

Abstract for “Posthuman Encounters: Desires, Fears, and the Uncanny”

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**The Posthuman in Fungal Gothic Fiction: Aliya Whiteley’s *The Beauty* (2018) and Silvia Moreno-Garcia’s *Mexican Gothic* (2020)**

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In recent years, fungi have become paradigmatic for the wonders, the adaptability, and the resilience of the nonhuman. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing uses the matsutake mushroom to think through the ‘possibility of life in capitalist ruins’; Merlin Sheldrake emphasises the potential of the mushroom world to ‘shape our futures’; and Doug Bierend scrutinises the ‘untapped potential of mushrooms’ to propose a ‘mycotopia’. In literary texts, however, encounters of the human and the fungal worlds and the creation of a fungal posthuman have veered towards the gothic. In this paper, I will analyse the productivity of the fungal gothic in Aliya Whiteley’s *The Beauty* (2018) and Silvia Garcia-Moreno’s *Mexican Gothic* (2020). In both novels, a fungus takes control over the human mind and creates a posthuman form of life, an ‘other’ intelligence (rather than an AI) that is conceived of as threatening in its uncanny otherness. Garcia-Moreno’s symbiosis between fungus and human is dependent on a human host, a human mind because the fungus “held no real thoughts, no real consciousness” (256). The mushroom-creatures in *The Beauty* are more resolutely other, but remain voiceless despite the narrator-protagonist’s attempt to give voice to his own experience of community with a fungal companion. It is, as I will show, the monstrosity of the posthuman fungal other that both texts position as a new iteration of the classic gothic monster.

References:

- Bierend, Doug. *In Search of Mycotopia: Citizen Science, Fungi Fantatics, and the Untapped Potential of Mushrooms*. London, 2021.
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