet, according to Tobias, these are also shown to be biased and anthropocentric.

Accordingly, the film engages with folklore that depicts trolls as disliking Christianity. After an initial and unsuccessful attempt to stop the troll through military firepower, Professor Tidemann, Tobias, Andreas, and Kaptein Kris take shelter from the troll's ensuing wrath. The troll pauses and sniffs the air, and Tobias recognizes that he is trying to sniff out the blood of a Christian man. Nearby a soldier starts to pray and the characters creep away from him before he is discovered by the troll and eaten. Where faith may have been depicted as a boon or protection from trolls in folk tales, the film makes it dangerous. The ineffectiveness of Christianity is reiterated later in the film. Professor Tidemann and Kaptein Kris try to control the troll using church bells. Military helicopters surround him, each carrying a bell. Though the sound does upset the troll, it only leads to further destruction as the agitated troll lashes out at the helicopters and surrounding buildings. Religion is not an effective weapon in the modern world and the decision is made to switch to military violence as the troll moves toward Oslo, the capital city. These

two scenes clarify that the power of the Christian faith has been usurped in contemporary Norwegian culture.

The incipient arrival of the troll in Oslo leads to the city being evacuated. Before the evacuation, Prime Minister Moberg addresses the country ending her statement with "God bless our dear fatherland."[32] Her appeal to God is ironic both because it is evident that Christianity is ineffective against the troll but also, as the viewer is shown, Christianity is the cause of the troll's violence. Guided by Tobias's dying words, "The Palace. The King. Home," following his accidental death by the troll, Professor Tidemann and Andreas go to the Royal Palace.[33] They discover that it has been built upon the hall of the Troll King—the troll currently attacking the capital. The palace aide explains that this decision was taken by St. Olaf. To take power, St. Olaf slaughtered the troll population and manipulated the Troll King through the love of his family to imprison him in Dovrefjell. This inverts previous depictions of the wilderness in Nordic Gothic texts in which it is the location of horror in contrast to the "civilized" human habitations. When describing tropes of Norwegian horror films, Leffler and Höglund explain that "action takes place in the Norwegian wilderness, a normally restful place for recreation, which transforms into an evil place of violence and terror."[34] The snowy Norwegian wilderness had been used as a location in Uthaug's slasher film *Fritt Vilt* (*Cold Prey*, 2006) and its sequel. In comparison, where *Troll* opens with a scene of recreation among the mountains, the journey of the troll locates the "violence and terror" to the heart of Norway, placing a graveyard underneath the symbol of state control—the palace. Moreover, from 1537–2012, the Norwegian head of state and head of the church were the monarch. Imperial and religious power were aligned. St. Olaf's actions toward the troll population, the film suggests, confirmed control over both land, people, and their beliefs. The scene is a literal representation of the church's attempts to bury belief in uncontrolled supernatural beings such as trolls.

Lingering on the skulls of infant trolls, the film reinforces the immorality of these actions while making the action of the Troll King more sympathetic. Yet, at the site of the previous destruction of the trolls, Professor Tidemann and Andreas discover that the bones burn up under UV light, which will be the means of killing the Troll King. In their introduction to Jón Árnason's Icelandic legends, the translators state that nothing is "more hateful to them than the enlightenment which accompanies and follows Christianity."[35] They connect the folkloric depiction of trolls hating sunlight with their irreligiosity as the "brightness of a cloudless sky strikes hate into the black hearts of these bitterest foes of Christ and Christianity."[36] The scene in the troll's graveyard reverses this by showing Christianity as unenlightened and violent. The power of the sun to destroy trolls is not sent from God but simply a natural phenomenon. Instead, God's power over the sun is replaced by the power

of technology. Having realized the potential of sunlight, Andrea says, "we can't control the sun," suggesting the natural world, and thus the troll, are still unable to be controlled.[37] Despite the denunciation of Christian violence, control remains an integral aspect of humanity's relationship with nature.

The response of Professor Tidemann is to use technology, in the form of huge UV lights, and the army, in the form of Kaptein Kris setting up a blockade. The suggestion is that this is better than the traditional military method of bombs, and yet, the troll is still to be destroyed. Echoing the actions of St. Olaf, the Troll King's love of family is used against him as Professor Tidemann and Andreas draw him to this destruction using the skull of a baby troll. While the motivation changes from religious righteousness to the need to save the city, the outcome remains the same. During the troll's journey through Oslo, Kittelsen's benign illustration "Troll at the Karl Johan Street" (1892) is transformed into violent reality. The nationalistic nostalgia which the image portrays is destroyed following the revelation of the destruction of the troll population. Instead, the "cutesifying" of trolls—images of which have recurred throughout the film—appears to be a saccharine attempt to hide the implicit violence at the heart of the nation state. Once in the open, this violence is made explicit as the UV lights are turned on the troll who moans in pain.

Apparently disturbed by her own actions, Professor Tidemann turns the UV lights off, and tries to tell the troll to leave and go back to the mountains. However, the possibility of the troll surviving and the ongoing implications of this are never explored as the sun rises and the troll dies. Despite the film's attempts to elicit a sympathetic response to the troll's violence against humans, the continued use of military personnel and force to eliminate the threat complicates, and at times undermines, this. The cheering soldiers delighting in the destruction of the troll is a moment of discomfort following the revelations at the palace and the visible emotional and physical pain of the troll. Though framed as a tragedy, the film suggests that this is also an inevitability. As Höglund argues "the euthanasia dispensed to those who have irrevocably crossed over into the ontological and epistemological territory of the gothic Other is also a tragic form of the military solution."[38] Whether conceived in religious or secular terms, the troll is depicted as the Other.

Thus, the film demurs from a radical ending in which humanity's understanding of the world and behavior must change to allow the continued existence of this Other. In part this seems to be an inevitability of generic conventions and the film's repeated references to American action cinema. Its international appeal and marketing are predicated on engagement with familiar action tropes such as the military. However, there is the possibility of reading an implicit critique of the influence of the American military internationally. The difference between countries has been eroded under the weight

of American cultural imperialism. In the first attack on the troll, Andreas tells Kaptein Kris that he has served, revealing that he means he has played a lot of *Call of Duty*. They both laugh. This self-aware moment suggests that the role of soldier has become a formulaic performance. The end of the film can be viewed as a warning about the dangers of technology and militarization to the environment. Though the desire to control nature and fear of the wilderness has its roots in Christianity, the diminishment of the church's power has not removed this desire, only displaced it into other systems of power. If the audience grieves the troll's death, it is because it suggests the end of a natural world in which mysteries can still exist, even if only in humanity's collective imagination.

NOTES

1. Sofia Wijkmark, "Nordic Troll Gothic," in *Nordic Gothic*, eds. Yvonne Leffler and Johan Höglund (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 103.

2. Wijkmark, "Nordic Troll Gothic," 103. Alongside and intertwined with Eco-gothic readings of trolls, Johan Höglund has convincingly read *Trolljegeren* (*Troll Hunter*, 2010), *Stallo* (2012), and *Thale* (2012) as an exploration of Nordic colonialism, and in particular the violent colonization of Sápmi and the Sámi. Höglund's work offers a useful methodology for reading *Troll* in the same way. See Höglund, "Revenge of the Trolls: Norwegian (Post) Colonial Gothic," *Edda* 104, No. 2 (May 2017): 115–29, https://doi/10.18261/issn.1500-1989-2017-02-03; and Höglund, "Indigenous Hauntings: Nordic Gothic and Colonialism," in *Nordic Gothic*, eds. Leffler and Höglund, 125–46.

3. The novel was published as *Ennen päivänlaskua ei voi* (2000) in Finnish. It has been translated as *Troll. A Love Story* in the United States and *Not Before Sundown* in the United Kingdom.

4. Johanna Sinisalo, *Not Before Sundown*, trans. Herbert Lomas (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2003), 226.

5. Kerstin Ekman, *The Forest of Hours*, trans. Anna Paterson (London: Random House, 1999), 479.

6. Wijmark, "Nordic Troll Gothic," 109.

7. Elizabeth Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic: The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 36.

8. Simon C. Estok, "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16, no. 2 (2009): 208.

9. Tom J. Hillard, "'Deep into That Darkness Peering': An Essay on Gothic Nature," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16, no. 4 (2009): 688–89.

10. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wyn Sivils, "Introduction: Approaches to the Ecogothic," in *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, eds. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wyn Sivils (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), 3.

11. David Del Principe, "Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century," *Gothic Studies* 16, No. 1 (May 2014): 1+, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.herts.ac.uk/apps/doc/A376206559/AONE?u=uniherts&sid=summon&xid=fa90e935.

12. Andrew Smith and William Hughes, "Introduction: Defining the ecoGothic," in *EcoGothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 2.

13. Leffler has written significantly on what can be broadly categorized as Nordic Gothic. Both the terms Scandinavian and Nordic are used throughout her work depending on the scope. In this chapter, I will use the term Nordic Gothic.

14. Yvonne Leffler, "Aspects of the Fantastic and the Gothic in Nineteenth-Century Scandinavian Literature," *Anales Nueva Época*, no. 11 (2008): 61.

15. Leffler, "Aspects of the Fantastic," 62.

16. Leffler, "Aspects of the Fantastic," 62.

17. Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, 59.

18. John Lindow, *Trolls: An Unnatural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 9.

19. Joan Roll-Hansen, "Introduction," in *A Time for Trolls: Fairy Tales from Norway Told by Asbjørnsen and Moe*, ed. Joan Roll-Hansen (Olso: Aschehoug, 1995), 8.

20. An ancient church plays a key role in the plot of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), typically identified as the first Gothic novel, as a location of both sanctuary for the heroine Isabella and downfall for the antagonist Manfred.

21. Lindow, *Trolls*, 39–48.

22. Lindow, *Trolls*, 45–46.

23. Yvonne Leffler, "The Gothic Topography in Scandinavian Horror Fiction," in *The Domination of Fear*, ed. Mikko Canini (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 49.

24. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 78.

25. Snorri Sturlason, *The Heimskringla, A History of The Norse Kings*, Vol. 2, trans. Samuel Laing (London: Norrœna Society, 1907), 419.

26. Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt*, trans. unknown (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1936), 71–72.

27. Höglund, "Revenge of the Trolls."

28. I have previously argued this regarding Sinisalo's *Troll* in a paper "Trip-Trapping over the Landscape: Trolls as Ecogothic Warriors in Johanna Sinsalo's *Not Before Sundown*." Presentation, Gothic Nature: New Directions in Eco-horror and the Ecogothic, Trinity College Dublin (November 17–18, 2017).

29. John O'Neil, "Dinosaurs-R-Us: The (Un)Natural History of Jurassic Park," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 293.

30. Eva Hoffman, "Beasts in the Closet: Sinisalo's *Troll* and Krebitz's *Wild* as Feminist and Queer Rejoinders to Anthropocene Fiction," *ISLE: Interdisciplinary*

Studies in Literature and Environment 28, No. 4 (October 2021): 1433–58, https://doi-org.ezproxy.herts.ac.uk/10.1093/isle/isaa118.

31. Lindow, *Trolls,* 38–39.

32. *Troll*, directed by Roar Uthaug, screenplay by Roar Uthaug and Espen Aukan (2022; Oslo: Motion Blur), Netflix.

33. Uthaug, *Troll*.

34. Leffler and Höglund, "The Past That Haunts," 24.

35. George E.J. Powell and Eiríkr Magnússon, trans., "Introductory Essay," in *Icelandic Legends*, coll. by Jón Árnason (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1866), lxiii.

36. Powell and Magnússon, "Introductory Essay," lxiv.

37. Uthaug, *Troll*.

38. Johan Höglund, *The American Imperial Gothic: Popular Culture, Empire, Violence* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 172.

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