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‘Laura Hall, Bloodied Bodies, Bloody Landscape: Settler Colonialism in Horror’

André Loiselle

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Laura Hall, *Bloodied Bodies, Bloody Landscapes: Settler Colonialism in Horror*. (University of Regina Press, 2025), 262pp. Paperback. C\$32.95. ISBN 978-1-7794-0080-2.

Laura Hall's book investigates how Indigeneity is represented in North American horror cinema, occasionally drawing on European films 'with obvious North American influences' (p. 38), such as Coralie Fargeat's *Revenge* (2017). Her project is not limited to identifying films in which Indigenous peoples are depicted as literal monsters. Indeed, such examples are relatively rare, with *The Manitou* (1978) being one of the few referred to in the book that explicitly portrays an Indigenous figure as evil. Instead, Hall is concerned with films that more implicitly stage the historical oppression of Indigenous peoples as the central repressed element of settler colonialism, and with how this repressed history returns to haunt white, heteropatriarchal society. The clearest illustration of this dynamic is the well-known 'Indian Burial Ground' horror trope, visible in films such as *The Shining* (1980) and *Pet Sematary* (1989/2019), where 'the Indian Burial Ground presents settler society with the guilt and anxiety associated with the knowledge that a past atrocity has occurred, thereby unsettling some aspects of settler life' (p. 192).

But the Indian Burial Ground is only the most overt manifestation of the return of repressed Indigenous genocide. Hall argues that traces of this repressed history appear across a wide range of horror narratives that make little or no direct reference to Indigenous peoples, yet nonetheless express Indigeneity as a diffuse threat to white settler families. Wilderness becomes a symbolic space that evokes the invisible presence of Indigenous peoples. This is not limited to monstrous figures like werewolves lurking in forests at the edges of suburban settlements; it also includes white settlers who themselves incarnate the savagery associated with the natural world. White men or women who 'go native' may embody the threat of the 'savage' as much as actual Indigenous characters. This is why Hall's 'favourite movie "Indian" is drowned camper Jason Voorhees' from the *Friday the 13th* franchise, 'a demonic entity and a bad spirit of Camp Crystal Lake [... who] functions as an extension of nature itself' (p. 178). The author extends this logic to Michael Myers, who may not personify wilderness as overtly as Jason but nonetheless represents a profound threat to the white settler family. As Hall puts it, 'histories of colonization and racism are obscured beneath mythologies of suburban white settler life' (p. 106), such as urban legends about promiscuous babysitters attacked by a lunatic escapee from a nearby insane asylum.

This interpretive framework leads Hall to incorporate an extraordinarily broad range of horror films into their corpus, at times stretching the connection between the films and the repressed history of Indigenous genocide. For instance, virtually all of Wes Craven's most famous films are included, from *The Last House on the Left* (1972), with its brutal rapists, to the original *Scream* (1996) and its subsequent installments, in which seemingly harmless Final Girls become savage killers. Even *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) is drawn into the analysis because, for Hall, its focus on nightmares reveals 'fear and anxiety about Indigenous world(s) of spirits and hauntings' (p. 152). The book includes dozens of films, some of which receive less than a page of discussion, for example, *Creepshow 2* (p. 206). This breadth ultimately weakens the force of Hall's argument. If all horror films are about the return of the repressed, and if the genocide of Indigenous peoples is the foundational repression of North American history, then the implication becomes that all horror films produced in the United States and Canada, and even many produced

elsewhere, are about 'the construction of the Other as the repressed "primitive", the Monstrous Indian' (p. 170). A more focused corpus, with sustained analysis of fewer films, would have strengthened the book's central claims.

It should also be noted that Hall is a sociologist rather than a film scholar. As a result, although her insights are often compelling, her analysis rarely engages with film form. There is little attention to cinematography, editing, sound design, or other technical elements that shape how horror operates as an audiovisual medium. Tellingly, the book's title does not include the words film, cinema, or even movies. *Settler Colonialism in Horror* implicitly assumes that horror functions similarly across all media, an assumption that does not hold when considering the specificity of film language. Film scholars may find this lack of attention to the medium particularly disappointing.

The most disappointing aspect of the book, however, is the absence of any discussion of horror films made by Indigenous filmmakers. Although Hall acknowledges that 'this book will not cover the potential or limitations of, for example, what an Indigenous Gothic or horror tradition might look like' (p. XVII), even a brief engagement with recent Indigenous horror cinema would have been valuable. Films such as Jeff Barnaby's *Blood Quantum* (2019) and Nyla Innuksuk's *Slash/Back* (2022) offer powerful alternatives that demonstrate how 'the genre might shift...away from settler colonialism' (p. 43). By omitting these works, Hall inadvertently contributes to the very erasure of Indigenous voices that her project seeks to critique.

André Loiselle, St. Thomas University