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Building Silver Bridges: Paranormal Apparitions, Settler Heritage, and Indigenous Erasure in the Ohio River Valley

Paul Edward Montgomery Ramírez

On December 15, 1967, the Silver Bridge, which crossed the Ohio River—connecting Point Pleasant, West Virginia, and Gallipolis, Ohio—catastrophically failed under the weight of rush-hour traffic, causing the death of forty-six people.¹ A tragic and cautionary tale of crumbling infrastructure quickly gained life within other stories in the Upper Ohio River Valley and Appalachia. It was rumored that those people and their families were the victims of supernatural forces. In a small Appalachian town, monsters, aliens, phantoms, curses, and unknown agents converged. To many, the Silver Bridge collapse was connected to a paranormal figure: Mothman.

Today, Mothman is widely known in popular culture as the subject of numerous books, a 2002 film starring Richard Gere, and a figure in the popular *Fallout* video game series. Sightings of the being that became known as Mothman began in 1966, when the November 16 report surrounding two young couples and their encounter with “a man-sized, bird-like creature” at an abandoned TNT site gained national attention.² From its first widely publicized sighting, the entity appeared to many people—some repeatedly. Linda Scarberry (one of the witnesses at the TNT site) and others described Mothman in almost angelic terms: ashen-white wings, muscular, and masculine. It was no “natural” being, and certainly not a misplaced sandhill crane, as early debunkers asserted. While descriptions have varied, the presence of wings

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and red eyes have persisted. Its motivations have been debated, but a largely consistent thread is that Mothman is a figure heralding misfortune. Mothman sightings continued into the next year, amid an explosion in UFO sightings and encounters with Men in Black. These reports have woven an asset from the paranormal into the fabric of an Estadounidense³ (US) settler heritage.

The garb that such settler heritages wear is made of many strands, fibers, and colors. This article examines the intersections of the settler and the Indigenous in the creation of modern legend-making in the paranormal figures of UFOs, the MIB, and their uniting figure of Mothman. It examines these figures as works of coloniality, and their power as instruments of settler colonization—and perhaps against it as well.

As Europeans arrived in the so-called New World, they brought their oral histories into a landscape that was alien to them and already filled with spirits. As settlers, enslaved people, and Indigenous people came into greater contact, so too did their cultures' spirits. Settler tales about the Hudson Valley into the 1800s featured supernatural figures reflective of beings known to regional Indigenous peoples, including storm-bringing women, "gnomes," and water monsters.⁴ Powerful Indigenous beings have been translated through the filters of settler folklore to the point of becoming stock monsters.⁵ The paranormal is "an integral part of what it means to be a modern American."⁶ The negation and retranslation of culture(s) is important to the ongoing force of settler colonization. Journalist and ufologist John Keel stated that "Mothman is now a part of history . . . In time it will become a folk legend."⁷ The study of unknown creatures, cryptozoology, has frequently (but not universally) drawn elements of Indigenous cultures into its search to "discover" the realities of cryptids like Mothman.⁸ These monster hunts and legend-making can be understood through the instruments of decolonial and settler colonial studies.

Two concepts are of particular assistance in the explorations this article undertakes: first, the logic of elimination Patrick Wolfe describes, wherein the Indigenous is destroyed only to be replaced.⁹ This destruction is not necessarily violent or physical, but renders those with Indigenous title invisible and dispossessed of land. As Philip Deloria said of the Estadounidense national project, "White Americans needed either to destroy Indians or to assimilate them into a white American world."¹⁰ This alignment of the logic of elimination is a crucial facet of the conceptualization of legend-making and heritage-weaving within this essay. It also explores the settler moves to innocence—that is, "attempt[s] to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity."¹¹ This article focuses on two of the six moves outlined by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang: "settler adoption fantasies" and "colonial equivocation." These moves work to appropriate Indigenous pain, practices, and narratives for the settler, such that Indigenous people "cede" their title and settlers cease to be colonizers.¹² Weaving a paranormal heritage in the Ohio River Valley, whereby "Indian curses," alien lights, and otherworldly encounters are linked to the central figure of Mothman, can be examined as a settler colonial force.

Paranormal heritage should be understood as a body of cultural heritage under the umbrella of those intangible/tangible cultural assets that are engaged in the industry of thanatourism (visiting sites primarily associated with death and disaster) and dark heritage.¹³ Unlike other immediately "dark" tourisms—like visiting concentration

camps—paranormal heritage encompasses occult and supernatural topics, like ghost tours.¹⁴ From this perspective, paranormal heritages can be yoked with seemingly “lighter” heritages than those of—for example—massacre sites, serving as a useful model for considering the potential darknesses they carry in the weaving of their narratives. Reexamining this “darkness” presents, as this article demonstrates, a path to viewing aspects of settler colonialism that have heretofore been underexplored.

The construction of narratives founded in the paranormal in the United States has been the subject of interdisciplinary inquiry.¹⁵ Ethnographic and anthropological considerations of monstrous figures and the paranormal have found recent purchase.¹⁶ Native Americans, racism, and colonization have been approached within such research, with hauntings holding scholarly attention in reference to Indigenous people and the paranormal.¹⁷ Darryl Caterine has highlighted settler anxieties and guilt in the construction of “Indian curses,” hauntings, and spiritualism.¹⁸ Likewise, Paul Manning drew upon colonized worlds and landscapes in the creation of hauntings and tales thereof in the absence of “ruins,”¹⁹ and the “Indian burial ground” has found analysis in scholarship on horror literature and cinema.²⁰ More limited, however, are analyses from the perspectives of Indigenous and decolonizing research, such as Eve Tuck and C. Ree’s autoethnographic work concerning Indigenous perspectives on haunting narratives and in considerations of Indigenous representations and pushback within the horror genre.²¹ It is in the spirit of Indigenous responses that this work finds a place.

This writing springs from decolonial theory popularized by Latin American scholars,²² and from within settler colonial studies and Indigenous scholarship and methods.²³ To approach the construction of the paranormal—or, more appropriately, a paranormal settler heritage, this article analyzes the histories, narratives, and research (cryptozoological and otherwise) surrounding the supernatural in and around the region through these theoretical lenses. It draws heritage, tourism, Indigenous, and settler colonial studies together toward a novel approach to understanding cryptozoology and attachments to the paranormal. In doing so, these contested heritages can be reimagined and rewoven to foreground decolonial options for the future. Tempting as it may be to organize this work into “case file”—style writings on the paranormal, such as Colin Dickey and B. J. Hollars (with a chapter on Mothman), this article instead takes a woven-narrative approach to trace numerous strands of the paranormal, with Mothman as its ominous figure, that exist in the Upper Ohio Valley.²⁴ It takes many strands to weave, warp and weft, and it is a continuing process. The paranormal yarns that merge to animate the mat of power (mats made for the elite to sit upon, rather than baskets to carry the goods of a society with) come in the form of the creation of “Indian curses” tied to historic events, the appropriation of Indigenous landscapes and intangible heritages, and the insertion of modernized narratives of supernatural entities.²⁵ In these yarns, the figure of Mothman is emblematic of a specific form of paranormal heritage that—in its creation—engages in the logic of elimination through settler adoption fantasies that “alleviate the anxiety of settler ‘unbelonging.’”²⁶ In this process, that which is Indigenous is eliminated or seized and combined with supernatural imports from Europe to produce a new settler heritage. To appreciate the weaving process, the strands that make this paranormal settler heritage must be given focus before considering the whole.

CURSED INHERITANCES

The first strand in the heritage-weaving of Mothman can be found in an “Indian curse” at the foundation of the United States. In 1763 a borderline in the Appalachian Mountains was established by royal proclamation, creating the Indian Reserve, including the “Ohio Country,” closed to settlers without treaty rights and royal approval, which relocated control of the settlement from colonial agencies to royal hands.²⁷ This border was moved to the Ohio River with the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix, signed by representatives of the Haudenosaunee and Great Britain—to the ire of the Lenape and Shawnee attendees who were prevented from playing a role in the negotiations and left the document ceding their lands unsigned.²⁸ Rather than bring peace, this treaty only brought greater conflict, with the Ohio River becoming a colonial barrier. Like the 1763 Proclamation Line, the Treaty of Fort Stanwix was ignored by settlers who saw the treaties and restrictions as one of the overreaches that directly caused the American War of Independence—never mind that several “founding fathers” sought wealth as land speculators in the reserve.²⁹ On April 30, 1774, Virginians crossed the Ohio River and massacred a settlement of Mingos, including the wife, son, brother, and pregnant sister of the famed orator Logan.³⁰ War followed.

Indigenous people initiated punitive raids, led by Logan and the Shawnee leader Hokolesqua (translated to “Cornstalk”), which spurred an invasion by militia galvanized by the governor of Virginia: John Murray, the Fourth Earl of Dunmore. Lord Dunmore’s War lasted throughout much of 1774. After months of diplomatic machinations to isolate the confederation, and a military loss at Point Pleasant on October 10, the Shawnee were forced to cede their lands south of the Ohio River. The speech “Logan’s Lament” became famous; Thomas Jefferson, in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), considered it to be superior to any oration found in Europe. For a time, it was required reading in US schools. “Logan’s Lament” spoke of his friendship with settlers and recognition that “there runs not a drop of my blood in the veins of any living creature. This called on me for revenge. I have sought it: I have killed many: I have fully glutted my vengeance . . . Who is there to mourn for Logan? Not one.”³¹ This war, though obscure today, greatly affected the formation of the settler state.

Throughout Lord Dunmore’s War, contempt for royal authority was evident, with one militiaman remarking, “When without a king, one doeth according to the freedom of his own will.”³² At the conclusion of the conflict, the soldiers penned the Fort Gower Resolves, declaring that “we resolve that we will exert every Power within us for the Defence of American Liberty, and for the Support of her just Rights and Privileges.”³³ Before the battles of Concord and Lexington ignited the American War of Independence, and ahead of the Declaration of Independence, the militia who terrorized and stripped land from Indigenous people declared intentions to shed blood for Estadounidense “liberty.” It is here that an “Indian curse” has been woven into paranormal settler heritage in the Upper Ohio Valley.

CORNSTALK'S CURSE

While “Logan’s Lament” has held a place in the minds of settlers, another speech by an Indigenous leader is important to this work. Hokolessqua and his isolated force of 300 were ultimately defeated by a force of Shemanese³⁴ over three times larger at Point Pleasant. He gave a speech³⁵ and signed a treaty to end the war out of concern for his people. Over the next few years, Hokolessqua conducted diplomacy with not only Shawnee factions but with the British forces at Detroit and the rebels at Fort Pitt. He had become a voice of neutrality. In 1776, he reached out to the Continental Congress in friendship, while at the same time presenting them a list of grievances against the settlers. And yet Hokolessqua met a grim fate in the same location that he had been defeated by the Shemanese. To many, this and not his diplomacy would be his legacy.

Accounts vary, but in the autumn of 1777, under the banner of diplomacy, Hokolessqua arrived at Fort Randolph in Point Pleasant. Accounts note that four Indigenous men were held captive, including Hokolessqua’s son, Elinipsico,³⁶ while some name another in the party as a Lenape leader named Red Hawk. They were all taken hostage upon arrival. Whether his intention was to warn the settlers about possible hostilities with the Shawnee or to negotiate for the captives’ release, Hokolessqua’s diplomacy was ill-starred. On November 10, a man stationed at the fort was killed by an unknown Indigenous person. Hokolessqua and the other Shawnees were murdered in “revenge.” According to legends, the orator spoke one last time before his death:

I was the border man’s friend . . . I never warred with you, but only to protect our wigwams and lands . . . I came to the fort as your friend and you murdered me. You have murdered by my side, my young son . . . For this, may the curse of the Great Spirit rest upon this land. May it be blighted by nature. May it even be blighted in its hopes. May the strength of its peoples be paralyzed by the stain of our blood.³⁷

With his death, the settlers lost a powerful figure of restraint in Indigenous communities. And in those alleged words, the story of “Cornstalk’s Curse” was born.

Numerous events and tragedies befell Point Pleasant and the surrounding area; each used as evidence of this “Cornstalk Curse.” The town itself was nearly destroyed in a fire in the 1880s, was twice devastated by flooding in the first half of the 1900s, and a train containing hazardous material derailed, contaminating the town’s water supply.³⁸ The collapse of the Silver Bridge was viewed as an extension of the curse. Cornstalk’s Curse has since been subsumed into the heritage-weaving of Mothman.

CONJURING CURSES

When considering Indigenous peoples, settler narratives often oscillate between imagery of tragedy and threat. Logan’s Lament, if it was ever spoken by him, is one of numerous speeches that Indigenous leaders have allegedly given to mourn their people’s future. They are often among the only words spoken by named Natives that settlers know. Frequently, Indigenous people are not given identity in speech and action: their words reduced to an “Indian proverb” or some nameless phantom. Names

of individuals and nations considered too alien to settlers, or those never asked, may be retranslated or foregone. Clarity of identity is not truly the desire and remaining nameless provides ambiguity enough to not consider deeply histories, realities, and diversities. Amorphous, distant “Indians” help to create narratives that are historically shallow and highly adaptable to changing settler needs. A nameless “Indian” can be retranslated into any landscape, time, and circumstance. And in such ways, settlers can both appropriate Indigenous pain (and move to innocence) while positioning the people as dangerous. Tragedy meets horror in settler narratives of Native curses.

In settler narratives, Indigenous people often channel their lamentations in powerful and supernatural ways, and many figures are remembered for placing curses upon settlers rather than their actual deeds. For example, the Curse of Tippecanoe was allegedly placed upon William Henry Harrison by the Shawnee prophet, Tenskwatawa, for his destruction of the capital of Tecumseh’s Confederacy. This curse has been credited for the mid-term death of every US president who won election in the twenty-year cycle beginning in 1840 with Harrison until being seemingly “broken” by Ronald Reagan’s 1981 assassination attempt survival.³⁹ And yet this curse was first noted in 1931, and first attributed to the prophet in the 1980 election cycle.⁴⁰ Among the earliest appearances of the “Indian Curse,” attributed to the Wampanoag sachem, Metacom, originates from the 1829 play *Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags* more than 150 years after his death.⁴¹ The Curse of Kaskaskia (Illinois) is dated to a newspaper article from 1882, one year after the curse was blamed for a flood. The article stated that the curse’s invoker was a seventeenth century priest,⁴² while in later tellings of this legend it is an Indigenous man.⁴³ This veneer added to the story is a shallow and hollow image of a horrific—and tragic—“Indian” used to suit storyteller and settler audiences. Indigenous people as the source of curses is a later creation of the settler state, not of early colonial origins nor part of First Nations cultures.

English settlers considered Indigenous peoples to be “weake witches,” and Indigenous peoples considered themselves to be the victims of curses befalling their societies.⁴⁴ In the second half of the 1700s, Oneida people voiced concern to the missionary, Samuel Kirkland, that the First Nations were being punished and could not resist the white settlers and prosper “until such a time as this curse or punishment should be removed.”⁴⁵ This, however, must be considered within the frameworks and external pressures of colonization. The devastating and traumatic impacts of epidemics upon Indigenous societies have been staggering. Prophetic Nativist movements emerged throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to explain the genocides that settler colonialism brought. Prophets sought ways to return to a state where their people were not cursed with diseases, the loss of land and food, colonial violence, and the resulting societal woes that ravaged communities. In doing so, many adopted colonial elements, like the Christian concept of sin and modernity’s racial categorizations of people.⁴⁶ Indigenous people were cursed simply for being “Indians” and were incapable of bringing curses to white settlers. But settler tales of curses were weapons to be wielded against the Indigenous other.

THE INDIAN, THE MONSTROUS OTHER

Within settler worldviews, curses were perceived as a divine judgment for sins (beliefs that filtered into nativist movements) but also a demonic act. Christian values dictated the reality of these curses, and the “Indian” played a role in this. Puritan narratives featured bestial Indians, “ravenous beasts” and a “company of hellhounds,”⁴⁷ emerging from dark forests to abduct Christians. The trope of violent, animalistic Indians continued in later pioneer stories. In the Ohio River Valley, the heroic white figures of these tales are excused for their inhuman actions, like defying peace treaties or digging up and scalping the corpses of Indigenous people to satiate their murderous desires. These misdeeds are largely excused because of the “savagery” that these men were said to have encountered. Images of bestial savages are further distilled into those of simply considering Indians animals: Sam Brady with his “pet Indian,” the Wetzel brothers and their butchering of people as thoughtlessly as bullocks, and Andrew Poe’s quote “no man ever took more satisfaction in hunting deer, bear, wolves and buffalo than I have, but the greatest enjoyment I ever took was in hunting Indians.”⁴⁸

The imagined threat of the lurking Native eager to destroy civilization found its way into the horror literature that emerged after the American War of Independence. The American gothic novel *Edgar Huntly* (1799) cast Native Americans as its monstrous villains, capable only of violent savagery, and led by an unseen Queen Mab (named after a fairy queen).⁴⁹ Of *Edgar Huntly* and later horror literature, Joe Nazare noted that “the positing of the Native American as brooding bogeyman and howling, inarticulate fiend of the wilderness clearly served as a pretext and justification for cultural domination.”⁵⁰ These stories utilized religious Puritanical imagery in the creation of a nationalistic propaganda that cast that Native as the anti-Christian and savage adversary in violent opposition to the Christian and civilized United States.⁵¹ Ultimately, stories and novels in the 1800s featuring Indigenous people “fed the public taste with increasingly violent images of the Indian as thoughtless savage killer and destroyer of civilized institutions.”⁵² The Estadounidense national project, in its enactment of the logic of elimination, requires Native monsters and ghosts to be haunted by. As Bergland wrote, “Although they threaten the American national project, they also nationalize the imagination. Ghosts are a sign of ‘successful’ appropriation of the American spirit.”⁵³ Before terminologies like settler moves to innocence emerged, Indigenous scholars long vocalized the state wherein images of the Indigenous hold both a nostalgic (lionized in the past) and threatening position within Estadounidense psyche, one that must be appropriated to ensure the dominance of settler society.⁵⁴ Into modern times, “the Indian” as an otherworldly and corrupting being has currency. In 2020, the Pass the Salt Ministries tried to lead a prayer at Great Serpent’s Mound in Ohio to place “anointed stone” in the mound and exorcise it of its demons. Other evangelical Christian groups have destroyed Native American remains and artefacts for similar reasons. Elsewhere in Ohio, Native Americans are blamed for things as banal and disconnected as poor weather at a golf course or the failure of a baseball team to have a winning season.⁵⁵ When in doubt, and for whatever failing, rather than take responsibility the settler can blame “the Indian.” Settler colonization demanded that

the Native be a monster so settlers could treat them inhumanely and monstrously without any shame or negative consequence. They had to be images of horror to be destroyed, yet, for some, that power is supernatural. Indians remain a threat even when—as the logic of elimination demands—they are gone.

COLONIZING INDIGENOUS LANDSCAPES

The figure of Mothman is tied to the Ohio Valley, of which Adlard Welby wrote of his dismay during his exploration of the region: “Instead of a garden, I found a wilderness.”⁵⁶ It is a hostile view, filled with beasts and the unknown. It also voices a mythic landscape needing taming, as the land itself was colonized. Mothman’s position within such a landscape is tied not only within an “Indian curse” but a much larger colonial shroud cast over the region. Decades after Indigenous people in Ohio were forcibly expelled from the Ohio River Valley through the 1830 Indian Removal Act, settlers continued to blame all sorts of strange events on Indians.⁵⁷ It was “the Indian” (even absent ones) and not the pixie to blame for the mysterious death of livestock. And of course, in the Ohio River Valley and elsewhere, the presence of Indigenous societies is etched into the stolen lands. Ploughs dig up Native American artefacts and magnificent earthworks still dot the region, even after being degraded and destroyed by colonizers. Removing Indigenous people is not enough to satisfy the logic of elimination. Indigenous heritages and pasts must be consumed to enable the settler to fulfil the settler adoption fantasy⁵⁸ and become “Native.”

MOUNDBUILDERS

The great earthworks in the Ohio Valley and across the Americas posed a distinct problem for the settler narrative of the savage and roaming Native. Settlers dug into these mounds and found disturbing evidence of Indigenous accomplishment and sophistication. This was irreconcilable to the narratives that fuelled colonization. The myth of the Moundbuilders was created as an answer: an advanced society of people—be they biblical giants, Israelites, or Bronze Age “Nordics”—created the mounds.⁵⁹ These great people were eventually destroyed by the savage invading ancestors of Native Americans. Supported by misinterpretation of Indigenous oral histories, and advanced even in the very first publication by the Smithsonian Institution, by Ephraim Squier,⁶⁰ this myth offered vindication for the genocide of Native Americans. It cast them as the perpetrators of the extermination and displacement of an advanced, and coded white, original society. This also brought with it a nation-building myth of attachment that placed settler as Indigenous, creating a narrative that circumvents the realities of settler alienness to the land.

Archaeology and Indigenous knowledge categorically proved the so-called Moundbuilders were the ancestors of modern Native Americans. Still, the myth endures. Numerous Ohio folktales collected in the late twentieth century refer to the Moundbuilders as not being Native Americans, with one even appealing to the archaeological cultures—“Adena,” “Hopewell,” and “Fort Ancient”—only to deny that these cultures were of Native Americans.⁶¹ The mounds and Moundbuilders form

another strand to the woven fabrics of the paranormal heritage surrounding the region and Mothman. John Keel's influential work on Mothman draws the region's mounds into his narrative. He discussed the Tsalagi oral history⁶² of the "Moon-Eyed People," where a civilized "white" race who could only emerge at night were terrorized and displaced by the Tsalagi ancestors. He posited that, if they had been removed from Tennessee by "fierce" Native Americans, "[d]id they move to West Virginia to escape their tormenters?"⁶³ Drawing upon the "Ancient Astronaut" pseudoarchaeology made famous by Erich von Däniken,⁶⁴ Keel questioned the ability of Indigenous people to construct earthworks without modern technology. Keel needed the region to be devoid of an Indigenous past. And so, he appealed to the authority of archaeology:

Modern anthropologists have worked out maps of the Indian occupancy of pre-Columbian America . . . There is only one spot on the map labeled "Uninhabited": West Virginia . . . There are strange ancient ruins in the state, circular stone monuments which prove that someone had settled the region once. Since the Indians didn't build such monuments . . . we only have mystery.⁶⁵

In reality there is an archaeological record of human occupation extending for thousands of years.⁶⁶ But, in pursuit of a mysterious figure (Mothman) in an equally mysterious landscape, the appeal of anti-Indigenous pseudoarchaeology was all too strong. Even the Moon-Eyed People come from a dubious background. This oral history of a "white," nocturnal people before the Tsalagi arrival might be influenced by settler stories of Moundbuilders or of medieval Welsh princes journeying to the Americas a thousand years before Columbus' arrival.

Still, the Moon-Eyed People have currency. Barbara Mann considered the Moon-Eyed People to be the so-called Adenas with whom the Tsalagi culturally mixed and became the Moundbuilders.⁶⁷ These mythic figures feature in the interpretation boards at state parks and in museum displays or rock art and statuary. It is perhaps their contested nature (and alien appearance) that appeal to those looking for a mystery. Colonial myths of Moundbuilders and Moon-Eyed People have fuelled settler imagination since they first fell on white ears. Their invocation of "hidden truths" intersects with weaving stories of paranormal pasts, events, and beings. A paranormal researcher does not need to know archaeological facts when controversy and esoterica of pseudoarchaeology can meet their needs.

These colonial myths work to strip Indigenous people from their lands and to cast them both monstrous and vanishing others. But the processes of settler colonization in the weaving of settler heritages extend further. Settler narratives demand monsters, and if the "Indian" is to be extinct, how could it serve beyond being a spirit or curse? For an enduring settler heritage, living monsters must also be conjured. And in here, we approach another strand leading to our Mothman and a paranormal settler heritage.

THE SETTLER BESTIARY AND MOTHMAN

Beings like Mothman are increasingly well-known throughout the United States and internationally, and many modern narratives surrounding these creatures are

framed—as with the Moundbuilders—within an allegedly scientific approach to the world, steeped in colonial language. To understand the monsters conjured, we must also examine the research that makes them “real.” To Charles Fort, a founding figure in the research of paranormal happenings through scientific approaches, the fulfilment of manifest destiny is the catalyst to curiosity in the paranormal, stating that “[t]he young man is no longer urged . . . to go westward . . . [but] he will, or must, go somewhere . . . [to] an extra-geography.”⁶⁸ Cryptozoologists use sightings and (sometimes) folklore in their exploration for species of animals previously unknown to science, called cryptids. They claim to be “reliving a time two centuries ago when all of zoology was in an age of discovery. This field preserves the spirit of those days.”⁶⁹ Many cast themselves as Indiana Jones-like figures, a counterpoint to the lab-coat-wearing scientist.⁷⁰ Their research often evokes the image of “frontier”—and by extension, *terra nullius*—that is firmly rooted in the imagination of the United States⁷¹ and settler colonialism.

Microscopic life or isolated tree frogs are not the creatures these cryptozoologists pursue. Bernard Heuvelmans, originator of the term *cryptozoology*, stressed that an animal cannot be a cryptid unless it is “truly singular, unexpected, paradoxical, striking, emotionally upsetting, and thus capable of mythification.”⁷² It is this “mythification” aspect that brings people to approach Indigenous narratives as though they are exploring a frontier in an “age of discovery.” Beings laden with spiritual significance to Indigenous peoples—Sasquatch, Thunderbird, the Underwater Panther—have all entered the “scientific” gaze of cryptozoology, where complex entities can be reimagined as remnants of ancient pasts, laid measurable if only proof could be captured. Thunderbird becomes an extant pterosaur; Sasquatch becomes a remnant great ape.⁷³ Indigenous people are not mere bystanders in these forms of narrative-making, having their own stories and understandings of cryptids and extraterrestrial entities.⁷⁴ But to other settler cryptozoologists, Indigenous beliefs are not seen as useful sources of evidence to a skeptical mind.⁷⁵ In either case, Indigenous cultural and spiritual belief can be ignored or explained away as part of the scientifically acceptable world. And as such, these cultural elements may be appropriated in the weaving of settler stories of beasts—no longer Indians—lurking in the wilderness.

Entities from cultures across the continent become flattened in the gaze of cryptozoology, as Indigenous people themselves become tropes and stereotyped into one universal image by settler imaginings. Cryptozoologist Mark Hall connected numerous Indigenous figures to a cryptid that he called Bighoot (for its owl-like qualities). Among these include the malevolent Kanontsistóntie’s (“Flying Head”) of Haudenosaunee and Wyandot traditions.⁷⁶ Beings from peoples hundreds of miles away become swept up into the narrative of a Bighoot: Yat’siminoli “Man-Owl”; Ndee “Big Owl”; Puebloan “Owl Boy.”⁷⁷ Cryptidification (if that is a word) of Indigenous beings feed into the flattening of diverse cultures and worldviews that dominant society inflicts on those forced into the margins. It is an erasure of cultural complexities and the compulsion to make the spiritual biological, effectively dismissing the understandings of traditional knowledge holders. It does so through a deeply colonial “scientific” and universalizing lens, one that appropriates the Indigenous while erasing it and its complexities. And in this

colonization of Indigenous worldviews—and by disregarding contemporary Indigenous understandings of “paranormal” beings—cryptids such as Bighoot and Mothman exist.

MOTHPMAN

During the first half of the twentieth century, West Virginia was marked by encounters with creatures called Birdmen, whom Hall associated with Bighoot. The creature was known to pursue drivers along the Ohio River.⁷⁸ In 1966, the area around Point Pleasant “was not only haunted by strange aerial lights, the home of the witnesses were plagued with poltergeists and other supernatural phenomena . . . Some people were getting calls from mysterious strangers speaking a cryptic language.”⁷⁹ The scope of events which fall within this narrative and timeline of Mothman (even when stripping away the “Indian” elements) are considerable. What began as a sighting at an abandoned World War II munitions storage facility (the TNT site, now officially called Clifton F. McClintic Wildlife Management Area) by two young couples has accumulated paranormal narratives strands, including an account from that same day at a cemetery around fifty miles southeast (as the Mothman flies) of Point Pleasant.⁸⁰ It is a living, expanding story.

Paranormal sightings along the Ohio River have continued into recent times: in 2004, a Point Pleasant couple spotted a large, flying “manta ray” while out for a drive along the river.⁸¹ Many of these paranormal occurrences, hauntings, and sightings have found their way into the weaving of the heritage of the winged and red-eyed Mothman. Since the collapse of the Silver Bridge that followed months of sightings of Mothman and other paranormal occurrences, it has been associated with looming catastrophe. After the 2007 Bridge 9340 collapse in Minnesota, numerous people claimed to have witnessed Mothman in the area. Beyond Point Pleasant, this harbinger of disaster has been attached to well-known events, like the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. However, this story cannot be traced prior to 2002, when the film *The Mothman Prophecies* was released. That this figure would find faked attachments around the globe speaks to its narrative potency.

This connection of Mothman to disaster entangles it with the “Indian curse” settler myth. As with curses such as Kaskaskia, recasting Indigenous people into settler narratives is not uncommon. The “Cornstalk Curse” predates the events surrounding Mothman and the Silver Bridge collapse. Despite being part of a settler contrivance, it provides a façade of antiquity and authenticity to the mythmaking of Mothman. It authenticates the sightings and ties the narrative to a series of events throughout time while modernizing the supernatural vengeance by a betrayed Shawnee orator. Some maintain that Hokolessqua’s curse was intended to last 200 years.⁸² This might appear to provide a convincing, Mothman-shaped punctuation mark, but what then of the last decade of the curse? This is one of many errors that John Keel fell into with mistiming the Battle of Point Pleasant and Hokolessqua’s death into the 1760s.

Ties to an “Indian Curse” give Mothman more options to exist in the heritage-weaving. Taking this approach to the Mothman legend, the cryptid becomes spiritually charged. It can be imagined as a monster (an evil “owl”) brought forth to

enact Hokolessqua's revenge, a source of settler horror. It could be cast as the "totem spirit" of the Lenape leader, Red Hawk, who—in some retellings—was murdered alongside Hokolessqua.⁸³ In this understanding, "Totem-Mothman" is an agent working against the "curse," Red Hawk's spirit wishing to end generational vengeance. A final interpretation considers the Mothman to be Thunderbird, part of a divine warning.⁸⁴

Mothman can be an entity of settler horror, playing into the anxieties of colonization, betrayal, and genocide. It can also serve as a supernatural proxy for the violent and destructive entity that "the Indian" has held in settler heritage narratives—particularly to those who are disinclined to feel guilt over settler colonization. The other two aspects conjure Indigenous spirits at the behest of settlers. One is more direct: an Indigenous spirit (person) working against another to shield the people of Point Pleasant from meeting generational consequence; it is settler appeasement played out in the afterlife. In Mothman-as-Thunderbird, a divine being adopts settlers and becomes their guardian. The people who directly benefit from the theft of Indigenous land and the massacre of countless Indigenous people are absolved of the guilt of colonization and given divine protection by the spirits venerated by the very people who exist despite colonial violence. While Indigenous people suffer intergenerational trauma and the consequences of settler colonization, the "Totem-Mothman" as the "Good Indian" and "Mothman-as-Thunderbird" is nothing short of the Great Spirit's indigenization of settlers, allowing them to continue their lives as the logic of elimination demands.

IMPORTING OTHERWORLDERS

The Mothman narrative's appropriation of the Indigenous and heritage-weaving is further complicated with otherworldly strands. Indeed, the story of Mothman is incomplete without the arrival of other paranormal figures and happenings. From October 1966, dazzling lights were reported to fly over the river at around 8:00 P.M. each night, Point Pleasant along its path.⁸⁵ Phantom light stories in the area extend back some time and are attached to Indigenous tradition in a story told by Joe Copperwing—the so-called Last Shawnee in Ohio—who described these will-o-the-wisps as curious stars who become stuck on earth and receive news of the world from their children, the fireflies.⁸⁶ Sightings of flying entities in the region are still reported.⁸⁷

UFO sightings are inseparable from the Mothman narrative, but alien abductions (which should be noted for their similarity to Indian captivity narratives popularized by Puritan settlers)⁸⁸ are largely absent. Instead, otherworldly encounters take place in the spaces most familiar to their witnesses. Mysterious people, noted for their dark suits, were reported to have arrived in and around Point Pleasant during the UFO and Mothman sightings: Men in Black (MIB). These figures first entered into paranormal narratives in 1952, when ufologist Albert Bender was paid a visit at his residence by suited men who cowed his pursuit of further research for several years.⁸⁹ While always associated with UFOs, the changing identities of the MIB have spoken to contemporary anxieties and social input: from government agents to spies to alien beings. MIB encounters with Indigenous people likewise speak to anxieties, environmental and

colonial. Consideration of alien invaders “just waiting to take away from the white man what he took from us”⁹⁰ enter these narrations, but it is worth mentioning that reports by Indigenous contactees typically take the same shapes as settler UFO narratives.

The ethnic appearance of MIB has some variation but is typically bound to an otherness. When not noted for their uncanny qualities (such as sickly skin or robotic voices), MIB contactees often define them in exoticized ways, with many being described as “Oriental” or “Indians” (that is, Native American). Contactees in John Keel’s research often noted MIB as having stereotypical features of Indigenous people: “[h]igh cheekbones and very red faces.”⁹¹ In some stories, the MIB themselves identify as Native American, referring to the return of their land, or point people toward Indigenous history in their interactions.⁹² To reports of MIB encounters, otherness/alienness is important, be that “Oriental,” “Indian,” or mechanical. But their appearance is only one facet to the strangeness attributed to these nocturnal visitors.

One MIB account described a lone “Indian” woman visitor. During this visit she asked for salt so she could take a pill; upon eating a handful of it she promptly left. Days later she returned to the same house, requested more salt, and then, after being gifted it, offered the occupant a warning to keep her windows locked that night.⁹³ This account has similarities to a fairy story from Scotland. While the relationship of salt and fairies is typically one of aversion, in this story a fairy woman visited a farmstead and requested salt over the span of several days.⁹⁴ Other MIB stories tell of equally strange or seemingly mundane requests. Many ask for glasses of water which they are not seen drinking from, or cackling and abruptly vanishing into the night after their request for a pen was met.⁹⁵ Ufologists have observed the fey quality of these encounters, calling them “[t]he old fairy trick, taken up from the Middle Ages and dusted off.”⁹⁶ Indeed, MIB are known for their deceptive nature and odd behavior, their spoiling of milk, as well as exhibiting occasional violence and habitual stalking of children.⁹⁷ Following the eruption of the modern Satanic Panic with the 1980 publication of the now discredited *Michelle Remembers*, ufologist Sidney Jansma stated that “the coldness of UFO-nauts, their sulfuric stench, and their lying also testify to their Hellish origin”;⁹⁸ and, earlier, Keel connected demonic imagery and poltergeist activity to the MIB.⁹⁹ It is, of course, worth reminding readers that, in many instances, the “Fairy” and the “Devil” have significant overlap, with fairies being proclaimed demons by more conservative forms of Protestantism, among them the Puritans.¹⁰⁰ These perceptions by ufologists are, then, not exclusive but supportive. The matter remains, the MIB are reimagined otherworld beings from European narratives, transported across the Atlantic into modern times.

Fey-like “Little People” feature across numerous Indigenous cultures, their narratives being adopted into English settler conceptions of Otherworlders (and vice versa).¹⁰¹ While the Little People feature within Indigenous cultures, it is important to recognize the colonial elements of fairy origins within European settler worldview. The eleventh-century work *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*The Book of Invasions*) describes successive waves of conquest of what is now Ireland. A work of Christian pseudohistorical nation-making propaganda, features dispossessed Irish deities as the Otherworldly fairies. After an exodus from Egypt, the *gairthear Mílidh Easpáinne* (Milesians) became

the rulers of Ireland by invading the island and sending the Tuatha Dé Danann in defeat into the mounds that dot the landscape. Coming to rule the Otherworld, they became Aos Sí (People of the Mounds). Monks reduced the pre-Christian Irish deities to a supernatural people displaced by a superior, colonizing foe, but even in defeat the Aos Sí hold a strong and fearsome position in Irish (and Scottish) folklore. The cultural storybook of these Irish/Scottish ancestors of Appalachian settlers is filled with fairies. In a landscape dotted with mounds and fears of those who live outside of “civilization” (read as Native Americans), it was not difficult to reimagine such fairies in the Ohio River Valley.

At Point Pleasant, MIB not only made strange requests but showed great interest in the local children. In the beginning, these suited men claimed to be census takers, their questions focused on the presence of children at the visited homes. These figures frequently visited those who reported seeing Mothman; Linda Scarberry was one such target—or, rather, her infant daughter. In an interview, she stated that the MIB actively sought to abduct young children under the age of six—including her infant daughter. One night, she recalled, they entered her baby’s room but immediately left upon seeing a metal cross Scarberry had placed above the crib.¹⁰² Crosses and cold iron are common forms of supernatural repellent to otherworldly beings.

Ufologists are told to pay attention to seemingly outlandish stories told by witnesses, particularly those where they “dream” of otherworldly people (“little men”) standing near the cribs of their babies.¹⁰³ This interest that MIB frequently show in children is found in Otherworlder (fairy/demon) lore. Stories of Otherworlders feature the abduction of people, children included, to take under the mounds, and have common features with the alien abduction—and by extension, Indian captivity—narrative. More directly related to the account of Scarberry and others visited by MIB is the tradition wherein a child is abducted by fairies and replaced with one of their kind, called a changeling. With UFOs and MIB, the Otherworlders found their way into modern settler narratives. They are intrinsically connected to Mothman, and these mystical aliens aid in casting an appropriative shroud across stolen lands while working to indigenize those who benefit from that dispossession.

PROPHECIES FOR MOTHMAN

Mothman has become a well-known figure around the world but is of particular importance in Point Pleasant, which holds an annual festival celebrating the phenomenon and where a twelve-foot-tall statue was unveiled in 2003. Like other mysterious creatures and phantoms, the story of Mothman has been developed into a heritage tourism product that has overlapped other cultural heritage destinations in the region.¹⁰⁴ What may be viewed as a niche interest is anything but. Researchers who have called accounts of or attachment to paranormal happenings a self-deception neglect “the cultural source of the meaning people in stressful situations so desperately seek.”¹⁰⁵ Belief in the reality of the story is a secondary matter, as with other legendary tales; cultural attachments and meanings supersede provability. And in Point Pleasant, Mothman has proven important, if only to attract tourists. Still, the entity has much

to say. Mothman is many things to many people, and has even been included in a petition to replace Confederate statues across the state of West Virginia with statues of the cryptid—tongue-in-cheek, to be sure, but the entity became an instrument of critique against the hypocrisy of claiming that statues glorifying racism preserve heritage, despite West Virginia forming to remain a part of the Union during the American Civil War.

Author Deborah Dixon stated that the appeal of Mothman “is of singular interest not because of his anomalous character but because his incorporation into systematized bodies of knowledge has become emblematic of how people proceed to live and cope with the notion of uncertainty.”¹⁰⁶ Mothman is a magnetic figure that draws narrative strands into itself, namely those of wider settler heritage. MIB and Cornstalk’s Curse are not a part of its earliest stories but have become inseparable from Mothman over months of sightings and the years of retelling. In this weaving of a paranormal settler heritage in the Ohio River Valley, as elsewhere, the selectivity of Estadounidense culture is “marked by the traces of those cultures and histories which it often functions to repress.”¹⁰⁷ This heritage is particularly insidious because the eyewitnesses, instrumental in its narrative, are often ostracized members of impoverished communities, easily positioned as victims—who can then move toward settler innocence on those grounds.¹⁰⁸ The horror-story of Mothman has interwoven multiple narratives of settler colonization under one mysterious entity.

John Keel and other ufologists¹⁰⁹ have associated Mothman and UFO activity with Native American mounds and the “birdman” cultural imagery of what archaeologists call the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. In the mounds and in reimaginings of the anti-Indigenous Moundbuilders myth forwarded by respected social scientists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, new stories of a mystical and paranormal heritage are woven that strip Indigenous heritage from those brutally removed from their ancestral homes. In the case of Mothman, the mounds are alive with alien beings: analogues of the Aos Sí in many ways. Those who built and now dwell in the mounds are simultaneously Indigenous, otherworldly, and alien. And those who interact with settlers, be they abducting aliens or lurking MIB, reenact the horror that has been found both in the stories of Aos Sí and Indigenous people. In their reenactments, they transplant and remove the Indigenous underpinnings of settler horror to replace the Indigenous entirely.

This article uncovers narrative elements that speak to and fuel settler colonization in the ongoing work of weaving a paranormal heritage of the Ohio River Valley through Mothman. This form, more appropriately understood as a paranormal settler heritage, is indeed a dark heritage that requires more serious attention, for it is not without potential harm and contestation for a new imagining. We must also keep in mind that this paranormal heritage conceives of itself as an alternative to other mainstream heritages, but this aids it to nestle into settler adoption fantasies where “[d]ecolonization is stillborn—rendered irrelevant because decolonization is already completed by the indigenized consciousness of the settler.”¹¹⁰ Paranormal heritage likewise feeds itself from other aspects of coloniality, in narratives framed around the suffering of enslaved peoples.¹¹¹ It is important to remember that “legend is an artifact

of culture,"¹¹² and settler culture is dependent on the elimination of the Indigenous—if not physically then in the settler gaze until only ghosts remain. But the conclusion of this would be to exorcize those phantoms and translate those memories into something else, something that transforms the settler into the native. Only then can the genocide of colonization be complete.

Eve Tuck and C. Ree's reminder: "Decolonization must mean attending to ghosts."¹¹³ The spectres of colonization must be remembered, not expelled nor shrouded in layers of obscuring settler narratives. If the story of Hokolesqua is one of inhumanity and betrayal, it is also one of negotiation within a changing world. We do not need to occupy the truths of his life and death with a curse he never uttered, nor invent stories of shadowy beings to alleviate settler guilt. Mothman lies at many intersections along the waters that served as the border to the United States' first "frontier." And while this figure is linked to narratives of settler colonization, it can be repurposed. Heritage, even dark, is a coproduced work that is constantly being woven and rewoven.¹¹⁴ This paranormal settler heritage shaped by Mothman is no different. As it was used to critique the spectre of racism embodied in Confederate statues, its own power as a harbinger of change can be turned in upon itself to restory Indigenous histories and worlds of survivance against settler colonization.

NOTES

1. The failure was traced to a defect in a single suspension chain's eyebar. The bridge was also improperly maintained while routinely supporting weights it was never intended to bear.
2. "Couples See Man-Sized Bird . . . Creature . . . Something," *Point Pleasant Register* (November 16, 1966). This sighting is not the first: earlier that month a pair of grave diggers in Clendenin—some seventy miles southeast of Point Pleasant—reported a similar being. Meghan Overdeep, "The Terrifying Tale of West Virginia's Legendary Specter: The Mothman," *Southern Living* (October 5, 2020), <https://www.southernliving.com/culture/the-mothman-legend-west-virginia>.
3. As an Indigenous Latino author, I use this term in place of "American" as a demonym for people from the United States of America.
4. Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2005), 32 and 132.
5. Carolyn Podruchny, "Werewolves and Windigos: Narratives of Cannibal Monsters in French-Canadian Voyageur Oral Tradition," *Ethnohistory*, 51, no. 4 (2004), 677–700; Christine Judith Nicholls, "Monster Mash: What Happens When Aboriginal Monsters Are Co-opted into the Mainstream." In *Monster Anthropology*, eds. Yasmine Musharbarsh and Geir Henning Presterudstuen (London, 2020), 89–111.
6. Darryl Caterine, *Haunted Ground: Journeys through Paranormal America* (Santa Barbara, 2011), xix.
7. Donnie Sergent and Jeff Wamsley, *Mothman: The Facts Behind the Legend* (Point Pleasant, West Virginia, 2002), 135. (from Keel's March 15, 1970, letter to Mothman witness Linda Scarberry)
8. Indigenous marks of authenticity are highlighted in cases like the Jersey Devil, lake monsters, and Sasquatch. See Colin Dickey, *The Unidentified: Mythical Monsters, Alien Encounters, and Our Obsession with the Unexplained* (New York, 2020), Chapters 8 and 11.

9. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8.4 (2006), 387–409.
10. Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, 1998), 3–4.
11. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), 3.
12. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 13–17.
13. Duncan Light, "Progress in Dark Tourism and Thanatourism Research: An Uneasy Relationship with Heritage Tourism," *Tourism Management* 61 (2017), 275–301; Suzie Thomas, Vesa-Pekka Herva, Oula Seitsonen, and Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, "Dark Heritage." In *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*, ed. Claire Smith (Cham, 2019), doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51726-1_3197-1.
14. Light, "Progress in Dark Tourism and Thanatourism Research: An Uneasy Relationship with Heritage Tourism."
15. Phillip Stevens, "'New' Legends: Some Perspectives from Anthropology," *Western Folklore* 49, no. 1 (1990), 121–133; Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Hauntings and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, 1997); Richardson, *Possessions*; Deborah Dixon, "A Benevolent and Sceptical Inquiry: Exploring 'Fortean Geographies' with the Mothman," *Cultural Geographies* 14, no. 2 (2007), 189–210; Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination* (Madison, 2010); Jeffery Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago, 2011); W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America: Our Historical Obsessions with the Hideous and the Haunting* (Waco, 2011).
16. Jack Hunter, *Paranthropology: Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal* (Bristol, 2012); Yasmine Musharbarsh and Geir Henning Presterudstuen, *Monster Anthropology: Ethnographic Explorations of Transforming Social Worlds through Monsters* (London, 2019).
17. Renée Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*. (Lebanon, New Hampshire, 2000); Colleen E. Boyd and Coll Thrush, *Phantom Past, Indigenous Presence: Native Ghosts in North American Culture and History* (Lincoln, 2011).
18. Caterine, *Haunted Ground*; Caterine, "Heirs through Fear: Indian Curses, Accursed Indian Lands, and White Christian Sovereignty in America," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 18, no. 1 (2014), 37–57.
19. Paul Manning, "No Ruins, No Ghosts," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 6, no. 1 (2017).
20. Joe Nazare, "The Horror! The Horror? The Appropriation and Reclamation of Native American Mythology," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 11, no. 1 (41) (2000), 24–51.
21. Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting." In *Handbook of Autoethnography*, eds. Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (Walnut Creek, California, 2013), 639–58; Ariel Smith, "This Essay Was Not Built on an Ancient Indian Burial Ground: Horror Aesthetics within Indigenous Cinema as Pushback against Colonial Violence," *Offscreen* 18, no. 8, <https://offscreen.com/view/horror-indigenous-cinema> (2014); Kali Simmons, "'The Environment Is Us': Settler Cartographies of Indigeneity and Blackness in *Prophecy* (1979)," *Science Fiction Film and Television* 14.3 (2021), 315–331.
22. Anibal Quijano, "Colonialidad del Poder, Eurocentrismo y América Latina." In *La Colonialidad del Saber: Eurocentrismo y Ciencias Sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas* [The Coloniality of Knowing: Eurocentrism and Social Sciences. Latin American Perspectives], ed. E. Lander (Buenos Aires, 2000), 2001–246; Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, New Jersey, 2012)
23. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London, 2021); Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Toronto, 2021); Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Halifax, 2008).

24. Colin Dickey, *The Unidentified: Mythical Monsters, Alien Encounters, and Our Obsession with the Unexplained*; B. J. Hollars, *Midwestern Strange: Hunting Monsters, Martians, and the Weird in Flyover Country* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2019).

25. I view the construction of heritage as ongoing processes of weaving, with multiple agents and strands coming together in creation. Whether that construction is to suit the elite—a mat—or any assortment of works that can be tools to help the multiplicities of peoples within societies—a basket, clothing, or blankets—is an important matter of navigation for those within the heritage industry. See Montgomery Ramírez, “What Can We Weave? Authority, Reconstructing, and Negotiating Heritages through Archaeological Open-Air Museums,” *Archaeologies*, 16 no. 1 (2020), 72–98.

26. Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” 15.

27. Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia*. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1999), 3–37.

28. Great Britain determined the Haudenosaunee were the lawful owners of these lands by “right of conquest,” despite the land’s use by numerous nations.

29. Holton, *Forced Founders*, 3–37.

30. Logan, a Cayuga, worked to foster good relations among Virginia settlers, called Assarigoe (“Long Knives”), and the populations of primarily Cayuga and Seneca people driven to Ohio Country by settler violence, called Mingos. Members of the party that committed the Yellow Creek Massacre reported mutilating the bodies of those people they killed, even removing the unborn child from its mother, to be scalped and impaled. The party also abducted Logan’s niece.

31. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (New York, 1954), 63.

32. Eric Hinderaker, “Liberty and Power in the Old Northwest, 1763–1800.” In *The Sixty Years’ War for the Great Lakes, 1754–1814*, eds. David Curtis Skaggs and Larry L. Nelson (East Lansing, Michigan, 2000), 233.

33. Benjamin Ashby, “Fort Gower Resolves,” *Virginia Gazette* (December 22, 1774).

34. This Shawnee word translates roughly to “Long Knives,” and is used as a reference to Virginians, though would later come to be applied more broadly.

35. Of this speech, Colonel Benjamin Wilson wrote, “I have heard the first orators in Virginia, Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee, but never have I heard one whose powers of delivery surpassed those of Cornstalk on that occasion.” Virgil Lewis, *History of the Battle of Point Pleasant* (Charleston, West Virginia: 1909), 108–9.

36. William Henry Foot, “Cornstalk, the Shawnee Chief,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 16, no. 9 (September 1850), 533–40.

37. Chris Rizer, “Mason County Memories: Chief Cornstalk’s Curse,” *Point Pleasant Register* (November 1, 2019).

38. Brent Swancer, “Mysterious Native Curses and the Mothman,” *Mysterious Universe*, <https://mysteriousuniverse.org/2019/01/mysterious-native-curses-and-the-mothman/> (January 21, 2019, accessed May 1, 2021). This is not a full accounting of events “linked” to the Cornstalk Curse, which includes mysterious lightning strikes on the monument to the Battle of Point Pleasant.

39. The curse still holds political clout, emerging again in media considering the health of presidential candidate Joe Biden. Robert S. Pohl, *Urban Legends and Historic Lore of Washington, DC* (Charleston, South Carolina, 2013), 56–59.

40. Timothy Redmond, “The Presidential Curse and the Election of 2020,” *Skeptical Inquirer* 43, no. 6 (2019).

41. Darryl Caterine, “The Haunted Grid: Nature, Electricity, and Indian Spirits in the American Metaphysical Tradition,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 2 (2014), 394.

42. Illinois State Historical Society, “The Legend of the Kaskaskia Curse,” *Journal of the Illinois State History Society* 59, no. 3 (1966), 289–92.

43. Elbert Waller, "Kaskaskia Destroyed by a Curse, a Tradition," *Journal of the Illinois State History Society* 3, no. 4 (January 1911), 67–9.
44. William Simmons, *Spirit of the New England Tribes: Indian History and Folklore, 1620–1984* (London, 1986), 54.
45. David Silverman, "The Curse of God: An Idea and Its Origins among the Indians of New York's Revolutionary Frontier," *William and Mary Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2009), 497.
46. *Ibid.*, 499.
47. Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, ed. Neal Salisbury (Boston, 1970), 70.
48. George Swetnam, *Heroes, Heroines, and Villains: Pioneer Folklore of the Upper Ohio Valley* (Greensburg, Pennsylvania, 1995), 20.
49. Bergland, *The National Uncanny*, 53–4.
50. Joe Nazare, "The Horror! The Horror? The Appropriation and Reclamation of Native American Mythology," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 11, no. 1 (41) (2000), 24–51.
51. Caterine, "Heirs Through Fear," 40.
52. James Ruppert, "Indians in Anglo-American Literature, 1492 to 1990," *Dictionary of Native American Literature*, ed. Andrew Wiget (New York, 1994), 382–94.
53. Bergland, *The National Uncanny*, 19.
54. Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York, 1969); Deloria, *Playing Indian*; Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, Kansas 2004).
55. The "Curse of Leatherlips" is blamed for the frequent bad weather at an Ohio golf course during a major competition, while the Cleveland major league baseball team is allegedly cursed by Joc-O-Sot. Incidentally, typical offerings to appease Joc-O-Sot's curse comes in the form of liquor at his grave.
56. Welby, *A Visit to North America* (London, 1821), 65.
57. Michael Jay Katz, *Buckeye Legends: Folktales and Lore from Ohio* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1994), 158.
58. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 13–17.
59. See Jason Colavito, *The Mound Builder Myth: Fake History and the Hunt for a "Lost White Race"* (Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2020).
60. Ephraim Squier, "Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley," *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge* 1 (1848).
61. Katz, *Buckeye Legends*.
62. First written by Benjamin Smith Barton in *New Views of the Origins of the Tribes and Nations of America* (1798).
63. John Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies* (New York, 2013), 70.
64. Erich von Däniken, *Chariot of the Gods? Unsolved Mysteries of the Past* (New York, 1968)
65. Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies*, 69–70.
66. Douglas MacDonald et al., "Holocene Land-Use, Settlement Patterns, and Lithic Raw Material Use in Central West Virginia," *Archaeology of Eastern North America* 34 (2006), 121–39.
67. Barbara Mann, *Native Americans, Archaeologists, and the Mounds* (New York, 2003), 154–6.
68. Charles Fort, *New Lands* (1921), reprinted in *The Complete Works of Charles Fort* (Mineóla, New York, 1974), 313–4.
69. George Eberhart, *Mysterious Creatures: A Guide to Cryptozoology*, Volume 1 (Santa Barbara, 2002), xxxi.
70. W. Scott Poole, *Monsters in America*, 134–5.
71. Peter Dendle, "Cryptozoology in the Medieval and Modern Worlds," *Folklore* 117, no. 2 (2006), 199.

72. Bernard Heuvelmans, "How Many Animal Species Remain to Be Discovered?" *Cryptozoology* 2 (1983), 5.
73. Robert Muck and Laura Tubelle de González, *Through the Lens of Anthropology: An Introduction to Human Evolution and Culture*, Second Edition (Toronto, 2019), box 2.5.
74. Ardy Sixkiller Clarke, *Encounters with Star People: Untold Stories of American Indians* (San Antonio, 2012); Cailin Murray, "Locating the Wild Man: Rain Forest Enchantments and Settler Colonial Fantasies amid the Ruins of the Anthropocene," *Journal of Historical Sociology* no. 32 (2019), 60–73.
75. Diverse views exist among cryptozoologists, and these people cannot be encompassed as a monolithic group, despite outsider considerations. See Christopher D. Bader, F. Carson Mencken, and Joseph O. Baker, *Paranormal America: Ghost Encounters, UFO Sightings, Bigfoot Hunts, and Other Curiosities in Religion and Culture* (New York, 2011), 129–149.
76. Michael Hall, *Thunderbirds: America's Living Legends of Giant Birds* (New York, 2007), 161–2.
77. Linda Godfrey, *American Monsters: A History of Monster Lore, Legend, and Sightings in America* (New York, 2014), 72.
78. Hall, *Thunderbirds*, 163.
79. Keel, "UFOs, Mothman, and Me," *Fate: True Reports of the Strange and the Unknown* 60, no. 9 (2007), 12.
80. David Sibray, "Did Legendary Mothman First Appear Near Elk River Trail?" *West Virginia Explorer Magazine*, (July 19, 2022), <https://wvexplorer.com/2022/07/19/did-legendary-mothman-first-appear-at-clendenin-cemetery/>.
81. See interviews in Sergeant and Wamsley, *Mothman*.
82. Sergeant and Wamsley, *Mothman*, 5.
83. James Gay Jones, *Haunted Valley and More Folk Tales* (Parsons, West Virginia, 1979).
84. Rizer, "Mason County Memories."
85. Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies*, 63–4.
86. Katz, *Buckeye Legends*, 218.
87. Linda Godfrey, *American Monsters: A History of Monster Lore, Legend, and Sightings in America* (New York, 2014), 229.
88. Michael Sturma, "Aliens and Indians: A Comparison of Abduction and Captivity Narratives," *Journal of Popular Culture* 36, no. 2 (2003), 318–34; Catherine, "The Haunted Grid," 373.
89. Peter Rosjcewecz, "The 'Men in Black' Experience and Tradition: Analogues with the Traditional Devil Hypothesis," *Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 396 (1987), 148–60.
90. Sixkiller Clark, *Encounters with Star People*, 77.
91. Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies*, 227.
92. Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies*, 227, 229–31, and 247.
93. Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies*, 257.
94. John Kruze, "Fairies and Salt," *British Fairies*, <https://britishfairies.wordpress.com/2020/11/22/fairies-and-salt/> (2020) (accessed 1 May 2022).
95. MIB stories involving a gifted pen happened both in Point Pleasant to journalist Mary Hyre and in Utah to coyote trapper Robert McCallister. Nick Redfern, *The Real Men in Black: Evidence, Famous Cases, and True Stories of These Mysterious Men and their Connection to UFO Phenomena* (Newburyport, Massachusetts, 2011), 183.
96. Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies*, 105–8.
97. Rosjcewecz, "The 'Men in Black' Experience and Tradition," 151; Redfern, *The Real Men in Black*, Chapter 16.
98. Rosjcewecz, "The 'Men in Black' Experience and Tradition," 157.

99. Keel, *Why UFOs? Operation Trojan Horse* (New York 1970), 255.
100. Katharine Briggs, *A Dictionary of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies, and other Supernatural Creatures* (Bungay, 1977), 320.
101. Similar Otherworlders may be found in cultures on every continent. Among Native Americans, they are complicated figures, with histories that intermixed with European and African narratives. See Simmons, *Spirit of the New England Tribes*, 235–8.
102. Sergent and Wamsley, *Mothman*, 29–30.
103. Dixon, “A Benevolent and Sceptical Inquiry,” 200.
104. Robert Kruse II, “Point Pleasant, West Virginia: Making a Tourism Landscape in an Appalachian Town,” *Southeastern Geographer* 55, no. 3 (2015), 313–37.
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107. Gesa Mackenthun, “Haunted Real Estate: The Occlusion of Colonial Dispossession and Signatures of Cultural Survival in US Horror Fiction,” *American Studies* 43 no. 1 (1998), 105.
108. Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” 16.
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111. Tiya Miles, *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill, 2015).
112. Mackenthun, “‘New’ Legends: Some Perspectives from Anthropology,” 122.
113. Tuck and C. Ree, “A Glossary of Haunting,” 647.
114. See Murray, “Locating the Wild Man,” regarding contemporary Indigenous uses of Sasquatch within narratives of environmental resistance.

