IJR, 2025, Vol. 14, pp. 69-91

Research Note

Unsettling: Perversion, Appropriation, and the Wendigo in Canadian Horror Media

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Abstract

A Wendigo is a creature from Indigenous storytelling that is said to haunt the forests, particularly in times of cold and famine, that lures in prey by mimicking the voices of loved ones. Wide variation exists in the story across time, geography, and nations, particularly as to whether Wendigo(s) are their own species or whether they were once people but have been cursed into Wendigo form for either acts of selfishness or cannibalism. The Wendigo has recently been used as a cryptid (a mythological creature) in several film and television productions. This use of Wendigo outside of an Indigenous context and the desire to learn from and adapt the mythos for a wider audience is a thorny and ethically complex desire in the context of ongoing colonialism in Canada. Rather than adopting the dominant critique of cultural appropriation, we explore the potentiality of a queer reading of these texts in pursuit of a more generative de-colonial potential. In this speculative piece, instead of appropriation, we offer a reading of contemporary Wendigo representations as a *perversion* of the traditional mythos. By perversion, we mean the alteration of something from its original meaning or context, but simultaneously also in its secondary meaning as unacceptable desire. We argue that increased knowledge and popularity of the Wendigo may be read alternatively as a resurgence of Indigenous culture that returns at a time when its warning about greed, ecological destruction, and familial violence resonates with many communities. We argue that a perverse reading of Wendigo texts opens space for dialogue about community and justice in pursuit of decolonizing relations.

Keywords: adaptation; colonialism; perversion, resurgence; justice Wendigo

It was one thing, he realized, to hear about primeval forests, but quite another to see them. While to dwell in them and seek acquaintance with their wild life was, again, an initiation that no intelligent man could undergo without a certain shifting of personal values hitherto held for permanent and sacred.

Algernon Blackwood "The Wendigo" ([1910] 2023, 219).

On a grander scale, too, we seem to be living in an era of Windigo economics of fabricated demand and compulsive overconsumption. What Native peoples once sought to rein in, we are now asked to unleash in a systemic policy of sanctioned greed.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013, 366).

Introduction

#NotYourCryptid. Cryptozoology may be understood as a perversion of science; the pseudoscientific search for and study of legendary creatures (Dawson et al. 2024). Referred to as cryptids, the Loch Ness monster (Nessie), Big Foot, and the Mothman of West Virginia are amongst their most well-known types. This classification has expanded to include a greater diversity of creatures both in terms of cultural and geographic origin. Ogopogo (British Columbia), Chupacabras (Puerto Ricco), and Skin Walkers (Navajo) are now commonly understood to be part of the cryptid canon. Wendigo[1], the cannibalistic spirit that possesses those who have broken social taboos (commonly greed, selfishness, or cannibalism), has received unique attention and critique (Remy-Kovach 2024).[2]

The Wendigo mythos has featured in several recent film and television productions. Adaptation of an Indigenous story by non-Indigenous creators has been decried as appropriation. The use of the Wendigo outside of Indigenous contexts and the desire to learn from and adapt the mythos for a wider audience is a thorny and ethically complex desire given the ongoing violences of colonialism in Canada. This condemnation is often based on the assumed cultural identities of producers and consumers rather than on the media *content* itself. Rather than adopting this critique, we propose a queer reading of the content of recent Wendigo texts in pursuit of a more generative decolonial potential. For queer theorists, perversion is "a defiant per-

[1] "Windigo" or "wétiko" are also common in the literature. We use "Wendigo" throughout for consistency.

[2] Léna Remy-Kovach (2024) analyzes "Wendigo," a 2005 episode of *Supernatural* in which Dean and Sam search for missing people in Colorado while posing as Park Service rangers.

formance of excess that shows up the constructedness and arbitrariness of the category of the 'normal,' and it is centrally implicated in queer's rejection of the meaning of identity in favor of a politics of practice" (Downing 2017, 123-124). Rather than as straightforward and inherently negative appropriation, we read contemporary Wendigo representations as a *perversion* of the traditional mythos. By perversion, we mean the alteration of something from its original meaning or context, but also simultaneously in its secondary definition as an unacceptable desire. Adopting these adaptations of the Wendigo as perversions rather than appropriation attempts to disrupt capitalistic conceptions of intellectual property while also acknowledging that the desire to use Indigenous resources—including cosmologies, knowledge, and stories—is an *unacceptable desire* by non-Indigenous creators in many ways.

Instead of adopting the narrative of these adaptations as appropriation and thus inherently bad, incorrect, or otherwise unworthy of careful consideration on their own merits, using this framework of adaptation as perversion we argue that increased knowledge and popularity of the Wendigo can be read as a resurgence of Indigenous culture that returns to the fore at a time when its warning about greed, ecological destruction, and familial violence urgently resonates with many communities. We suggest that a perverse reading of these Wendigo texts may open space for dialogue and (re)imaginings about community and justice in pursuit of decolonizing relations, rather than the foreclosure of conversations oft write by discourses focused solely on identity politics and appropriation.

This research note represents our earnest effort to navigate these complex relations. The idea for this essay arose in the context of a different research project on Canadian horror media. This note is therefore somewhat speculative and based on a limited selection of texts that came to light as we followed new analytical and conceptual threads away from the original focus of our project. Our selection of the texts explored in this piece stemmed from our recent analysis of "Butcher's Block," season three of *Channel Zero*, a sci-fi horror television anthology series based on creepypastas (see Kohm and Lonergan 2026). We noticed similarity between the supernatural creature on the show and descriptions of the Wendigo mythos. Moreover, the

original creepypasta story that inspirited "Butcher's Block" also contained many allusions to the Wendigo. We learned that the creator of "Butcher's Block" authored a short story based on the Wendigo mythology that was adapted into the recent feature film *Antlers* (2021). Our evolution of thinking about the Wendigo in popular culture was decidedly nonlinear. After following threads linking examples drawn from contemporary visual popular culture, we went back to the early twentieth century to revisit Algernon Blackwood's seminal short story—to our knowledge the first published perversion of the Wendigo myth. Our thinking and choice of texts mirrors how stories shift, are adapted, and change in both medium and meaning across time, place, and cultures.

This research note is organized in four parts. In the following section, we briefly outline the Wendigo mythos and some of the ways it has been appropriated, perverted, and applied in ways beyond the original Indigenous mythology. Next, we offer an outline for our perverse reading of Wendigo texts as de-colonial and in allyship with an Indigenous cultural resurgence. The main section follows and weaves together perverse readings of several Wendigo texts to assess their potential to shed new light on contemporary issues of justice. Our analysis starts from Algernon Blackwood's early 20th century novella "The Wendigo", and includes an internet based urban legend, a short story, and their respective TV and film adaptations. We conclude with some very tentative thoughts about our perverse project.

The Wendigo Mythos

The Wendigo mythology is shared across traditional Algonquin territories of the northern plains and boreal forests[3] (Smallman 2014) in Anishinaabe, Cree, and Métis horror stories (Remy-Kovach, 2024, 119). The Wendigo appears in 17th century accounts as a fool or madman who had lost their mind, while cannibalistic connotations developed in boreal forest languages during a prolonged period of food crisis (Busatta 2023, 61). Ojibwe scholar Basil Johnston (1995) translated the term windigo as "only for self" (p. 222), a translation shared with Bradi SeSanti of Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Nation

[3] The northern plains and Boreal forests represent the majority of land now referred to as Canada.

(2018, 8-9). Indeed, the myth likely served to remind people of the terrible punishment of being "banished from the web of reciprocity, with no one to share with you and no one for you to care for" (Kimmerer 2013, 365), for selfish and destructive behavior. However, some Indigenous writers counter the idea that Wendigo is an exclusively malevolent entity, claiming it may also reward moderate behavior (Johnston 1990; Dillon 2014).

The Wendigo has been "appropriated both for use in literature and popular culture and as the source of a (mis)diagnosis to explain cannibalism in Indigenous communities" (Wetmore 2021, 137). However, Alfie Howard (2024) notes that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers have also used the Wendigo to critique and challenge colonialism, environmental destruction, and that these stories can offer hope for a more just future. Specifically, Howard (2024) notes that for some Indigenous scholars and in many representations, the conditions creating Wendigo can be healed, understanding it as sickness rather than a fixed status as monster. Indeed, in the traditional mythos, "the windigo was more often cured than killed, so it was not a scapegoat or a victim of witch hunts caused by social unrest" (Busatta 2023, 57). Wendigo represents being out of balance with oneself, one's community, and one's environment, but this can be healed through reparative measures.

The use of Wendigo as a "metaphor for colonialism and imperialism" (e.g. Wetmore 2021, 137) is important because it demonstrates how myths and stories are adapted to meet the demands of new contexts. Dina Georgis (2013) asks us to consider "the value of stories for making insights into collective histories and group identity," reminding us that "[s]tories give us access to the deeply human qualities of how political histories get written from existential experience of trauma, loss, difficulty and relationality" (p. 1). Folklorists, especially those within "monster studies," embrace the cultural insights these stories provide while resisting easy definitions (Puglia 2024, 3). This is our motivation for proposing alternative understandings of use of the Wendigo in horror media, by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous creators, to push beyond the dichotomy of authenticity or appropriation, by centering the texts themselves and reading the sto-

ries and meaning found within.[4] To borrow (or *pervert*) the concept from Benedict Anderson ([1983] 2006), what if we were to (re-) imagine the national community, decentering a settler norm with an Indigenous addition at the margins or after the fact? As Ken Derry (2018) notes, the category of Indigenous is ghettoized;[5] the additive model of marginalized content is not sufficient in the pursuit of substantive justice.

Resurgence and Decolonization

Resurgence is the vigorous act of bringing something back into life or focus. According to Rogers (2023) "the vision of the Indigenous Resurgence is to take ever-evolving Indigenous cosmologies into the future, bringing about the possibility of living in ways and according to values that would be recognizable to the Ancestors" (Rogers 2023, 10). For Taiaiake Alfred (1995), resurgence stands apart from reconciliation—the former asserts "a radical form of Native sovereignty" rather than "a process of political change leading to further integration with Canada" (p. 3). A key aspect of Indigenous resurgence is achieved through efforts to preserve traditional knowledge and culture. This not only preserves and educates, but also actively contests the violence of European settlement and erasure of Indigenous people and culture (Palmer et al. 2022, 2). Palmater (2023) describes resurgence as "taking back our power – and revitalizing our cultures, traditions, laws, and value systems" (p. xxiii). However, Taiaiake Alfred (2023, 165) reminds us that resurgence is about relationships: "It's not just a Native story. It's a story of everybody. How are you part of Indigenous Resurgence? How are you going to make this country a different place, one that is fitting with a vision of justice?" In this spirit, we ask if these relationships may be fostered in part through popular culture that explores questions of justice. Recent adaptations of the Wendigo mythos have helped share this traditional story with a wider audience and its popularity attests to the wide resonance of its themes and values in contemporary times. We cautiously view this as

[4] This deconstructionist approach of course is indebted to Roland Barthes' seminal essay "The Death of the Author" ([1967] 1986).

[5] "Ghettoized" here meaning that the categorization of "Indigenous," whether in curriculum, media, politics, etc. is often relegated to the margins, boxed-in and segregated from other categories and potential connections, and systematically undervalued.

evidence of ongoing Indigenous resurgence. In this research note, we offer a speculative take on Wendigo adaptations, arguing that they make Indigenous culture and knowledge central in stories of (in)justice that disrupt the settler as center point or cultural norm.

We do not deny the historical and ongoing exploitation of First Nation resources and culture—including by academics and cultural producers (see Webb Jekanowski 2019). Indigenous artists and communities have the right to tell their stories, celebrate their culture, and materially benefit from their knowledge and cultural productions. At the same time, we offer this note to expand from the binary notion that all use of culture and folklore by others (presumably not of that culture) is always *inherently* appropriation and exploitation. Instead, we contend that there may be spaces for the teachings of the Wendigo mythos to foster mobilization around shared forms of oppression, including intergenerational trauma, poverty, and environmental destruction. Moreover, our approach centers the adaptive and collaborative features of storytelling and meaning making. We would not suggest that this is the case for using *any and all* traditional beliefs or practices, but rather specifically in our exploration of specific uses of the Wendigo mythos.

Whereas cultural appropriation is the theft of or inappropriate use of elements of another culture, usually for gain while contributing to harm against the original culture, we instead offer a perverted reading to facilitate a decolonial approach. This means actively resisting and undoing colonialism: "Decolonization involves ongoing processes or removing or transforming the pernicious cultural effects of colonialism" (Cox 2014, 56). We start from the definition of cultural appropriation as "unlicensed 'borrowing' of items from other cultures, which is carried out in such a way that 'neither considers the true meaning of the elements nor gives credit to their primary source'" (Petrović 2021, 187). We acknowledge the fraught history of distorted and damaging (mis)representations of Indigenous peoples and culture in popular culture (see for example Black 2020; Howe et al. 2013; Rollins 2011; Aleiss 2005; Kilpatrick 1999). Even well-intentioned or sympathetic portrayals of Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous creators can be ethically troubling when framed through the "white camera eye" (Gittings 2002). This is particularly evident

when Indigenous people, cultures and history are relegated to an imagined past overtaken by a tragic, yet inevitable colonial present. This mirrors Eve Tuck's (2009, 1) assertion that damage-centered research, despite good intentions, may actually reinforce "a one-dimensional notion of [Indigenous] people as depleted, ruined, and hopeless." We do not wish to minimize or sidestep these ethical concerns. Yet we also seek to better understand and support what we view as an ongoing resurgence that is playing out in the cultural texts that we have encountered in our research. This research note moves cautiously toward this aim. We contend that some recent media representations of the Wendigo do give credit to their primary source (to different degrees) and they also consider the true meaning of the stories even in their perversions of the traditional mythos, as we demonstrate in the next section.

Weird Tales and Perverse Legends

A creepypasta is a portmanteau of "creepy," "copy," and "paste," and refers to copying and pasting urban legends on message boards and other websites (Blank and McNeill 2018). Creepypastas are usually posted anonymously and spread amongst internet forums and social media. Creepypastas are considered the digital evolution of folkloric storytelling (Cooley and Milligan 2018; Henriksen 2018). Paul Manning (2024) also places creepypastas in the lineage of 19th century weird tales, which he describes as "a kind of 'boundary genre' in the epistemic and ontological marchlands between the newspaper and folklore" (p. 258); stories purported to be true but that disrupt logical or normative understandings of possibility.

While weird tales are associated with writers like H. P. Lovecraft, Algeron Blackwood is one of the genre's seminal authors (Joshi 1990). Blackwood's 1910 novella "The Wendigo" is the earliest published adaptation/perversion of the Wendigo mythos and thus first to be criticized as cultural appropriation (see Tailor 2023; de Vos 2022; Hunchman 2020; Nazare 2000).[6] It recounts the story of Dr. Cathcart, his guide Hank Davis, nephew Simpson, and Joséph Défago, their

[6] To reiterate, it is not our assertation that these adaptions cannot be claimed to be cultural appropriation or that these scholars' critiques are invalid, but rather than we propose perversion as a framework for opening further dialogue and focusing on decolonial potential.

French-Canadian "Canuck" guide on a backwoods Canadian hunting trip. The final character is Punk, "an Indian… who acted as cook… [and] had in him still the instincts of his dying race; his taciturn silence and his endurance survived; also his superstition" (Blackwood, 1910/2023, 212). The plot revolves around Défago reluctantly sharing the story of the Wendigo one evening, and later taking off from camp terrified of a strange odor and "the shadow of an unknown horror" (Blackwood 1910/2023, 224). The hunting party searches the vast wilderness for Défago, but Punk flees when he recognizes signs of a Wendigo. They have a strange encounter with either Défago or the Wendigo in disguise. Later, Défago returns to camp badly frostbitten and delirious, and he soon succumbs to exposure. The remaining members of the hunting party and the reader are left uncertain as to whether the cause of death was psychological or supernatural.

While Blackwood can be credited with bringing the concept to a broader public, his telling of the Wendigo mythos "robs it of many of the aspects that make a wendigo a wendigo" (Wetmore 2021, 151). Notably absent was any representation of cannibalism. Moreover, Blackwood's racist caricatures of both French Canadian DéFago and Indigenous Punk reveal the real source of horror in this adaptation: "For Blackwood the danger is not in becoming a cannibal but in losing what little veneer of civilization one has and becoming 'the Call of the Wild personified'" (Wetmore 2021, 151). Consequently, Blackwood's "Wendigo" may be critiqued as appropriation because it distorts the true meaning of the mythos, rather than adapting it to new cultural contexts.

Kerry Hammond's (2015) creepypasta "I am a Search and Rescue Officer for the US Forest Service, I have Some Stories to Tell" is a contemporary descendent of a weird tale. "Search and Rescue" presents ostensibly true first-person accounts by a National Park ranger working deep in the wilderness. It is written as a series of posts about the strange experiences of the ranger on their rescue missions, as well as secondhand accounts by other park employees. Many stories involve the disappearance of people who are either never found, found in pieces or in impossible to reach locations, or involve encounters with mysterious non-human figures in the woods. There is no over-

arching narrative linking the vignettes together, and the mysterious phenomena are always left unexplained.

In Hammond's vignettes, witnesses describe a "bear-man," or the "fuzzy man," a big man with black eyes," or a "big man with a scary face," or even having no face at all. One post describes the story of a hiker who encountered a man in winter clothing but no climbing gear and no face sitting atop a mountain. Other stories recount people climbing up sheer rock without any handholds. In the various "Search and Rescue" posts, mysterious figures are described as humanoid but not quite human. For example, one is described as:

> …some kind of amalgamation of raw meat and hair. As if someone had scooped up roadkill and molded it into the vague shape of a man. The face was lumpy and only a rough approximation of a human face. The thing opened its lopsided mouth, and from it came the sound of the gun the hunter had fired. It did this twice before mimicking the sound of the tent zipper and fleeing into the night (Hammond 2015).

This description resembles the appearance of the Wendigo in the 2021 film *Antlers* (see Figure 1). It is both man and abomination, viscerally unappealing. That the creature can mimic sounds corresponds with both Blackwood's and more recent adaptions, where Wendigo are said to make sounds of children or friends in distress to lure victims.

There are clear parallels between Hammond's creepypasta and earlier tellings of the Wendigo mythos, such as when victims are found impaled on treetops as if dropped from high above. In Blackwood's adaptation, the Wendigo is described as able to take unfathomable leaps into the air ([1899] 2023, 235-236): "…it'll take great thumpin' jumps sometimes, an' run along the tops of the trees, carrying its partner with it, an' droppin' him just as a fish-hawk'll drop a pickerel to kill it before eatin' (Blackwood [1899] 2023, 245-246). A Wendigo would account for the body parts and bones found in Hammond's vignettes, whether stuck in tree branches or smashed on the ground. Some bodies and limbs are described as having unidentifiable animal bites. Moreover, people being found dead in the woods of

exposure, aligns well with the Wendigo's most common association with the extreme cold, scarcity of winter, and dangers of isolation.

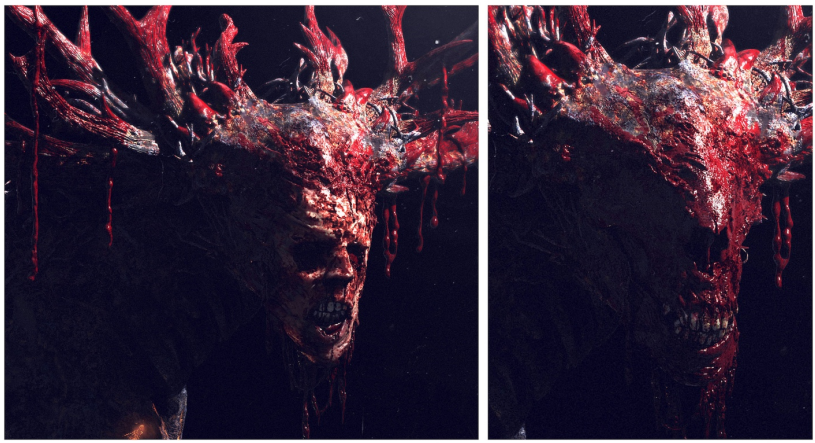

Fig. 1 The Wendigo in *Antlers* (from Martin 2022).

In one story, a strange deer skeleton is found with "weird antlers," a more discernable nod to the Wendigo. In a later vignette, Wendigo is mentioned explicitly in a story recounted by a fellow ranger recalling a childhood experience in Central Oregon, near Warm Springs Indian Reservation. He recalled seeing something that looked like a deer; "I realized it wasn't a deer, because whatever it was, it was walking on two legs." He was warned by an Indigenous friend not to talk to or listen to it. Another character in conversation with the narrator adds, "That does remind me, in a lot of ways, of the Wendigo legend. There's a phrase used to describe it that I think fits perfectly, which is that the Wendigo is 'the spirit of lonely places'" (Hammond 2015). The Wendigo mythos is named explicitly here and linked to the isolation and harshness of the wilderness.

While Hammond's description of the Wendigo resembles the one from *Antlers* (Figure 1), the image shown in Figure 2 was uploaded by a user to accompany Hammond's creepypasta posts. Interesting, the image is originally from the opening credit sequence of television show *American Horror Story Season 3: Coven* (2013).[7] While the

[7] For a reading *of American Horror Story: Coven* as a critique of white feminism and broader commentary on divisions within feminism see Lonergan (2017).

creature in the image does not appear in the show, it is significant that *Coven* is set in New Orleans, Louisiana, and thus like Nick Antosca's short story "The Quiet Boy" (discussed in detail below), resituates the Wendigo-like creature from its northern Boreal origins to the American south.

Fig.2 Image uploaded to Reddit.com/R/NoSleep post "Search and Rescue" by user ohohoh_no.

Hammond's creepypasta also draws on associations between the Wendigo and cannibalism. After the mythical creature is mentioned in one vignette, an officer describes experiencing: "a weird kind of craving… this desire to consume… this weird, distracting hunger that comes from every part of my gut." In a different vignette, an officer lost and disoriented in the wilderness experiences an insatiable hunger and comes close to killing a fellow ranger: "I'd have eaten anything you put in front of me right then." In this way, cannibalism is linked to the Wendigo as a source of horror spawned by the uncanny landscape of the remote wilderness. However, the obsession to consume is not inherently a *cannibalistic* desire. This invites readers to view the violence of capitalism and resource extraction as an equally evil hunger, consistent with contemporary uses of Wendigo as a met-

aphor for capitalism and imperialism (Wetmore 2021). For example, a contentious logging site in the park is quickly shut down due to unexplained violence, connecting the desire to consume nature and natural resources with the Wendigo mythos alongside the consumption of flesh.

Consumed by Capitalism: "Butcher's Block"

Channel Zero is a four-season television anthology series created by Nick Antosca that aired on the SYFY network (2016-2018). Each of the four seasons adapted a popular creepypasta and were filmed in Manitoba, Canada. The third season, "Butcher's Block," is based loosely on Hammond's "Search and Rescue". Sisters Alice and Zoe Woods move to a new town for a fresh start. Alice works as a family advocate to support Zoe, who like their mother, lives with schizophrenia. Butcher's Block is the name of a rundown neighbourhood once home to a thriving meatpacking industry. The sisters encounter members of the Peach family, former meatpacking barons, who disappeared decades prior after their two daughters were murdered. The family turned to dark magic and work to appease the God of Pestilence (see figure 3),[8] by sacrificing people who are unlikely to be missed, including those suffering addictions, mental illness, and in poverty. They practice cannibalism in exchange for immortality with the complicity of the local police department. The Peaches vividly represent the excesses of consumption while providing an allegory about the vampiric nature of capitalist exploitation.

"Butcher's Block" bears little similarity to the creepypasta by Hammond on which it is based. Instead of a remote national park, the setting is a blighted inner-city area, with a creepy overgrown city park at the centre. Like in Hammond's story, a mysterious staircase appears in the park. However, in the TV adaptation, the stairs lead to another dimension where the Peaches reside in a quaint plantation-style home, returning via the staircase to feed on residents of Butcher's Block. While the adaptation contains no explicit reference to Wendigo, there are clear similarities between the God of Pestilence and the Wendigo. Adorned with antlers and linked within the story to

[8] The God of Pestilence is not referred to by name in the show but is named as such in the credits.

cannibalism, greed, overconsumption, and mental illness, the God of Pestilence is likely derived from the Wendigo mythos. As this brief overview makes clear, the association of "Butcher's Block" to the Wendigo is more implied than intentional, given the show's intertextual connection to other horror media and creators. We therefore move quickly beyond this text to consider prior work by the show's creator that more explicitly draws on the Wendigo. Creator Nick Antosca's short story and its subsequent film adaption move the Wendigo from northern boreal forests to a setting of economic decline, deindustrialization, and environmental ruin, as we discuss below.

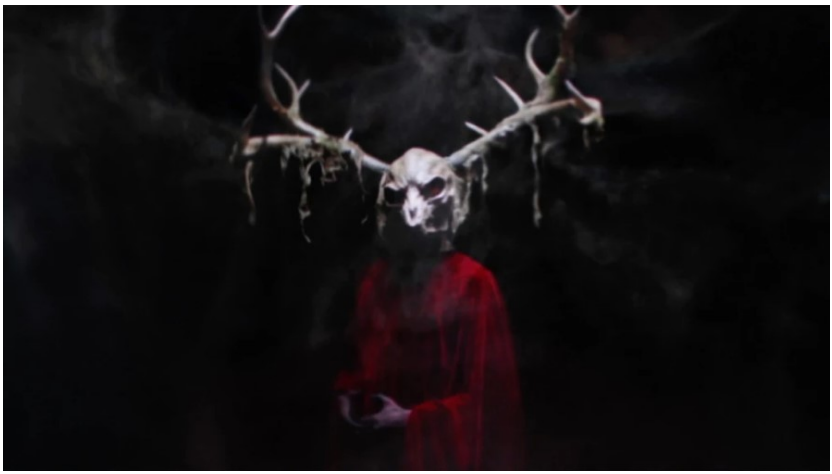

Fig. 3 God of Pestilence ("Butcher's Block," Episode 5 "The Red Door").

The Curse of Resource Extraction: "The Quiet Boy" and *Antlers*

Channel Zero creator Nick Antosca's short story "The Quiet Boy," was adapted as feature film *Antlers* (2021). Julia Meadows (played by Kerri Russell in the film adaptation) is a teacher who becomes concerned for the welfare of a student in her class. Lucas Weaver is from the poorest part of town, small and underfed, shy, and smells like wet animal fur,[9] but is enthusiastic about writing (in the short story) or drawing (in the film). "The Quiet Boy" uses three wolves[10]

[9] A similar smell of organic material, of wet fur is described by Blackwood as well ([1899] 2023, 231).
[10] Or to be more precise "three wolfs," as Lucas writes.

with "rabeez" while *Antlers* substitutes three bears who are always hungry to represent for both teacher and audience, that Lucas has a bad-tempered father and a younger brother at home, and he must act as peacekeeper.

In both texts the setting is rural, post-industrial, and poor. "The Quiet Boy" is set in West Virginia, where "the unofficial town motto was 'Hills, Whores, and Liquor Stores," and many residents are coping with substance dependency. *Antlers* is filmed in British Columbia and set in Cispus Falls, Oregon,[11] opening with Lucas waiting in the truck outside a closed down mining site where his father manufactures crystal meth.

Attempting to follow up on the family situation, the teacher finds the bodies of an adult man and small child in Lucas's home. Sheriff Drew Easton (Paul Meadows in the film, played by Jesse Plemons) believes they are the bodies of Frank Weaver and his younger son Todd. In the film adaptation the sheriff and teacher are siblings, who live together in their childhood home. Both were abused by their now-deceased father. In the short story, the teacher convinces the sheriff to let her take Lucas to stay with her, and similarly, in the film, the brother is convinced by his sister to take Lucas home with them.

That night Lucas' father and brother Todd come to collect him. They are described in the short story as having "horns or antlers," "wax-white and strangely bulbous, with large, crazily staring eyes, and a wet mouth that was sucking on itself as if in constant search of a food source." However, in the short story, the creatures feed on pain rather than human flesh. The short story ends with the sheriff finding the teacher "all over the kitchen floor," and "alone." Thus, the ending of the story is the murder of the kindly teacher by the creatures who have successfully recovered their remaining family member.

Antlers ends differently and is more explicit about the connection to the Wendigo story, as well as themes of intergenerational abuse and

[11] For an in-depth exploration of the history of economic decline, environmental damage from natural resource industries, social problems including domestic violence and addiction, colonization and relations between First Nations peoples and settlers in Oregon see William G. Robbins (2006).

the damage of extractive capitalism. After the discovery of the bodies in Lucas' home and several mysterious deaths around town, the teacher and sheriff pay a visit to the former town sheriff Warren Stokes, who is of First-Nation's heritage (played by Canadian actor Graham Greene). Stokes believes that Wendigo are behind the recent violence. One film reviewer writes of *Antlers*:

> The film, which makes use of Native American myth, relegates its one prominent Indigenous actor, Graham Greene, to the sidelines. Green [portraying the character sheriff Stokes] is utilized only to offer a raised eyebrow at scenes of carnage which he recognizes as a result of a vicious Wendigo, and then later to enlighten the dubious white characters on what such a creature is. Stokes explains that to Indigenous people the Wendigo is a cautionary tale of overindulgence and exploitation, and a myth to the rest of the world (Zigler 2021).

Indeed, Greene's portrayal of Stokes conjures the trope of the "wise Indian," which as Jessica Mehta reminds us, is not problematic for its use of the positive descriptor "wise" but rather that this wisdom is meant in contrast to "knowledge" or "expertise" with the former being naturalized and the latter connoting skill (2020).[12] The "wise Indian" primarily functions to help the white protagonist on their journey.

Sheriff and teacher protect Lucas from his brother and father who have transformed into Wendigo and seek to reclaim the boy. However, the sheriff is injured in the process after the Wendigo uses trickery to mimic Lucas's crying. *Antlers* concludes with a slow-burn realization that Lucas is already infected with the tell-tale black ooze of the Wendigo, while the last shot of the film shows the sheriff wiping his eye and realizing he too is infected; this scene cementing the overall allegory of Wendigo as intergenerational trauma and cyclical abuse.

In their analysis of the relationship between natural resource extraction (specifically coal mining and natural gas production) and poverty in Appalachia, Partridge et al. (2013) describe the "natural resources

[12] Mehta also notes that "Indian" has fortunately fallen out of popular usage to describe First Nations/Indigenous peoples (2020).

curse," wherein resource rich communities have poorer economic conditions than those without, in part due to long-term health effects on the community. Like "Butcher's Block", *Antlers* and "The Quiet Boy" transpose the Wendigo mythos to communities suffering from the ill effects of rampant capitalist development to tell a cautionary tale about the violence of (over)consumption and resource exploitation. Indigenous scholars have argued that the "current epidemic of self-destructive practices—addiction to alcohol, drugs, gambling, technology, and more—[are] a sign that Windigo is alive and well […] The native habitat of the Windigo is the north woods, but the range has expanded in the last few centuries," and argue that multinational corporations and their devouring of resources has birthed a new "breed" of Windigo (Kimmerer 2013, 364). Rather than viewing this *perversion* of the Wendigo mythos as solely appropriative, our speculative reading of these texts optimistically suggests a resurgence of Indigenous culture and teaching at a time when the Wendigo's warning about greed, ecological destruction, and intergenerational violence urgently resonates with many communities suffering under regimes of (over)consumption.

An Unsettled Conclusion

Our hope is that our *perverse* reading of these Wendigo texts opens space for conversations about community and justice in pursuit of decolonizing relations. In keeping with the theme of perverting justice, recalling that the meaning of perversion is to alter something from its original course or state, to become distorted or corrupted from what was originally intended, in this note we utilize a queer perspective to read selected contemporary adaptations of the Wendigo mythology not *simply* as cultural appropriation of indigenous traditional teachings, like in Blackwood's early 20th century tale, but as illustrative *perversions* of the traditional mythos that are adapted to better fit contemporary contexts that address issues of social, economic and ecological injustice. Rather than arguing against a reading of these texts as cultural appropriation to further a colonial project of settler entitlement to Indigenous knowledge or culture (particularly from within the academy), we instead read the mainstreaming of the Wendigo into popular horror media as *resurgence.* Resurgence in the sense of Indigenous culture, knowledge, language and traditions

breaking through into mainstream/dominant settler culture and becoming more visible despite the ongoing Canadian national project of invisibility and eradication. We believe that this comports with a vision of resurgence that brings "ever-evolving Indigenous cosmologies into the future" (Rogers 2023, 10).

The increased usage and cultural salience of the Wendigo mythos suggests its power for rethinking unchecked environmental and social destruction in the pursuit of profit. We want to acknowledge the contentious issue of coopting Indigenous culture and practices and calls for greater representation particularly creative control in film and television industries (DeSanti, 2018, 3). However, we think there is considerable value in taking seriously the content of adaptations of the Wendigo mythos that reveal the violence of unchecked capitalist and colonial development and the exploitation of earth's resources. A resurgence of Indigenous culture, as represented by these Wendigo adaptations, points to a future where healing from the excesses of imperial and colonial greed is not only possible, but perhaps even inevitable.

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