The Body as a Site for Socioeconomic Commentary:

Cannibalism in Hardcore Horror

Stephanie Norwood

Department of English

1 November 2023

Thesis Advisor: Benjamin Robertson, Dept. of English

Honors Council Representative: Laura Winkiel, Dept. of English

Outside Reader: Katherine Alexander, Dept. of Asian Languages and Civilizations

Abstract

While horror as a genre is a frequent topic of literary research, there is a dearth of scholarly research concerning subgenres such as splatterpunk and extreme horror. When viewed through the various horror theories developed by scholars such as Noël Caroll and John Clute, it becomes evident that these subgenres are in conversation with the broader genre. The subgenres use this connection to make commentary on society, politics, and the economy. The self-reflective monsters of other horror works are substituted by representations of corporate greed, the police, and misogyny in these subgenres. These themes were present at the inception of splatterpunk in the 1980s and persist in it and the closely related subgenre of extreme horror (which I collectively term "hardcore horror") today. Hardcore horror makes use of over-the-top gore and characters who subvert social expectations to discuss issues present in society. The body, that which is splattered to pieces and graphically described, is used as a tool within the subgenre to represent commodification, transformation, and survivability when faced with socioeconomic pressure. Through its use of graphic imagery, hardcore horror fully utilizes the body as a site for such commentary through depictions of cannibalism, body horror, and sexual sadism.

“I write because I have shit to say and the sex and violence is to get you to listen.”

-Wrath James White, “Four Questions with Wrath James White”

Part One:

Horror as a genre forces its readers to confront uncomfortable truths. This is an accepted aspect of the genre. Noël Carrol writes “Just as Karl Marx called capitalists vampires and werewolves, utilizing horror iconography for progressive purposes, so the creators of horror fiction can apply the imagery of fear and disgust against the forces of political or social repression” (198). How do more narrow subgenres within horror make use of literature to comment on these forces? Are less respected subgenres worth studying? Horror author and critic Thomas Ligotti suggests that less conventional writers may produce commentary that pulls no punches:

> The literary outsider is prone to be non-idealistic. He will not stand in awe before the pyramids of the past, present, or future; he will not salute the flag of the status quo. The characters in his works will get nothing for their sufferings except the imprint of pain, that is, should they survive, since the outsider is not skittish about depicting death and doom as our natural birthright. (120)

Whether they have academic merit or not, subgenres such as splatterpunk and extreme horror certainly have cult followings. Authors Brian Keene and Wrath James White host a yearly award ceremony in Austin, TX. Dedicated subreddits and other online forums see daily posts discussing the latest books or threads about classics in the subgenre. What becomes clear with just a cursory Google search is that these subgenres are being actively produced and talked about despite a lack of scholarly research within the academy.

Works were published in the 1980s which were labelled “splatterpunk”. This term likely came about with inspiration from the term “cyberpunk”, which possesses a nebulous origin story itself. W. A. Senior, writing in 1997, remarked “Where ‘splatterpunk’ came from, I shrink from investigating; knowing it’s there—like the L.A. freeway system—suffices” (279). The term is often credited to David J. Schow after being spoken during the World Fantasy Convention (Hartmann). After some years, the term “extreme horror” came about. The two subgenres are often used interchangeably while some readers argue that there are clear differences between the two. Author Wrath James White, in an interview with Tamika Thompson, explained that the terms appear to have flipped at some point. He views early splatterpunk as political and extreme horror as gore for gore’s sake, though the definitions of both have swapped in his view. The suggestion that these terms have come to mean the opposite of what they initially did leads me to believe that these differences are minute. Both splatterpunk and extreme horror are defined by their use of excessive and graphic violence as well as the way authors position their protagonists as societal outsiders. For the sake of examination, I am grouping the two together under a more descriptive name: hardcore horror.[1]

Despite the popularity of the subgenre correlating with economic disaster and global financial trends, there are few academic articles exploring hardcore horror. Often, genre studies doesn’t get extensive research within the academy. Nevertheless, people from various corners of our society continue to produce and interact with works of genre fiction. While works of hardcore horror, many of which are distributed through small publishing houses or are self-published, may not receive the same attention as works of literary fiction, they are reflective of the society in which they are written. For that sake alone, they are worthy of academic study.

Additionally, by looking at the nastier side of horror, we can develop a more complete understanding of the overall genre.

Noël Carroll seeks to explain why people are frightened of fictional horror yet still engage with the genre in *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart.* Much of his definition relies on affect (something which John Clute writes about in his own work). Art-horror, his term for works in the genre, is termed such on account of the emotions it produces in those who interact with it. He writes "What appears to demarcate the horror story from mere stories with monsters, such as myths, is the attitude of characters in the story to the monsters they encounter. In works of horror, the humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order" (16). Art-horror is only classified as such to Carroll if the protagonists feel the need to recoil from whatever it is which disturbs "the natural order". "They are not only quite dangerous but they also make one's skin creep" (Carroll 23). He argues that this recoiling is present in other genre fiction, such as science-fiction, resulting in a blurring between genres. While there is no doubt that the violence in hardcore horror is skin crawling, the subgenre suggests that society itself defies the natural order. The violent reaction of characters may cause negative affect, but that is merely them recoiling from the discomfort their setting inspires.

Hardcore horror challenges the perceived normalcy of society's monstrosity. Often, protagonists in these works live in some level of reluctant agreement with the systems which surround them until, for whatever reason, this comfort is interrupted. What now seems "abnormal" is the way that the world (and its many governments and corporations) continues as it always has while there is such violence and despair wreaking havoc on the lives of the marginalized. The victim of over-the-top violence in Jack Ketchum's *The Girl Next Door* is a

young orphan living with her formerly wealthy, now working-class, aunt. While the frustrations of womanhood and poverty are taken out on this young girl, the world carries on as usual. The protagonist, a neighborhood boy, watches his father go to and from the business that he owns. His mother continues to do the shopping. Capitalism doesn't cease on account of horrific suffering. The violence is a part of the natural order and the protagonist begins to regard himself as abnormal for reluctantly taking part. While Carroll's baddies are set apart from others by their "impure and unclean" (23) nature, hardcore horror applies this concept to the world in which the stories take place and *every* character contained therein.

Critic John Clute works primarily with genre fiction. (Science fiction is perhaps the literature he has discussed the most.) His theory regarding horror is thus less restrictive than more traditional treatments of the genre (such as that which Carroll offers). Clute provides two definitions of horror, similar to Carroll's explanation of horror which is felt and art-horror. In his lexicon, *The Darkening Garden* (reprinted in its entirety in *Stay*), he writes "Horror—and the Fantastic as a whole—are conceived in contradiction to the imperialisms of the West. The Fantastic is Enlightenment's dark, mocking Twin […] the Fantastic exposes the lie that we own the world to which we are bound" (306). Horror, especially that which involves some supernatural element, reveals that we cannot entirely understand or rule the world for Clute. This lack of control and understanding is what causes both protagonists and readers to feel terrified. Affect Horror is a term which he uses to describe the relationality between a text and the emotions of the reader. Clute writes "Since the beginning of the 1980s, it has become common to state not only that certain emotional responses are normally generated in the reader of horror texts, but also to claim that these responses are, in themselves, what actually define horror" (341). He suggests that texts outside of capital-H Horror (or Carroll's art-horror) can be read as

Affect Horror if they produce feelings associated with being horrified in their readers. He does note that horror seems to be the only genre which is sometimes classified by generated affect, writing "Horror (in this understanding) is a kind of afflatus, a wind from anywhere" (341). The cause of these feelings are numerous. Texts which produce them can use this affect to make several different arguments, unconfined by traditional genre.

Clute also provides a narrative model for horror consisting of four parts: Sighting, Thickening, Revel, and Aftermath. Sighting is the moment that a character begins to see that there is something uncanny in their world. This may be a glimpse of a ghost or a view of a vacant street. Clute explains that "Sighting *predicts* [italics are Clute's]; it is an aliquot sample of what is to come…" (410) The sighting need not be the initial source of Affect Horror (though it certainly can be). It is the instant that the protagonist realizes that something is very, very wrong. This is followed by Thickening, "a cumulative movement towards a further stage" (Clute 417). Things go wrong for the characters. They are seemingly railroaded toward a point with no egress. Thickening is escalatory, as if the terror is pulling characters deeper despite their attempts to swim to the familiar surface. When, at last, the characters accept (however reluctantly) the happenings of the text they are in the Revel stage of Clute's model. Clute notes that "Revel tends to announce the world to come" (401). Finally, the characters will arrive at the Aftermath. The world which was hinted at during Sighting is now fully exposed, leaving the characters fully aware that this *is* the world now. There is no going back to what they believed the world to be. "Aftermath is all problem, like muskeg: problem without solution, a geography without watershed" (347). Aftermath ends the story and presents an image of a frightening future.

Several of the concepts Clute defines in his lexicon make appearances in hardcore horror. Additionally, his model of Sighting, Thickening, Revel, and Aftermath can be applied to many

works within the subgenre. By viewing hardcore horror through a Clutian lens, one can see quite apparently that it has much in common with other literature in the broad genre of Horror. In the latter half of this thesis, I'll apply this model to the primary texts discussed therein. Hardcore horror's unique approach to narrative horror will be made clear, as well as the overlap it has with various other subgenres. As genre studies increase in popularity, one is left wondering why some areas of the genre are so often left unexplored. Could horror as a genre not be best understood by turning over every rock and seeing what differences the worms beneath bear?

Thomas Ligotti braids the terror present in reality with that found in fiction in *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*. Horror in fiction is reflective of the terrifying despair of our own reality. He writes "the world is indeed well-stocked with horror, which means only one thing: death and everything that culminates in death" (54). Ligotti focuses on the pessimistic hopelessness that human consciousness brings. Because humans have evolved in such a way that we are able to deeply consider our own existence we are able to understand our insignificant place in the universe. This depth of thought extends to awareness of societal and political structures, which are often rooted in humans lying to one another about the nature of our existence. While this philosophy of cosmic horror is central in some subgenres, such as weird fiction, it rears its troubled head across the broader genre. "Why exist?" characters of both weird fiction and hardcore horror cry into the vacant sky.

While hardcore horror often features protagonists who are the source of the myriad deaths in a given story, there is still the threat of a more abstract death looming above the reader. Ligotti writes "Apart from human mortality, there is also the death of sanity, ideals, and hand-me-down conceptions about the universe and everything in it" (126). This is perhaps a fear of the death of capitalism, whose horrors we are used to, or the death of the concept of the lower class

as the rich find them no longer useful. Ligotti argues that our species' self-harming nature is a result of the lack of "natural enemies" (104). When you are at the top of the food chain, you have only yourselves to hunt. And so, as Paula D. Ashe titles her collection of short stories, *We Are Here to Hurt Each Other*. Is capitalism not a method by which one group of humans consumes another? The protagonists of hardcore horror are often awakening to a horror which has existed alongside them the entire time. They only feel the churning chasm of capitalism's true cannibalistic nature once they realize how they have been lied to and made complacent. Hardcore horror explores what one will do once they realize their hopeless place in the economy.

Mark Steven is one of the few academics exploring hardcore horror. In *Splatter Capital* Steven argues that both splatter films and splatterpunk (this is his preferred term for what I am calling "hardcore horror") literature are a direct response to the horrors of capitalism. "Splatter is neither conservative nor apolitical. It is politically committed and its commitment tends toward the anti-capitalist left" (Steven 14). He tracks the rise of splatter alongside the hyper-conservativism of the 1980s, both in the UK and America. Steven argues that there was a second rise in production during the lead-up to the global financial recession of 2008. Central to his argument is the link between the bodies of the workers and the immaterial measures of wealth that their work generates. He writes "Gore emphasizes the materiality of bodies and brains, of the human substance within an economy made seemingly abstract because it has become financial but which is nevertheless dependent upon labour as the sole source of value" (19). He ties this idea to Marx's writing, which often likens capitalism to vampirism and uses bodily imagery to illustrate the terror the proletariat faces. Steven ties the violence in splatter films and literature to the desires of the working class to "seek our bloody reparations" (19). Steven's view is that the violence is excessive so that those engaging with splatter are forced to disregard their

moral compass and merely consider what is taking place within the confines of the narrative. Steven's coverage of the genre, which explores both literature and film, echoes my own idea that hardcore horror has something to say that's worth listening to. Hardcore horror aims its camera lens at capitalism, capturing every drop of blood expelled by those ground between its gears.

Hardcore horror's protagonists are often economically disadvantaged. For example, Kathe Koja's *The Cipher* features two characters so broke that their primary source of entertainment is staring at a hole in the ground of a shabby apartment building's derelict basement. The lack of control felt by the impoverished living in capitalistic systems is echoed by the various ways one's body betrays them in extreme horror works. In Tim Miller's short story "Backne"[2] the protagonist, an underpaid factory worker, becomes exposed to a chemical which causes pustules to form on his body. In the end, the pustules are milked by the company, who use the valuable fluid to generate more capital while the worker is locked away, having become company property.

Those who use their power to keep capitalism afloat are often antagonists in hardcore horror. In recent years, the public seems to have awakened to the true role of the police: to protect capital and keep the impoverished in line. 2021 saw the publishing of an anthology of hardcore horror centered around this very concept, *Antifa Splatterpunk*. The stories, penned by various authors, echo current conceptions of the boys in blue. Where hardcore horror from the 20th century often aligns the police with the protagonists (as in Jack Ketchum's *Off Season*), current writers have a different understanding of the police's role in our society. In Max D. Stanton's "The Four Magi of Motakwa County", the police form an occult group reminiscent of both Freemasons and the Klan. Keith Rosson's "The Book of Veils" features alt-right neo-Nazis peddling World War II era contraband which leads to their undoing. Together, these stories seem

to suggest that adherence to the past will only replicate past sins. The anthology is full of scenes with police brutality, typically accompanied by anti-LGBT or -PoC rhetoric. The anthology makes it clear that in the 21st century, we understand the relationship between the police and those at the lowest rung of society's ladder as one of oppression. Hardcore horror displays these concepts masterfully. As Kathe Koja writes in the forward "Horror as a genre, and most especially splatterpunk, is unafraid of blood. It's unafraid to get its hands dirty, to look hard, to stare, and pull into focus whatever it finds" (6). It is this quality which allows hardcore horror to critique systems and ideologies which are ever-changing. By flaying the skin, hardcore horror is able to get to the meat of the matter.

Part Two:

Hardcore horror uses moral transgression to get its point across. What is more transgressive than the consumption of another person? While it isn't universally considered taboo, many cultures find the act of cannibalism abhorrent. This appeals to the hardcore horror writer, who wants to shock their reader into paying attention. Intrinsic to cannibalism is the sense that humans are being lowered into the category of mere animals. Ligotti writes "That we are critters is a verdict decided on a technicality. What we see in our mirrors are human beings, and what we need in our diet is the sustenance of stories telling us that we are more than the sum of our creaturely parts [underlining is Ligotti's]" (124-5). Our privilege as omnivores is the ability to categorize things as edible and inedible. Animals are edible, but humans (despite our *technical* categorization as animals) are not to be eaten.

Both capitalism and cannibalism are centered on consumption and commodification. Through the act of exchanging wages for labor, bodies are assigned monetary value. The value attached to the bodies of laborers bears resemblance to the stickered price tags affixed to choice cuts in the grocery store. Despite the elevation of humans over other animals, we both comprise meat, skin, and bone. These substances have their price tags. It is only through speciesism, the privileging of our own variety of animal, that we forget *what* we are. In his own work, Steven focuses on Marx's use of language to convey the horrors of capitalism. The imagery Marx deploys is visceral (literally) and decidedly inspired by horror. Steven writes that Marx allows "his prose to modulate from the gothic into splatter" (35). Cannibalism, through analysis, is the perfect act with which to describe the relationality between bodies, capital, and consumption.

By reading three traditional novels (that is to say, books which are simply words on pages) and a manga short, these theoretical lenses will be used to pull at the

cannibalism/capitalism thread running through all four narratives. Hardcore horror, as used here, can be applied to many works. An attempt has been made to choose works from across the subgenre's history. Jack Ketchum, one of the most well-known early writers in the subgenre, published *Off Season* in 1980. This early example makes less explicit any message about capitalism, though it's there if one looks closely. Ketchum uses the affect of his protagonist to play with the idea of becoming monstrous in response to feeling horror. Matt Shaw's *Sick Bastards* and Agustina Bazterrica's *Tender is the Flesh* (titled *Cadáver exquisite* in its original Spanish language publishing) came out in 2017. These later works are much more explicit in their concerns with government and capitalism, though they come from different parts of the world (the UK and Argentina, respectively). Both echo Ligotti's concepts of pessimism in horror. Finally, Junji Ito's "Greased" (often published elsewhere under the title "Glyceride") was published in the collection "Voices in the Dark" in 2002. Its inclusion here provides perspective from a non-traditional source of literature from Japan.

Off Season

Jack Ketchum's *Off Season* pits a group of New York City yuppies against a feral family of cannibals in the forests of Maine. Carla, a successful editor, has rented a cabin in Dead River to get some work done away from the bustle of the city. Dead River subsists on tourism during the summer. The town engages in a love/hate relationship with the tourists. Early in the novel, victims of a car accident are referred to as "Boston people" (Ketchum 27). As the prose reflects the inner thoughts of a local cop, Ketchum writes "like most tourists, Mrs. Landers was trouble start to finish" (28). In the same chapter, patrons in a local bar note that they can tell tourist season is over when local beauty Lydia flaunts her looks. She is described as one of the "shy girls or unhappy girls, usually, who were pretty enough when there was not much competition"

(Ketchum 30). This dynamic between Lydia and the tourist women mirrors the overall relationship between the citizens of Dead River and the visitors. The visitors come from affluent settings and pay for their vacation with high-paying jobs. The people in Dead River don't have this socioeconomic advantage. Without the tourists' dollars, they starve. In the novel, characters frequently note that they find the tourists ill-equipped to deal with the Maine wilderness. However, it isn't the wilderness that becomes Carla's undoing.

Carla settles into the cabin and awaits the arrival of a group of friends, her sister among them. Unbeknownst to her, the cabin is being watched. In a cliffside cave, a family of cannibals waits to begin their hunt. It's explained that this family is mostly made of kidnapped children and whatever offspring are born in the cave. They hide from civilization, lacking formal education and monetary wealth. The group have sex in the open, where other members of the family can see. They dress themselves in clothes taken from their victims. The cannibals exhibit behavior which would certainly cause one to shirk from them. Nowhere in the novel does a character espy a cannibal and not feel deep horror. *Off Season* begins with a very Carrollian binary. Those who are removed from society are to be feared as they undermine what is considered civilized.

In the midst of Carla and Jim's lovemaking, which takes place behind closed doors away from others in the group (as opposed to the behavior exhibited by the cannibals), one of the cannibals enters the room via window. Carla's boyfriend, Jim, is slain while she is forcefully removed from the cabin. The shattering of glass and subsequent discovery of Jim's corpse by the other members of the group serves as Sighting, using Clute's model. The chapter titled "1:18 A.M." begins from the cannibals' perspective as they prepare a feast in front of the cabin. Carla isn't referred to as a person or a woman. Instead, she is "their kill" (Ketchum 165). Carla has been reduced to an object, devoid of personal identity. Pronouns such as "her" are used, but the

prose resembles the way one might refer to any hunted animal. Ketchum sticks with genderless terms for the most part in the opening paragraph. Carla is now simply an assemblage of parts (which themselves are being actively disassembled). “Together they worked the spit up through *the* kill, trussed *the* arms and legs together, and slung *it* over the fire [italics are mine]” (Ketchum 165). None of Carla’s wealth or professional skills were able to prevent the cannibals from seeing her as something to pursue for sport and sustenance.

In this first section of the chapter, there are two paragraphs in which Ketchum plays with the concept of intelligence. As stated earlier, the cannibals have no formal education. They communicate without intelligent speech. It would be easy for readers to assume that they can’t reason at all. The yuppies, hoping to escape the cabin, have thrown pots of boiling oil on some of the cannibals. One woman screams before bearing her burnt flesh to some of the other cannibals. “He did not understand. Neither did the other men, who looked at him for an answer. He shrugged” (Ketchum 166). The reader is led to believe that the uneducated cannibal can’t understand what is happening at all. However, the following paragraph corrects this. The cannibal tastes the liquid in the discarded pan and knows exactly what has occurred. Furthermore, he remarks on the intelligence of the yuppies, who he (like the inhabitants of Dead River) previously assumed were unintelligent. “Those inside were not stupid. The hunt was better now” (Ketchum 166). Ketchum, in causing the reader to question who the more intelligent party in this scenario is, challenges assumptions made about those parties based on their socioeconomic class.

The yuppies begin to make their escape from the cabin, planning to make it into one of their cars. Cars are often used to convey class in society. It’s worth noting that the cannibals travel on foot as their only possessions are those which they’ve pilfered during hunts or

handcrafted. As one of the yuppies, Nick, is trying to get bullets for a handgun from a trunk, he's surrounded by cannibal children. Nick shoots a little girl in the head with no hesitation. "He whirled again and pointed the gun directly in the face of a little girl. "The gun exploded in his hands and the girl's head was suddenly gone…" (Ketchum 168) It's difficult to argue that someone being attacked by knife-wielding children shouldn't fight back. However, the reader isn't informed that Nick has any qualms about doing so. Is this simply on account of the little girl's weapon? Or is she viewed primarily as an outsider due to her lack of complex language and her odd, found clothing?

Nick and Dan struggle to return to the cabin, having been overrun by the cannibals. Marjie, the now-deceased Carla's sister, ends up in possession of the gun over the course of a few paragraphs. Nick manages to make it back inside, but Dan is left surrounded by the cannibals. Marjie attempts to shoot one of the large cannibals and misses. She aims the gun and fires it again, killing Dan and a cannibal in the process. "*I killed him,* she thought, *oh my God* [italics are Ketchum's]" (Ketchum 172). There is less moral divide between her and the cannibals now. Marjie's actions now inspire horror affect (at least for herself). She'll continue to ruminate on this action, among others that she takes to live, as the novel progresses. Marjie will do whatever she must to survive the cannibals, even if she has to betray her own sense of morality to do so. For her, the state of Revel is the understanding that her ordinary sense of morality is not as important as she once believed as she betrays these morals to ensure that she will live through this night. Keeping Steven in mind, I wonder what other morally questionable actions Marjie has done to survive. Or, looking backwards to a point before the novel's beginning, what her ancestors have done to allow Marjie and Carla to live a successful life in the city. Attempting to

ensure her own financial survival, has Marjie had to choose who will move forward with her and who will fall onto a heap of corpses next to a Ford Pinto?

Eventually, the police spot the smoke from the would-be feast and discover the wreckage of the fight between the yuppies and the cannibals. Their survey of the scene relies on differences between classes in the body. “It was filthy and it was the hand of a workingman, scarred on the back and callused on the front. […] Both the male with his throat slit on the bed and the man out front had smooth, tender hands. City hands” (Ketchum 199). The cannibals and the yuppies can be socioeconomically identified by only their bodies. The differences between both groups are so intrinsic to their beings that they are evidenced in the flesh. Collins writes “The human body, whose intact parameters comprise the most canonized of texts, becomes itself the agent and vehicle of horror, a figure at once distant and immediate to the viewer, who is itself contained by and subject to its body” (29). The body works in this text as a source of both horror and comfort. Marjie is fearful of what has become of Carla’s body, aware that it could easily happen to her own. As she fights to survive, bodies which resemble her own are instantly recognized as allies.

Marjie, along with one of the yuppies named Laura, is carried back to the cannibals’ cave. Laura, who has struggled psychologically throughout the novel to this point, is on the verge of a total mental breakdown. Marjie decides that she will put herself above any other to get out of that cave. “I’m sorry, Laura, but here we go again. If it’s me or you, I’m damned if it’s me” (Ketchum, 218). In her attempt to survive and maintain sanity, Marjie has become a thing of horror. She has shot one of her friends and wished for another to die at the hands of the cannibals. Marjie is the monstrous which conjures the affect of terror. Despite the privilege of her class, she has become something to fear, tainted by her encounters with the poor. “The other [thought] was a vast new sense of her own evil—of the awful place she had been brought to by

these people…" (Ketchum 246). She takes no accountability for her newfound monstrosity. Instead, she blames the cannibals for it as though they forced her to shoot Dan and wish for Laura's death. Ligotti writes "The most dangerous idea is that we should all be free to do as we like as long as what we do hurts no one else. Those suggesting this idea will get nowhere or dead, based on the social and political atmosphere in which they live" (60). He argues that we must hurt to survive. Applying Ligotti's ideas to *Off Season* would suggest that it isn't the cannibals' fault that Marjie has changed. Rather, it was something lying dormant in her all along, as it does within all humans. She simply didn't notice her capacity for evil until circumstance revealed it. Eventually, the police arrive and rescue Marjie. Naturally, they are aligned with the citizens in possession of wealth and social capital. As she rides in the back of the ambulance, Marjie is comforted by the knowledge that she is among members of at least the middle class. "She touched the man's hand. It did not seem to be a strong hand" (Ketchum 269).

The entire novel is framed by Dead River's primary industry: tourism. People come to Dead River to play at poverty. They, temporarily, give up their city apartments or suburban houses to stay in shabby cabins in the woods. They consume the everyday lives of the working class to escape the fast pace their lives of excess and success require. For the yuppies in *Off Season,* this escape simply becomes reckoning. That which they sought to consume has instead consumed them.

Sick Bastards

Matt Shaw's[3] *Sick Bastards* features a nuclear family of post-apocalyptic cannibals living in an abandoned suburban home. The survivors have no recollection of their lives before whatever happened, causing the collapse of the family structure. The novel begins at a point where the family has already begun practicing both incest and cannibalism. The father-son

relationship is under threat as the son, the novel's protagonist, begins to question the reality of both the family's situation and what they do to survive. The novel addresses the fear of outsiders, government experimentation, and the fragility of familial bonds.

In Part Three, the unnamed protagonist wrestles with the moral implications of engaging in incest and cannibalism. The father has explained that everyone who survived the (presumed) bomb is likely a looter who will take valuable resources from the family. This, coupled with food scarcity, makes it morally acceptable to kill and consume any other survivors the family happens upon, in the father's view. This justification spreads to the mother and sister, leaving the son as a reluctant participant in the family's killings. "When I'm taking part in the atrocities [both incest and cannibalism] it feels good. It feels more than good. But afterwards? The guilt surges through me reminding me how wrong it all is" (Shaw 50). Just like *Off Season*'s Marjie, the son finds it difficult to live with his own actions, even if they are keeping him alive. While the family may carry on living in their house, having family dinners, and engaging in a caricature of middle-class life, the son has the sense that their humanity is slipping away.

The son laments that he doesn't know who he is anymore. He came to in a car, surrounded by his family, but with no memories. He doesn't know who he is anymore, but it seems that he didn't know that before the cannibalism and incest ever started. There is no fixed identity in *Sick Bastards*. This idea of lost innocence is extended to his sister, who is also a stand-in for a girlfriend. The sister typically sides with the father, though the son is her chosen sexual partner. "I held her tight, clinging to the memory of how it felt to cuddle her when she was human" (Shaw 54). The family is well past Sighting. The son is trudging through the Thickening of their new reality, wishing he had never made it this far.

As the pair go downstairs to join their parents for dinner, the prose resembles the section from *Off Season* in which Carla is referred to as "it". "*It* was missing from the table now of course. Where *it* had been bound, there were just dark patches from where it had leaked (piss and blood) [italics are mine]" (Shaw 56). The victims are often referred to as "food" or "meat". The family doesn't view other survivors as *people* who are looting, but rather as looters. Their victims are dehumanized in an attempt to make their consumption morally palatable. Where the cannibals of Dead River likely didn't have complex morals, the son does. As a result, like Marjie, he lives in a state of constant regret. As the son stands up from the dinner table, his father reminds him "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day…" (Shaw 58) in true sitcom fashion.

Back in his room, the son thinks "Without society here dictating what was right and wrong, things have changed quickly. We had become more animalistic in our nature and I hated it" (Shaw 60). The son has replaced society's moral direction with that of his father. One source of authority, now gone, has been replaced by another. Another question is soon begged into existence. "Who was it (in the first place) who deemed the difference between rights and wrongs anyway" (Shaw 61)? This theme continues as the novel progresses. Eventually, the son will decide that he must be his own moral compass. Steven, referring to the subgenre, writes "There is no moral compass, only spectacular horror, and yet once again it is because splatter suspends morality that it allows us to think systematically and with clear eyes about the situation it narrates" (114). For the son, gore's removal of conventional morality is not narrative—it's his reality. As the bodies breakdown, so too does his sense of what is right and wrong and who he should accept moral guidance from. Can we, as readers, pass moral judgement on the family? We

don't know what it is like to survive in their world or to fear so deeply strangers who approach our suburban neighborhoods.

The son, having left the family home, stumbles upon a map. The map makes evident that they have been existing in an enclosed environment surrounded by walls, with one point of entry. In Part Fifteen, the son enters a building beyond the wall and finds dead people in white lab coats with name badges. In a room lined with monitors, he discovers that their house has been watched all along. In this beginning stage of Revel, the son finally glimpses the true nature of the family's reality. "I stumbled from the cabin before I noticed anything else. I already felt as though my head was going to explode" (Shaw 172). Wandering into another building, the son finds a set of files which reveals their identities. They were never a family at all. The acts of incest which had plagued him up to this point were never incest at all.

Each member of the family had been paid for their participation in an experiment, not knowing that they would become devoid of identity and placed in a situation so dangerous. Essentially, they were made to live in a wasteland due to their economic disadvantage. With the truth (quite literally) in his hands, the son is made aware that he has an identity which has been stripped from him. The people in the lab coats are conducting a test on behalf of the government, as he discovers in Part Seventeen. This section goes on to detail how the family, along with the other "survivors", are kept unaware of their pasts. The son realizes, finally, that his family are the victims of a test which preyed upon the poor. "Did I really agree to this just because they had offered a little money" (Shaw 195)? Documents reveal that the son was never told the full extent of the experiment. None of the family ever truly consented to the situation they now find themselves in. Instead, the government deemed them expendable on account of their socioeconomic status. As the son eats a surviving technician, he opines that he wishes the man

was still alive to witness himself being consumed. “To feel the teeth of the monster tear into him piece by piece until there’d be no more flesh to consume” (Shaw 201).

The son briefly fantasizes about a future in which the family has left the confines of the experiment. They return to their actual families and ordinary lives. However, in this daydream, the family still meets to engage in cannibalistic murders and sexual debauchery. He concludes that they can’t just go back. The Aftermath of the story is one in which the son realizes that there is no place in the world for people like the family. The son simply returns home, having decided that he will keep the truth of the experiment to himself. “I didn’t want to see their faces, even after what they had become, when they realised it was all for nothing” (Shaw 230). His attempt to get a paltry amount of money in exchange for participation won’t result in a significant financial change, let alone class mobility. Instead, the family will just be scarred by the knowledge that they were taken advantage of and made to suffer needlessly.

Tender is the Flesh

Agustina Bazterrica’s novel *Tender is the Flesh* takes place in a world that has been recently ravaged by disease. Animals are likely to carry dangerous diseases, rendering them unfit for consumption. Animal agriculture infrastructure has been converted to allow for the slaughtering of animal meat’s replacement—human meat. The world is collectively terming this change the “Transition”. The protagonist of the novel, Marcos, has worked in a particular slaughterhouse since before the Transition. The Transition took place alongside the death of his infant son and subsequent separation from his wife. He is a vegetarian, unable to commit the act of cannibalism. The novel begins with Marcos living alone. His days are consumed with work at the slaughterhouse and ensuring that his father is being properly cared for at a local nursing home.

Tender is the Flesh makes it clearer than the other novels discussed here that humans are commodified and without identity. They are never referred to as "humans", but rather as "heads" (as in "heads of cattle"). "No one can call them humans because that would mean giving them an identity" (Bazterrica 7). Marcos often reflects on the language used to refer to humans in this manner. While the reader is made very aware of his thoughts regarding the heads, he must hide his opinions from the various branches of animal agriculture that he interacts with. His only outward display of disagreement is his refusal to partake of human flesh. Wiley writes "Seen from the perspective of the dominant Western view of language as the hallmark of humanity—as that which lifts us up from the squalor and aphasia of the beasts […]—horrific art is perverse" (726). The society Marcos finds himself in reinforces this idea of language. Bazterrica's prose is very aware of this concept and toys with the idea that despite whatever language we use to hide it, we are the same as the animals on which we dine. There is no subtle metaphor in the novel. Bazterrica makes plain that the Transition has class components, writing:

> In some countries, immigrants began to disappear in large numbers. Immigrants, the marginalized, the poor. They were persecuted and eventually slaughtered. Legalization occurred when the governments gave in to pressure from a big-money industry that had come to a halt. They adapted the processing plants and regulations. Not long after, they began to breed people as animals to supply the massive demand for meat. (6)

When deciding which people would become products, naturally, those who had long been considered undesirable were the first on the butcher block. For many, the Transition provided a fantastic reason to do away with certain populations while evading a sense of wrong-doing. Saying these communities "were persecuted" leads the reader to conclude that there were legal proceedings, lending the entire process an air of legitimacy and, thus, morality. A "Municipal

Slaughterhouse" handles such executions (butcheries?), adding to the government's endorsement of such actions. The novel also addresses the way animal agriculture negatively impacts abattoir workers. For example, a worker at the processing plant Marcos works at had to quit some time after the Transition. There was always a psychological toll associated with routine killing. The Transition just multiplied it.

Marcos's father preceded him at the processing plant. Marcos is working at the slaughterhouse as a sort of inheritance. Just as the head are reared with a distinct purpose, Marcos arguably was raised to work in animal agriculture. Money is tight, but he has the privilege of a stable job and a home. Within the novel, there are mentions of a black market meat trade. "It's the cheapest meat money can buy because it's dry and diseased, full of pharmaceuticals. It's meat with a first and last name" (Bazterrica 46). Marcos's own trade has prestige. He interacts with wealthy Europeans and rich Argentinians in his day-to-day life. He isn't wealthy himself, but he certainly isn't poor. Like many members of the middle class, Marcos excuses the moral failings of his government and society by saying that he is only providing a product that the public wants and would just as readily purchase from another processing plant. He takes no real accountability for his actions, hypocritically judging those who eat humans as if he plays no major role himself.

Marcos is gifted a female head of high quality from a colleague. "Just keep her for a few days and then we'll have ourselves a barbecue" (Bazterrica 29), he's instructed by the sender. Marcos is unsure what to do with the female head at first. The biggest thing keeping him at the slaughterhouse is the nursing home bills. He isn't an only child. However, Marcos takes much more interest in his father's care than his sister. He frequently calls the nursing home to check in on his father. There's a sense that he doesn't seek employment elsewhere as this job is what he

has always done. “How many head do they have to kill each month so he can pay for his father’s nursing home” (Bazterrica 72)? Given the instability of both the Transition and his marital issues, one imagines that the constancy of the job is some small sort of comfort. Marcos, as someone who abstains from eating human flesh, is unlikely to slaughter the female head for his own personal consumption. Likewise, he has no desire to breed the female with a male head to produce more livestock, despite her “pure genes” (Bazterrica 29). It’s illegal for the head to work (it’s considered slavery, which is deemed worse than cannibalism). “She’s no one and she’s in my barn, he thinks” (Bazterrica 41). Instead, he leaves her in his barn. For the moment.

The female head, who Marcos will eventually name Jasmine, becomes her own moral debate in Marcos’s mind. The Transition resulted in many legal changes. A law was introduced banning sexual relations between people (not head, meat, or products, but people with names and identities) and head. This is often referred to as “enjoying” a head. Since the head are not viewed as people, they cannot be slept with or raped. The verb reflects the head’s status as an object. Bazterrica’s writing reveals to the reader that Marcos feels an intense loneliness. The death of their child put immense strain on his marriage. Marcos’s wife, Cecilia, moved out of their home. He must call her mother to check in on her, just as he calls the nurses to get updates concerning his father. His relationships with others occur over the telephone. His social distance is mirrored by physical distance. Jasmine is there. Though, like all the head, she doesn’t have speech, she is able to communicate with body language and is physically near Marcos. Predictably, he begins to romantically and sexually desire her.

This relationship has an obviously imbalanced power dynamic. Marcos *owns* Jasmine. He granted her the small sliver of identity she has by naming her. She only has freedom to roam around the house, rather than being confined to the barn, because he grants this privilege to her.

Marcos keeps an eye on Jasmine when he's away via security cameras. There are multiple reasons that he might do so. There's a government agency that routinely visits privately owned head to ensure that they are not being enjoyed and are adequately cared for. Jasmine is not used to life in an ordinary home and runs the danger of accidentally harming herself. (There is an incident in the novel where she does just that with a kitchen knife.) As mentioned previously, Jasmine is a high quality head. She has a sizeable market value. Marcos is keeping an eye on a valuable possession. The slaughterhouse doesn't pay him well enough to leave something like Jasmine entirely unattended.

The sexual relationship leads to a pregnancy. Marcos quickly becomes preoccupied with the unborn child. He will do anything to ensure that *this* child survives. "The room contains no furniture within reach; nothing that could hurt her. […] He didn't want to risk something happening to his child and took all the necessary precautions" (Bazterrica 135). This is understandable for someone who has experienced the loss of a child. However, as the novel progresses every interaction he has with Jasmine centers on the child. Slowly, she transitions from property to an incubator. It is Marcos's ownership, and thus economic power, which allows him to use Jasmine's body for the production of a child.

The novel's final chapter sees the fruition of Marcos's plan. He's slowly rebuilt some sort of relationship with his wife, Cecilia. As Jasmine goes into labor, he urges Cecilia to come over. Cecilia, who is a nurse, may be of assistance during what looks like it will be a difficult birth (the amniotic fluid is not the color that it should be, according to Marcos's reading). It seems that the primary reason she is in attendance is to witness the reparation of her family. Marcos doesn't speak to Jasmine during this process, but to his as yet unborn son. "Everything's gonna be just fine, little one, just fine, your birth's gonna go well, everything's gonna be just fine" (Bazterrica

205). After hours of labor, the baby is born. “Jasmine is in bed and she stretches out her arms. They ignore her…” (Bazterrica 207) Jasmine is no more human to Marcos that all the other head are to society. His inherited wealth has kept him safe from the purge and above her lot in life.

Marcos has no further use for Jasmine. His family is restored. Cecilia is back in the marital home and cradling his newborn son. Jasmine, resembling a cow whose calf is being dragged away, reaches out to her son. She doesn’t understand the intricacies of property and identity. She can’t comprehend that she, and any*thing* she produces, legally belongs to Marcos. She was a reward for his continued service in the generation of capital. “He’s ours now” (Bazterrica 207) Marcos tells his wife. After he clubs Jasmine to death, Cecilia laments “She could have given us more children” (Bazterrica 209). After the killing, Jasmine, like the victims of the other novels, is referred to as “it”.

Tender is the Flesh clearly aligns the acts of cannibalism with the commodification of bodies. Marcos views himself as complicit in but not responsible for society’s sins. At the very least, he understands that he is not the same person he was before the Transition—before the deaths of his son and father. “It is then [in depression] you discover that your ‘old self’ is not the substantial and inviolable thing you thought it was, nor was the rest of your ‘old’ reality” (Ligotti 95). These losses have resulted in Marcos taking advantage of his socioeconomical status. Because he has industry connections, he is able to easily conceal Jasmine. Because his wife is educated, the baby is delivered unharmed. Because he inherited his family home, he has somewhere to raise his son. His reality has changed and his morals have adjusted alongside it. If the Marcos that the reader is introduced to finds the practice of slaughtering humans deplorable, the Marcos at the novel’s end would club Jasmine again if it meant keeping his son.

“Greased”

Junji Ito's "Greased" is about a teenage girl, Yui, who lives with her father and brother above their yakiniku restaurant. The restaurant and home are both coated in a thick layer of grease. Yui is so aware of the amount of oil that she begins to measure the "oil index" within the home. As the story becomes increasingly horrific, the oil index rises. Ito's story cleverly uses grease to convey the way poverty coats everything in one's life. Every panel of the manga showing the home is dark, covered with patchy crosshatching. Additionally, characters are often dripping with oil. This visible poverty causes tension in the family which ultimately leads to cannibalism.

"Greased" begins with Yui gazing at Mount Fuji. The mountain is present throughout the story. Its beauty provides Yui with comfort, contrasting with the ugliness of her home life. "Ever since I was little, I've loved to look out at Mount Fuji. It was so big and beautiful" (Ito 352). Mount Fuji can be read as a symbol for the perfect, serenely gorgeous Japanese life. Yui explains via narration that the family home is rarely cleaned. The oil seeps into the futons and clothing. Her older brother, Goro, has a strange habit of drinking cooking oil. He is a product of the family business, drenched in grease. She hates the oil, her father, and Goro. Yui rejects every part of the family.

When Goro enters puberty his face becomes covered in large pimples. In one panel, he squeezes a pimple. It's very round between his fingers as sebum squirts across the panel. Between the oil soaking his clothes and his pimple-covered face, there is plenty to set him apart from his classmates. Girls laugh at him while boys rough him up. One even has the audacity to ask Goro to pay for his dry cleaning bill when he gets oil on his clothing during the bullying. His anger at the bullies is redirected to Yui at home. As Goro is taking out his anger on Yui, kicking her while she kneels on the ground, their father intervenes. Goro finally directs his anger at the

source. “It’s your fault my face is like this! You contaminated my body with your dirty oil!!” (Ito 362). The family lives in a state of poverty because the restaurant isn’t very successful. Goro’s life is a direct result of his father’s actions. Their father tries to wipe the oil from his forehead after the fight, but it reappears. Poverty is something that he can’t wipe away.

“After that, my brother shut himself up in the house and began drinking oil every day” (Ito 363). Understanding the inescapability of their situation, Goro embraces it. While Yui is still at the Thickening stage of Clute’s model, Goro is in Revel. He presses his hands against his forehead in a series of panels. Several large pimples burst, splattering sebum in Yui’s direction. When she voices displeasure, Goro sees it as an opportunity to torture her. His anger escalates until his hands are wrapped around her throat. “I’ll slaughter all of you. […] I’m gonna kill you first” (Ito 367). He says that he’ll become smoke spewing from Mount Fuji. If he cannot achieve an ideal Japanese life, he’ll take that possibility from others.

Once again, their father must stop Goro from hurting Yui. He strikes the boy in the back of the head with a frying pan, knocking him dead. On the next page, two salarymen walk by the restaurant. One of the men remarks that the food is ordinarily bad, but there was good meat recently. He asks the father if there is any more of it, only to be informed that they “sold out of that meat yesterday” (Ito 369). When he asks when more will come in, the father makes a disturbing face. His brows furrow, as if he’s thinking hard about how he can come across more of this meat.

As the oil index reaches seventy percent, Yui dreams that Mount Fuji is erupting. Instead of lava, the volcano spews oil. Goro is haunting her dreams. The town is slick with oil and utterly deserted, as though he accomplished his goal of killing everyone. How can Yui have an ideal life when she is still covered in oil and aware that her father killed her brother? Yui has no

hope. “And even after I woke up, Mount Fuji, which had been so beautiful no longer made me feel refreshed” (Ito 373). As her depression worsens, she becomes like Goro. Pimples begin to appear on Yui’s face. She pops them in front of the mirror, projecting sebum just as her brother did. “The pimples on my face multiplied before my eyes. I shut myself up in the house” (Ito 374). The dreams continue, worsening her mental state.

Yui wakes up in the night to her father pouring a bottle of oil down her throat. Her father looks almost hypnotized as he explains that he thought she was hungry. She realizes that he must have been feeding her oil for some time. “Th-that’s it. That’s totally it. Dad’s trying…to make me like Goro…” (Ito 378) Yui takes care not to make herself vulnerable by sleeping when her father is near. At the beginning of the story, her skin was clear. Now, she’s drawn with pimples on her face while her clothes and body drip with oil, like Goro and her father.

The restaurant is closed. Yui’s father sits at home drinking cooking oil. Speaking to himself, he explains that he’s done with the restaurant. The same depression that has begun affecting Yui seems to be taking its toll on him. “Even though the yakiniku shop was closed the oil index in the house didn’t drop in the slightest” (Ito 379). Yui explains that her father seems as if he’s emitting grease. The oil index gets higher near him. If the grease itself is read as a manifestation of poverty, Yui’s father can’t be saved from it at this point. By drinking the oil, like Goro, he is resigned to his fate. One the last page, Yui walks to the restaurant kitchen where she witnesses her father butchering his amputated leg on the counter. “What gushed out from my father’s severed leg was not blood, but yellow-ish brown oil…” (Ito 382)

“Greased” is a story about the inescapability of a family occupation. Yui and Goro both react differently to the way the yakiniku restaurant permeates their family’s existence. However, they both find themselves unable to escape the thick, sodden poverty that oozes from their pores.

As it does in other hardcore horror works, their socioeconomic status shows itself in their bodies. In turn, these bodies are sold to those who can afford them. As is often the case in capitalism, the price attached to both the father's labor and Goro's flesh isn't enough to lift the family out of poverty. Wiley notes that "horrific art is obsessed with radical difference or otherness" (728). This is why Ito makes the signs of poverty within his work so viscerally disgusting. The family looks different than the students and salarymen in their neighborhood. They are marked by the dripping oil as "other". There is a push and pull between "others" and the reader, according to Carroll. Even though the family and the idea of atmospheric oil is disgusting, readers continue to flip pages. Their reward for curiosity is the grave images on the last page.

Conclusion:

Hardcore horror is certainly working within the conventions of its genre while it is stylistically unique enough to warrant its own categorization as a subgenre. Aspects of Carroll's definition of art-horror are present in each of these works. There is that sense of deep disgust followed by recoiling in the body as readers engage with these texts. Ligotti's sense of deep pessimism and societal betrayal is central to these narratives as they grapple with capitalism, the family structure, and government. Clute's model can likewise be applied to these narratives, revealing a sense of Revel which often involves becoming the source of horror and an Aftermath in which one rarely, if ever, overcomes the greatest evil of all—capitalism. Steven's ideas in *Splatter Capital* apply just as easily to the stories discussed here as they do to the films he applies them to. The framework for studying hardcore horror as a niche corner of horror was already available for these examinations.

Cannibalism is only one way in which hardcore horror handles capitalism. There are novels, such as Samantha Kolesnik's *Waif*, that use human trafficking and sex work to make

similar commentary about the commodification of bodies. Various treatments are used in this subgenre. It's the extreme moral transgression of cannibalism that makes these works stand out. If hardcore horror is about using the most upsetting imagery to get its point across, what better to use than humans literally consuming one another? Capitalism assigns value to human bodies as it destroys them to turn profits. The best way to critique this horrifying relationship is by tearing those bodies—and the systems which seek to buy and sell them—into tiny, digestible pieces.

Endnotes:

1. Hardcore horror as a term is used elsewhere, such as anthologies.

2. “Backne” appears in *Year’s Best Hardcore Horror: Volume 2*

3. Matt Shaw has faced recent controversy for dedicating a book in which a woman is tortured to an online female user who gave a book authored by him a negative review. This book came after a less-than-professional (and frankly sexist) series of tweets aimed at the reviewer. Unfortunately, this happened in the midst of my project. It felt strange to leave this unaddressed and I want to make it clear that I do not condone his actions in the slightest

Works Cited

Bazterrica, Agustina. *Tender Is the Flesh*. Translated by Sarah Moses, Scribner, 2020.

Carroll, Noël E. *The Philosophy of Horror*. Routledge, 1990.

Chandler, Randy, and Cheryl Mullenax, editors. *Year's Best Hardcore Horror*. Vol. 2, Red Room Press, 2017.

Clute, John. *Stay*. Gollancz, 2016.

Collins, Michael J. "The Body of the Work of the Body: Physio-Textuality in Contemporary Horror." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1993, pp. 28–35. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43308161.

Eldridge, David. "The Generic American Psycho." *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 42, no. 1, Apr. 2008, pp. 19–33. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40464237.

Hartmann, Sadie. "Splatterpunk for Dummies, Or Defining the Genre For Those Who Love Horror Fiction." *Fangoria*, 13 Jan. 2021, www.fangoria.com/original/splatterpunk-for-dummies-or-defining-the-genre-for-those-who-love-horror-fiction/.

Ito, Junji. "Greased." *Shiver: Junji Ito Selected Stories*, translated by Jocelyne Allen, Viz Media, San Francisco, CA, 2022, pp. 351–385.

Ketchum, Jack. *Off Season*. 47North, 1980.

Koja, Kathe. *The Cipher*. Dell Abyss, 1991.

Kolesnik, Samantha. *Waif*. Grindhouse Press, 2021.

Ligotti, Thomas. *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*. Viking Press, 2010.

Milburn, Colin. "Nano/Splatter: Disintegrating the Postbiological Body." *New Literary History*, vol. 36, no. 2, spring 2005, pp. 283–311. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20057893.

Raglin, Eric, editor. *Antifa Splatterpunk*. Cursed Morsels Press, 2021.

Senior, W A. "Etymological Whimsy." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1997, pp. 279–280. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43308300.

Shaw, Matt. *Sick Bastards*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017.

Steven, Mark. *Splatter Capital*. Repeater Books, 2017.

Thompson, Tamika. "Four Questions with Wrath James White." *Tamika Thompson*, 2023, Accessed 23 Sept. 2023.

Wiley, Jeanne L. "The Alchemy of the Horrific Imagination." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 83, no. 3/4, fall/winter 2000, pp. 723–738. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41178990.