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Black Skin, Green Masks: Medieval Foliate Heads, Racial Trauma, and Queer World-Making

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WHAT DOES A VISUAL IMAGE, a decorative motif from the later Middle Ages found mostly in churches in England and Northern Europe, have to do with a countercultural communal gathering every summer in the desert of Nevada? Or with twentieth-century colonial trauma in the South Pacific? Or with a gay sexual subculture in the US today? Why did a celebrated Australian author choose the medieval sculptural figure of a human-vegetal face to work through some of the deepest outrages – the Holocaust, colonial dehumanisation – in the twentieth-century world? Why has a gender-bending group taken to the woods and chosen such imagery as it begins to address legacies of settler colonial violence?

The medieval visual motif that has been so widely appropriated is known to art historians as a foliate head, known to the broader public as a Green Man: a human face made of leaves, or with fronds burgeoning from cheeks and forehead, or with vines emerging from the mouth and other orifices. It is a phenomenally widespread decorative motif, close to ubiquitous in English and Northern European church sculpture from the late eleventh to the sixteenth centuries. These aesthetically intricate, affectively intense images represent creatures that are strange admixtures, weird amalgams: they picture intimate interrelations between the human and the non-human – interdependencies between species that throw taxonomies into question, press categories up against one another, put classifications and hierarchies of the human under scrutiny. These are queer creatures indeed.

The medieval objects themselves are fascinating – eerie and haunting – and they have proved to be irresistible in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They have been appropriated with gusto because they are powerful to 'think with', prompting reflection about who and what is deemed human, who and what is not, who decides, and what the costs of those judgments might be. In this chapter I focus on the latter-day uptake of this imagery; I first briefly put these carvings in their medieval contexts in order to provide some sense of the range of the motif and the scholarly discourse around it, but I then turn to the image's deployments in

twentieth- and twenty-first-century contexts in the US and UK. Invocations of trauma and catastrophe accompany many appropriations of the Green Man; after I discuss several festivals that feature the Green Man – one, particularly, in the wake of a climate catastrophe – in order to map the potentials of the figure, I turn to two examples in detail: I discuss a queer group that engages such imagery in a context structured by settler colonialism, and I then dwell on a novel that plumbs the depths of world-historical postcolonial trauma via the Green Man. In these two quite disparate cultural productions I see attempts at queer world-making: these are experiments at transformation, at imagining and fostering different kinds of intimacies, at creating conditions in the world in which a broader range of life-forms can participate.

My ultimate interest in analysing the Green Man is to explore ideas of interrelations between human and non-human that – even as species boundaries are broken and traversed – acknowledge the histories of subjugation and devaluation enabling that human/non-human distinction in the first place. My goal, then, is not only to trace the afterlife of this medieval imagery but also, and most importantly, to 'think with' the Green Man myself in order to develop a framework for understanding human/non-human relations. My critical apparatus has been formed by work done under the banner of *queer* that is attuned to such regimes of subjugation and dehumanisation.[1] I want to leave readers with a sense of transformative possibility that the foliate heads present (leaf turning into human, human turning into leaf), not discounting the liabilities but imagining – aspiring to, trying to bring about – more expansively queer worlds. In such queer world-making, in such experimenting, accessing and engaging trans-species connectivity, how will we react to the intimacy with the non-human? To the loss of sovereignty? To a radically enlarged world of potential agents? What are the histories – sexual, gendered, racial, ethnic, colonial – embedded in such a realm? The Green Man adumbrates the intensity and danger of a radically interconnected world.

Part One: Foliate head and Green Knight

The foliate head is one of the most common decorative motifs – if not *the* most common – in late medieval church sculpture, in England and on the European continent. As I have discussed them previously, these heads appear all over ornamentable surfaces – on supporting columns, capitals, vaults, tympana, misericords,

[1] See, most recently, Mel Y. Chen and Dana Luciano (eds), *Queer Inhumanisms*, special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21: 2–3 (2015), especially the editors' Introduction, plus José Esteban Muñoz et al., 'Dossier: Theorizing Queer Inhumanisms', 209–48, and Tavia Nyong'o's 'Little Monsters: Race, Sovereignty, and Queer Inhumanism in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*', 249–72.

Figure 14.1 Norwich Cathedral, cloisters, roof boss, fourteenth or fifteenth century (photo by the author).

bench ends, arm rests, screens, fonts, and on and on.[2] Roof bosses sport an especial abundance, including a famous proliferation of leafy heads on bosses in the Norwich Cathedral cloisters (Figures 14.1 and 14.2). Foliate heads were carved in subsequent eras as well, tending to be more stylised and appearing in different contexts, but it is the Gothic examples ('flamboyant, sometimes startling', as Mercia MacDermott characterises them) that have gained the most attention and that I shall concentrate on here.[3] Earlier English examples (late eleventh- and

[2] See my 'Ecology', in Marion Turner (ed.), *A Handbook of Middle English Studies* (Chichester: Wiley and Sons, 2013), pp. 347–62, esp. pp. 347–51. In the present chapter I have repeated some basic information and analysis of foliate heads from this earlier piece.

[3] Mercia MacDermott, *Explore Green Men*, 2nd edn, Explore Books (Wymeswold: Heart of Albion Press, 2006), p. 42.

Figure 14.2 Norwich Cathedral, cloisters, roof boss, fourteenth or fifteenth century (photo by the author).

early twelfth-century) of leafy human faces tended toward the relatively abstract, while by later years the faces were more often characterised by individual human features. Throughout these eras (indeed, predominating early on) there were foliate beasts, too, as well as beguilingly mixed animal-human creatures that merged the human and non-human animal with the vegetal.[4]

[4] On dating and chronology, see Alex Woodcock, *Liminal Images: Aspects of Medieval Architectural Sculpture in the South of England from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Centuries*, British Archaeological Reports, British Series 386 (Oxford: Hedges, 2005). Kathleen Basford, *The Green Man* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1978), traces the development of the high medieval Green Man out of classical prototypes and earlier medieval foliate heads. For a leonine human foliate head, for example, see the roof boss in the parish church at Brant Broughton, pictured in Tina Negus, 'Medieval Foliate Heads: A Photographic Study of Green Men and Green Beasts in Britain', *Folklore* 114 (2003), 247–70, plate 17. Because

Of course medieval church sculpture is lush with foliage, represented in many different forms and varieties. Foliate heads might be viewed simply as specific variations on decorative leaves, used, for example, as 'space fillers' or as the visual sources of spreading leafy schemes along a length of wall, as Kathleen Basford observes; facial features, after all, can readily be carved within the veins and stalks of leaf or vine.[5] But even simple or pure ornament must be understood to serve a function – a function, to adapt Daniel Remein here, of providing an 'interface', of offering a 'spatiality' of engagement with a perceiver.[6] And engagement (between different entities, different species) is, at root, what these faces picture. This particular foliate motif seems to have been well established by the 1230s; in his portfolio, apparently recording what he had seen, Villard de Honnecourt drew four examples, labelling two of them *tête de feuilles* ('leaf head').[7] The motif evinces more 'iconographic stability' than the gargoyles and grotesques that Michael Camille analyses;[8] several different styles have been distinguished, including 'leaf masks' (on the console in Bamberg Cathedral (Figure 14.3), for example), 'disgorgers' (as in the Norwich Cathedral cloisters (Figure 14.2)), 'bloodsuckers' (found in Melrose Abbey (Figure 14.4), for example) and 'peepers'.[9]

In these various styles foliate heads were so plentiful by the late Middle Ages in Britain that they seem to defy hypotheses about their placement throughout ecclesiastical buildings.[10] They appeared on their own in some churches as the only sculptural ornamentation there; in other churches and ecclesiastical spaces they appeared alongside other carvings or formed part of larger sculptural pieces. Observing the clustering of heads in marginal rather than main areas of religious structures, Richard Hayman writes that foliate heads 'colonise the minor spaces' (that verb resounds ironically with my analysis of the latter-day appropriation of the heads in postcolonial contexts) such as the cloister; there are at least a dozen

of space limitations here, I have not been able to consider foliate beasts as part of the whole range of trans-species relations suggested by the foliate human head, but clearly they are crucial in broadening the consideration of transformative potentials beyond the human/non-human manifold.

[5] Basford, *Green Man*, pp. 16–17.

[6] Daniel Remein, 'Wonder and Ornamentality: A Medieval/Modern Poetics', PhD diss. (New York University, 2013), esp. pp. 42–6.

[7] Carl F. Barnes, Jr. (ed.), *The Portfolio of Villard de Honnecourt (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Fr 19093): A New Critical Edition and Color Facsimile* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), colour plates 13 and 46, pp. 51, 152.

[8] Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 36.

[9] 'Peepers' appear to be humans hidden by and peeking out of vegetation. Taxonomies and terminology vary within and between languages; see Mike Harding, *A Little Book of the Green Man* (London: Aurum Press, 1998), p. 12; William Anderson, *Green Man: Archetype of Our Oneness with the Earth* (London: HarperCollins, 1990), pp. 14, 20; and MacDermott, *Explore Green Men*, p. 2; in French and German traditions, the foliate head is known as *masque de feuilles* or *masque feuillu* and *Blattmaske* or *Blattgesicht*.

[10] Woodcock, *Liminal Images*, p. 58.

Figure 14.3 Bamberg Cathedral, console, c.1237 (photo: K. Basford).

in the cloister in Norwich, decorated with intricately carved bosses.[11] And in these 'colonies' they create strange little affective worlds, their facial expressions not easy to read. They glare, glint, smile, snarl, are bemused, angry, bewildered, or sorrowful, sometimes showing several affects at once. Every now and then you will

[11] Richard Hayman, *The Green Man* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2010), p. 26.

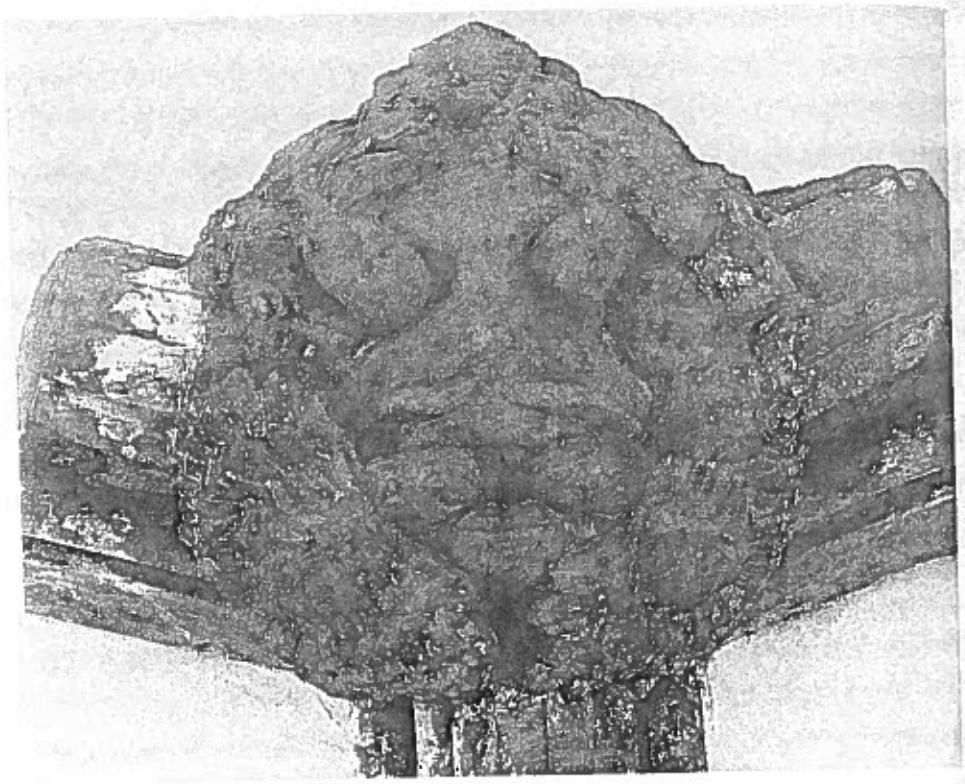

Figure 14.4 Melrose Abbey, Roxburgh, Scotland, roof boss, fifteenth century (photo: K. Basford).

see a less symmetrical face (on a corbel in a Pinchbeck church, for example), or a head with multiple faces, as in a roof boss in Southwick Hall (Figure 14.5), or a green man sprouting foliage that sprouts green men (on a roof boss in the church of Saint Mary, Haverfordwest, for example), or a foliate head with a different calculus of features (like the roof boss with six green men sharing six eyes).[12] All of these examples with their complex affects only amplify the problems of boundaries and taxonomies that are already so dramatically posed by the garden-variety heads.

Foliate heads also appear in manuscripts, and though such illuminations may have been one means by which green men first entered Christian art, in the Gothic era they don't appear on the page with the frequency seen in carvings.[13] They

[12] For Pinchbeck church, see Negus, 'Medieval Foliate Heads', plate 18; for Saint Mary, Haverfordwest, see MacDermott, *Explore Green Men*, p. 80; for the six green men, see MacDermott, *Explore Green Men*, p. 92.

[13] Hayman, *Green Man*, pp. 11–13. See, however, Woodcock, *Liminal Images*, pp. xvii–xviii, on the differences between sculpture and manuscript illumination and the need for different terminologies and methods of study.

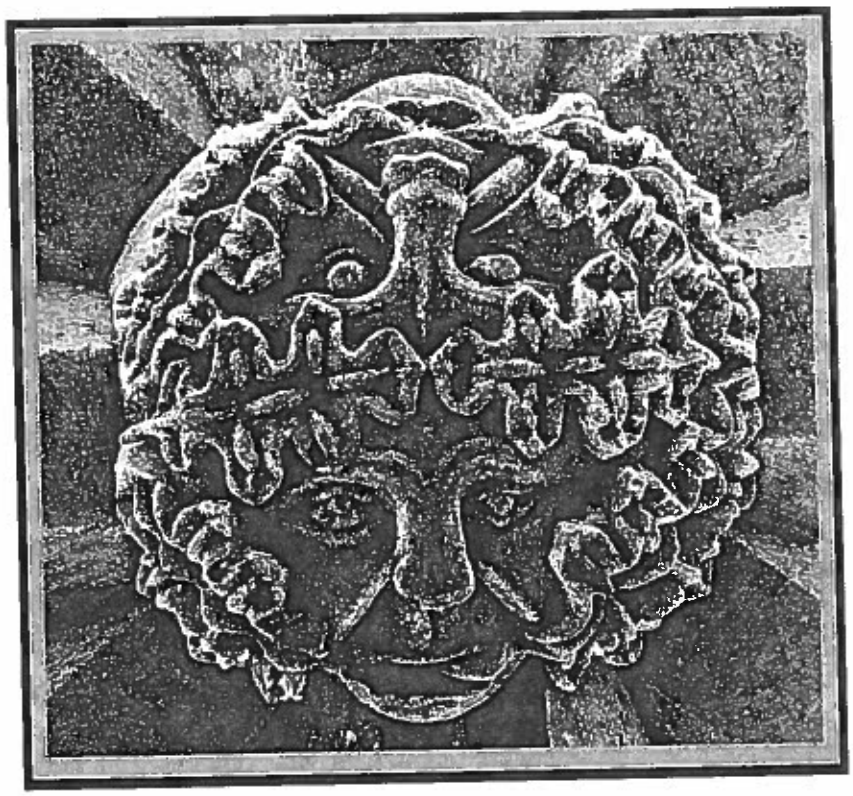

Figure 14.5 Southwick Hall, Northamptonshire, undercroft, roof boss, early fourteenth century (photo: T. Negus).

are found in margins, or in illuminated initials, or in interstices on the page. A well-known leaf-face peers from the bottom of the page of a mid-thirteenth-century manuscript of the Anglo-Norman *Life of St. Edward the Confessor* in the Cambridge University library. On the famous Pater Noster page of the late medieval Vernon manuscript, the green man is between the columns of virtues and vices; among all that interlace and foliage is a little face between Humilitas and Superbia (Humility and Pride).[14] The between-ness of this representation – its unclassifiable aspect, neither entirely human nor entirely leaf – is performed by the very placement on the page, between columns, between sharply delineated categories.

[14] *Life of St. Edward the Confessor*, in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Ee.3.59, bottom of page, f. 14v; other naturalistic foliage occurs in *bas-de-page* drawings. For the Vernon manuscript green man, see Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Eng. Poet. a.1, f. 231v. Kathryn Vulić drew my attention to the Vernon example; see her complex analysis in 'The Vernon Paternoster Diagram, Medieval Graphic Design, and the *Parson's Tale*', in Susanna Fein and David Raybin (eds), *Chaucer: Visual Approaches* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016, pp. 59–85).

'Liminal', indeed, is Woodcock's powerful characterisation of the image, 'evocative of processes unknown and unknowable, located at the outermost edges of experience'.[15] Various hypotheses have been adduced to account for this medieval imagery, but there is no real consensus on its origin or development. The motif seems non-Christian in its inception. Arguments (variously convincing, in the absence of any explicit historical connections) have been made for origins in Roman sculpture, or Indian carvings, or the Near Eastern Tree of Life motif, or ancient Celtic tree-worshipping practices, or the realm of traditional folk performance.[16] Christian exegetical significance – resurrection, for example, or the Cross, death, sin, or corruption – is undoubtedly operant in some of the medieval heads but does not exhaust the aesthetic impact or affective potential of the motif. An unusual variation of the motif – a *crowned* foliate head – in a stained-glass window in the church of St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, suggests not only the between-ness I mentioned above (this head is placed above an image of the sun and beside one of the Virgin, the foliate head neither solely associated with the everyday revealed world of nature nor solely associated with the Christian or spiritual world); but also, as it remains in between and apart, the crown somehow urges a re-evaluation of sovereignty or an exploration of another kind of sovereignty.

Scholars have not yet discovered any record of contemporary medieval responses to foliate heads. Ronald Hutton suggests that a systematic search of medieval sermons or devotional literature might yield some reference, but nothing has yet been uncovered, and there is no medieval narrative or lore attached to the figure, as Carolyne Larrington has observed.[17] So we are left to search for other kinds of contemporary witnesses, trying to correlate them with what we see. One possibly relevant source is the late fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, which famously features a totally green knight who rides an entirely green horse into King Arthur's hall at Camelot, interrupting the Christmas revels. The Green Knight belongs simultaneously to the vegetable world (with his green skin and beard like a bush), the non-human animal world (his skin the same verdant shade as his horse's), and the world of things (his green clothes and armour matching his epidermis). I suspect, with Gillian Rudd, that medieval audiences

[15] Woodcock, *Liminal Images*, p. 61.

[16] Basford, *Green Man*, adduces classical origins, yet as others have observed, the Roman motif shows only leaf masks but not disgorgers; Rita Wood, 'Before the Green Man', *Medieval Life* 14 (Autumn 2000), 8–13, maintains that the Romanesque disgorger and Gothic leaf mask are independent developments of two different classical motifs. MacDermott, *Explore Green Men*, hypothesises Indian origins for disgorgers; Woodcock, *Liminal Images* (p. 47), suggests the Near Eastern Tree of Life motif, readily Christianisable; Lady Raglan, 'The "Green Man" in Church Architecture', *Folklore* 50 (1939), 45–57, offered ritual performance as the origin; Brandon S. Centerwall, in 'The Name of the Green Man', *Folklore* 108 (1997), 25–33, offers the evidence of pageants.

[17] Ronald Hutton, *Pagan Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 349; Carolyne Larrington, *The Land of the Green Man: A Journey through the Supernatural Landscapes of the British Isles* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), p. 232.

might have made a link to foliate heads when they heard this poem; daily they were surrounded by those carvings that also represent human/non-human crossings.[18] The Green Knight is characterised as fierce, arrogant, truculent, an *aghlich mayster* (a master both awesome and ugly), bellicose and baleful; as he gallops away from Arthur's court, he can, startlingly, manage without his own severed head. The adventure that ensues is an adventure of wild transformation: Gawain, having accepted the Green Knight's challenge, passes through a wilderness in northern Wales to reach a provincial castle in the untamed borderlands of England. There, as I have argued elsewhere, genders are frighteningly performative and interchangeable (courtly roles are reversed as Gawain acts like a woman and the Lady wields the gaze) and human bodies are revealed in all their animality, most like the four-footed prey they hunt.[19] Corporeal transformation and challenges to human sovereignty – implicit, I want to suggest, in the image of the foliate head itself – are played out in a landscape with 'a long and confused history of colonization, conquest and cultural assimilation', as Michael J. Bennett characterises it.[20] Then as now, the extent to which issues of human/non-human permeability and transformation are linked with the dynamics of colonialism is striking, and I will explore that in some detail, especially in the final part of this chapter.

But at the moment, other heady matters await.

[18] Gillian Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 131 n. 23. Note that the carved foliate heads were not necessarily (indeed, were probably rarely) coloured green; the manuscript instances I mentioned above, though, feature the colour green. On thematic connections between this poem and foliate heads, see my article, 'Ecology'. Bella Millett, 'How Green Is the Green Knight?', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 38 (1994), 138–51, explicitly rejects – as did Derek Brewer (in 'The Color Green', in Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (eds), *A Companion to the* Gawain *Poet* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), pp. 181–90) – a reading of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* that would link the Green Man (including foliate heads) to the Green Knight. Larrington, *Land*, concurs (p. 227). But my readings of both the foliate head (Green Man) and the poem differ from the readings Millett indicts; I agree with her overall take on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and I do not assume that the Green Man derives from a 'merrie' rural folk past.

[19] See my 'A Kiss Is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and Its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *diacritics* 24: 2–3 (1994), 205–26, especially 211–14.

[20] Michael J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of* Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 10, quoted in Patricia Clare Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 119. I draw on Ingham's treatment of the cultural heterogeneity of this borderland, and her linking that heterogeneity with colonial dynamics between England and Wales. Su Fang Ng and Kenneth Hodges, 'Saint George, Islam, and Regional Audiences in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 32 (2010), 257–94, push the trajectory of Gawain's journey to the Green Knight off the island of Britain altogether, setting the poem's cultural interests within complex relations between a 'powerful Islamic east' and England.

Part Two: Green Man, Burning Man

The foliate head is an ancient motif that flourished in the late Middle Ages, but its naming as 'Green Man' dates only from 1939. The name was proposed in a short article by an amateur folklorist, Lady Raglan, was picked up in Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's widely read *Buildings of England* series, and has been in use ever since. Lady Raglan's original article is a brief and sketchy but striking piece. She recounts that, led by a local vicar, she viewed a 'curious carving' (Figure 14.6) in a Welsh parish church – south of the imagined itinerary of Gawain's travels in Wales – and she immediately intuited that the sculpture was a mimetic representation, 'taken from real life'. Apparently compelled by its vibrancy and animate quality, she went on to find more and more in other country churches. She studied them and asserted: 'I do not think that anyone who has seen these carvings can doubt that they are portraits'.[21]

Portraits! On the face of it this is an extraordinary claim, given the creepy look of the heads, vegetation bursting forth from orifices, tendrils sprouting from under the very skin. But Lady Raglan thought that medieval masons and woodcarvers were attempting to depict the faces of men whom they had seen – 'the figure variously known as the Green Man, Jack-in-the-Green, Robin Hood, the King of May and the Garland, who is the central figure in the May-day celebrations throughout Northern and Central Europe' – and so she called the carvings 'Green Men'.[22] Though her method was deeply flawed – she lumped too many different kinds of phenomena together and assumed they were historically continuous from a shared ancient origin – the idea that the carvings could have some relation to performance has more recently been reinforced by Brandon Centerwall.[23] And most fundamentally she conveyed a conviction that has proven influential, even infectious: that they refer to something alive, something seen, heard, felt – not only by medieval people but also by people 'to this day'.[24] Under the sway of the enormously popular *Golden Bough* she argued that modern-day re-enactments of ritual performances link us in our own time with medieval Green Men, carrying through something of their ancient pagan meaning of fertility and generation into the present day.

Of course Lady Raglan did not really think that such in-between creatures, such vegetal men with fronds sprouting from their mouths, actually existed as such. She was maintaining that humans dressed up in foliage (holding branches in their teeth,

[21] Lady Raglan, 'The "Green Man"', pp. 45, 50, 47.

[22] Lady Raglan, 'The "Green Man"', p. 50.

[23] Centerwall, 'The Name of the Green Man'; but see Hutton, *Pagan Britain*, p. 349, and MacDermott, *Explore Green Men*, p. 64, for counterarguments. The problems of Lady Raglan's analysis have been well demonstrated; see, for example, Roy Judge, *The Jack-in-the-Green: A May Day Custom* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979); Anderson, *Green Man*, pp. 18–21.

[24] Lady Raglan, 'The "Green Man"', p. 50.

Figure 14.6 Llangwm, Monmouthshire, St Jerome, corbel, fifteenth century? (photo: R. Hayman).

say) were the medieval artists' models. And looking back at the face she originally saw, one might conclude indeed that branches are being bitten between the teeth. But the power of her hypothesis – persistent beyond scholarly contestation – was in its suggestion of continuity between ancient pre-Christian practices, medieval foliate heads, and the present day: as a result of her approach, which was prepared for and strengthened by the phenomenal influence of *The Golden Bough* (itself taken to legitimate an idealisation of rural England as an 'organic continuum with ancient roots, preserving timeless wisdom'),[25] the Green Man has come to be understood popularly as the living link between pagan practices ancient, medieval, and modern.

Foliate heads have fired popular imaginations. The picture they offer, of inter-relations between human and non-human nature, combined with that association

[25] Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 119, 120. Hutton traces the intellectual historical context of the reception of *The Golden Bough*, a work that Lady Raglan cites (p. 54). Hutton argues that a belief in hidden forces beneath 'the veneer of civilization' (p. 126) – a belief subtending anxieties about colonial rule – informed the reception of Frazer in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England; note here a general connection between the meaning of the Green Man and colonial preoccupations. Hutton also maintains that the influence of Margaret Murray's hypothesis about the Old Religion influenced Lady Raglan (*The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993), p. 310).

with a paganism that links us to antique times, has promoted the Green Man as a powerful alternative to mainstream spirituality, an ancient disruption of dominant religiosity.[26] It has lent the Green Man an aura of the *countercultural*. Thus the big Green Man Festival in Wales, for example, across the country from where Lady Raglan saw her first leafy face. This is an annual music and arts gathering every August, where in 2013 none other than Patti Smith, one of the original punk heroes, sang 'Pissing in a River' under the 'watchful gaze' of a giant Green Man effigy ('made entirely from shrubs and branches', as the website put it).[27] Numerous other Green Man festivals have varying stakes in counterculture, from the 'hippie-punk rock vibe' of the alternative music venue at the Green Man Festival in Duluth, Minnesota, to a festival in Maryland focusing solely on trees and environmentalism, to May Day faerie festivals that feature Green Men.[28] One of the biggest alt-art and culture festivals in the US, the notorious Burning Man festival that takes place in the Nevada desert every summer, adopted the Green Man as its Art Theme a few years back: Burning Man's call for art projects in 2007 began with a quotation from William Anderson's influential and lavishly illustrated *Green Man*, published in 1990.[29] It's worth lingering on Burning Man's Art Theme for a moment, not only because it eloquently presents a prominent current understanding of the figure but also because it makes a gender adjustment that is very revealing. This will lead, then, to the heart of my own analysis of the Green Man and the uses that have been made of this foliate figure.

The 2007 call for art installations at Burning Man encouraged people to use the figure of the Green Man as an occasion to contemplate humanity's relationship to non-human nature. Humans have forcefully dominated nature, the website maintained, and nature's forces at times have powerfully and destructively struck back. (Memories of 2005's catastrophic Hurricane Katrina were still seering.) To try to shift this agonistic dynamic, participants were urged to engage the idea that humans 'can *collaborate* with nature' (emphasis original). Nature flows through us, and thus we can elicit and nurture its power by seeking primeval sources of consciousness within ourselves: 'Hidden behind the masks of convention', the website stated, 'there is surely a Green Woman or Green Man in every one of us'. Such a collaborative, interdependent approach to life is intended ultimately to be purifying and restorative; it redresses nature's balance. Challenging us to reach

[26] On the intellectual history of the link between paganism and the rural, see Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*, ch. 7, 'Finding a Folklore'.

[27] www.greenman.net/explore/areas/far-out/ refers to plans for the 2016 Green Man Festival, but the language is the same (accessed 29 September 2015).

[28] 'Hippie-punk rock vibe': Brad Nelson, quoted by Chris Godsey, 'Green Man Festival Reflects Duluth's Diverse Arts Scene', *Twin Cities Daily Planet*, 11 July 2006, www.tcdailyplanet.net/green-man-festival-reflects-duluths-diverse-arts-scene/ (accessed 29 September 2015).

[29] http://burningman.org/culture/history/brc-history/event-archives/2007-2/07_theme/ (accessed 3 November 2015). Quotation from Anderson, *Green Man*, p. 75.

out (or reach in) to the terrifying unknown, it finally reassures us with its vision of the total harmony of the universe. This is a harmony that perdures across time; William Anderson in fact sees the Green Man as an archetype 'of our oneness with the earth'.

The reference to a 'Green Woman or Green Man' is part and parcel of that vision of harmony, complementarity, union, but it also inadvertently exposes the narrowness of this liberal eco-vision. It is trying to adapt the medieval to the demographics of Burning Man. With very few known exceptions among the thousands of extant objects and images, foliate heads representing human and vegetation seem to present conventionally masculine facial features only: there are Green Men but *not*, for the most part, Green Women. Anderson documents two feminine figures in his long book, one of which is a mermaid, not a foliate head, albeit a mermaid with a foliate tail.[30] But the liberal Burning Man gesture of just adding 'woman' in order to create a more complete or inclusive ecological vision of the world actually narrows the critical and transformative potential of the figure of the foliate head. These heads suggest a more challenging and disruptive vision of the world, I maintain, precisely because what they represent is not merely human and it is not governed by a binary logic. The vegetal head (consider Figure 14.4 again) doesn't represent a *man* whose complement, or opposite, is *woman*. Such a binary human gender taxonomy is too narrow to describe the kinds of beings represented here. Now, it may be the case that binary gender was indeed important in the making of these images insofar as medieval femininity was thought to be inherently penetrable – more porous, less stable, than masculinity – so that to represent a really dramatic boundary-breaking contact between two species, it was the *masculine* that was pictured. The result, though, is heads that are interstitial (I echo Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah in using that word), somewhere between animal and vegetable, carved in mineral.[31] Operating through and beyond the masculine human, they show opposing metamorphic trajectories held in tension: leaves transforming into animal, and at the same time animal transforming into leaves. Both and neither animal and plant, as I have argued before, this is a creature ever in a state of disjunctive becoming. Never mind the either-or logic of 'Green Woman

[30] Anderson, *Green Man*, figures 13, 50. Anderson argues for an important complementarity between the Green Man and a feminine counterpart, the Great Mother. On the Green Man as balanced with feminine figures but ultimately transcending gender, see Phyllis Araneo, '*Green Man Resurrected*: An Examination of the Underlying Meanings and Messages of the Re-Emergence of the Ancient Image of the Green Man in Contemporary, Western, Visual Culture', Master of Creative Arts thesis (University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia, 2006), pp. 12–21. Woodcock, *Liminal Images*, p. 58, details two composite figures that represent non-human foliate animals with human feminine characteristics, including a mermaid.

[31] Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah, 'General Editors' Introduction', in Aren Aizura et al. (eds), *Decolonizing the Transgender Imaginary*, special issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1: 3 (2014), 303–7, at 305.

or Green Man'; we should even resist the word 'hybrid' for these heads (though others use it for such figures often enough) because it would nominate and harden that which is truly unstable and undecidable.[32]

The taxonomical crisis represented by these ever-emergent, ever-becoming foliate heads means that no absolute distinction between human and non-human can hold. That plant is using human energy with which to grow; that face is giving life to a leaf. What should be categorically outside humans is sprouting from deep inside. Categories are jostling, classifications are grappling with each other as human and plant co-exist in these heads. 'Green Woman or Green Man' neglects the disjunctions here and simply applies the same old established gender categories to this figure. But how can human gender govern a cheek from which a frond emerges? As Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen ask, what might gender 'look like apart from the anthropocentric forms with which we have become perhaps too familiar'?[33] Contra Burning Man's Art Theme 2007, then (and perhaps more in line with 'Queer Burners' at the festival), we can take these trans-species heads as a prompt to theorise or reflect on gender not as a binary phenomenon, and not as species-specific, but, rather, as relational and open-ended, a phenomenon of contact between entities, a classification system operating in ad hoc formations, in encounters, in becomings.[34]

But gender is only part of the consideration here, as in fact recent coverage of the racial politics of Burning Man might lead us to see.[35] More broadly, because these foliate heads set that binary human/non-human distinction into question, because the heads show taxonomies rubbing up against one another, they can move us to pose the question of *how* – by what ideological or biopolitical means – humans are distinguished from non-humans. Most crucially, the heads can put

[32] See my 'Ecology', p. 350. Timothy Morton insists on this point about 'hybrid' in *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), a book that has influenced my thinking here.

[33] Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, 'Introduction: Has the Queer Ever Been Human?', in Chen and Luciano (eds), *Queer Inhumanisms*, pp. 183–208, at p. 189.

[34] The 'trans' in 'trans-species' emphasises an ongoing dynamic of crossing and corporeal 'fungibility'; see Sandy Stone, 'Guerrilla', in Paisley Currah and Susan Stryker (eds), *Postposttranssexual: Key Concepts for a Twenty-First-Century Transgender Studies*, special issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (2014), 92–6, at 93. See also Carla Freccero, 'Carnivorous Virility; or, Becoming-Dog', in Julie Livingston and Jasbir K. Puar (eds), *Interspecies*, special issue of *Social Text*, no. 106, 29: 1 (2011), 177–95. Eva Hayward, 'More Lessons from a Starfish: Prefixial Flesh and Transspeciated Selves', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 36: 3–4 (2008), 64–85, has inspired my thoughts on the relational nature of gender. For Queer Burners, including an unofficial history, see http://queerburners.com/news/burner-history-x.

[35] See Steven Thrasher, 'Burning Man Founder: "Black Folks Don't Like to Camp as Much as White Folks"', *Guardian*, 4 September 2015, www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/sep/04/burning-man-founder-larry-harvey-race-diversity-silicon-valley (accessed 29 September 2015); and 'Burning Man's Black Campers Explain Why They Are the 1%', *Guardian*, 27 September 2015, www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/sep/27/black-campers-burning-man-explain-why (accessed 29 September 2015).

us in mind of 'the violence that the category of the human contains within itself', as Luciano and Chen so starkly state it.[36] In the establishment and maintenance of those categories 'human' and 'non-human', as Zakiyyah Iman Jackson has recently argued, some dehumanisation has already taken place, some human denigration has occurred, some humans have been judged less than human so that hierarchy and sovereignty (gendered, sexualised, classed, and racialised) can be sustained. Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* famously historicised 'man' as a European Enlightenment production; Jackson points to Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* ('At the very time when it most often mouths the word, the West has never been further from being able to live a true humanism – a humanism made to the measure of the world') that both predated Foucault's treatise and was 'hastened by a wave of decolonial resistance that arguably provided the historical conditions of possibility for Foucault's subsequent analysis'.[37] And while the modernity of the emergence of this 'human' is insisted on by these and many other thinkers, I will note that the dehumanising processes of modernity are nonetheless related to medieval discourses:[38] right in the era in which foliate heads were being carved, a monk of St Albans in the early thirteenth century in England neatly exemplified this human dehumanisation in his phrase 'genus hominum monstruosum et inhumanum' (monstrous and inhuman kind of humans).[39] In his chronicle history, the *Chronica majora*, Matthew Paris narrates an episode dated 1238 in which Saracen ambassadors to the French court report on the predations of the 'Tartars' (Central Asian peoples) who were seizing Eastern lands. The Saracens, who seek aid from the West, describe the Tartars as inhuman humans (*genus hominum monstruosum et inhumanum*).[40] When a Saracen messenger comes to England to make the

[36] Luciano and Chen, 'Introduction', p. 196. See also p. 186, on categories that 'rub on, and against, each other'.

[37] Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, 'Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism', *Feminist Studies* 39 (2013), 669–85, at 670. She adds Frantz Fanon and Sylvia Wynter to this genealogy; both elaborate the critique of Western humanism to engage Western imperialism deeply. For a brief historical narrative of medieval to modern in the emergence of the 'human' ('Man'), see Sylvia Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation: An Argument', *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3 (2003), 257–337, at 262–3.

[38] Wynter follows Jacob Pandian in tracing a shift in the 'physical referents' of the Other: from people categorised as heretics and infidels by the medieval Christian Church to modern humanism's filling that 'matrix slot of Otherness' by Indigenous peoples of the New World and enslaved peoples of Black Africa (Wynter, 'Unsettling the Coloniality', pp. 266–7).

[39] Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, Rolls Series, 57 (London: Longman, 1876), vol. 3, p. 488. Asa Simon Mittman, 'Are the "Monstrous Races" Races?' *postmedieval* 6 (2015), 36–51, at 48, alerted me to this passage.

[40] 'In diebus illis missi sunt Sarracenorum legati solennes ad regem Francorum, nuntiantes et veraciter explicantes, principaliter ex parte Veteris de Monte, quoddam genus hominum monstruosum et inhumanum ex montibus borealibus prorupisse, et spatiosas terras et opulentas Orientis occupasse, Hungariam Majorem depopulasse, literasque comminatorias cum legationibus terribilibus destinasse.' Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. Luard, p. 488.

Figure 14.7 All Saints, Sutton Benger (Wiltshire), respond, late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (photo: K. Basford).

same request of the English king, so that 'the Saracens, with the assistance of the Christians, might resist the attacks of these people', the Bishop of Winchester, overhearing the request, interrupts the messenger and in his 'jocose' remark makes the brutality of the construction of 'humanity' explicit:

> Sinamus canes hos illos devorare ad invicem, ut consumpti pereant. Nos cum ad Christi inimicos, qui residui remanebunt, venerimus, trucidabimus, et mundabimus terrae superficiem; ut universus mundus uni catholicae ecclesiae subdatur, et *fiat unus pastor et unum ovile.*
>
> (Let us leave these dogs to devour one another, that they may all be consumed, and perish; and we, when we proceed against the enemies of Christ who remain, will slay them, and cleanse the face of the earth, so that all the world will be subject to the one Catholic church, and there will be one shepherd and one fold.)[41]

Humans that are not humans, subjugated and extirpated to create one 'Humanity'.

'About this time, special ambassadors were sent for by the Saracens, chiefly on behalf of the old man of the mountain, to the French king, telling him that a monstrous and inhuman race of men had burst forth from the northern mountains, and had taken possession of the extensive, rich lands of the East; that they had depopulated Hungary Major, and had sent threatening letters, with dreadful embassies.' *Matthew Paris's English History from the Year 1235 to 1273*, trans. J. A. Giles (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1852; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1968), vol. 1, p. 131.

[41] Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, ed. Luard, p. 489, emphasis original; trans. Giles, p. 132.

So if some of these vegetal faces look very sad to us – if we read a ghosted, unconsoled, and inconsolable affect in the visage of the Sutton Benger foliate head (Figure 14.7), for example – we might take that affect as a prompt to consider the cost of the category of the human, the cost of constructing human sovereignty, the 'violence that the category . . . contains within itself'. Green Men are good to think with; if the figure visually represents the breakdown of the human/non-human opposition, and poses the question of what gender is and how it must be reinvented in such a trans-species world, we can use it to help us confront histories of dehumanisation which have brought that human/non-human binary into being, histories which, we might feel, haunt those vegetal men.

Part Three: Black skin, green masks

Some foliate heads, as Kathleen Basford feelingly observes, are 'thing[s] of sorrow'.[42] Artists and other culture makers have used foliate heads in invocations and explorations of historical traumas. I focus here on cultural productions that use the Green Man to work through interrelated issues of race, gender, and sexuality in the inhuman context of colonialism. My examples – one a set of ritual and material practices, the other a novel – attempt to envision a world, to make a world, that reckons with its histories even as they seek transformation, seek new and expansive intimacies and ways of being.

Counterculture is in the genealogy of the rituals to which I turn first. Some early gay liberation and lesbian feminist activists in the US, seeking to oppose heterosexism, racism, capitalism, and imperialism, exiled themselves to 'spaces coded as communal, antiauthoritarian, or premodern', as Scott Lauria Morgensen writes.[43] These gay men sought alternatives to normative sex and gender regimes by looking to rural spaces, seeking 'intimacy with "the land"' as a site of gay belonging and authentic subjectivity.[44] One of the best known groups inheriting this legacy is the Radical Faeries, a national and now international movement of loosely affiliated people, founded by gay men in the US in 1979, drawing on 1970s countercultural back-to-the-land movements, inspired by lesbian-feminist collectives, and blending religious traditions. Indeed, making the connection between land-based countercultural movements, one blogger speculates that 'It is very likely that some of the original people who brought us Burning Man were Faeries.'[45]

[42] Basford, *Green Man*, p. 8. Basford's interpretation of the Green Man as ghostly, baleful, and grief-stricken has influenced mine here.

[43] Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), p. 131. Morgensen's analysis has informed my discussion here.

[44] Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, pp. 130, 132.

[45] '2 Tribes: Burner v. Faerie', by Toaster, http://queerburners.com/2-tribes-burner-v-faerie (accessed 13 September 2015).

As if picking up the etymology of *pagan* in *paganus* (person who lives in a rural area), Radical Faeries gather outside the built environment of cities and its imposition of social constraints; living close to Nature with a capital N holds out the promise to liberate gender and sexuality from these repressive and exclusionary conditions of modernity and to allow discovery of the 'ancient spiritual roots of being gay'.[46] Faeries have intensively explored the spiritual dimensions of sexual liberation, seeking to uncover the dimensions of what is lovingly and resistantly known as 'faggot' spirituality.[47] This is where the Green Man is resonant, that living pagan figure resistant to dominant religion. Drawing on English and European pagan traditions, Faeries adopt a neo-pagan calendar for their gatherings, in Beltane erecting a maypole – traditionally used in May Day celebrations of the type Lady Raglan referred to, to celebrate the coming of spring, the insemination of the earth. Morgensen notes that the maypole is 'reframed' by Radical Faeries for gay purposes: it gets associated with a 'natural gay sexuality emerging from Gaian roots' that departs from the traditional gendering of heterosexual procreation.[48] Faeries' visual culture includes Green Man-type imagery: satyrs, those ancient human/non-human figures, abound in Faerie drag costumes as well as on the cover of *RFD*, the de facto Faerie journal. In a film shot during Beltane 2013, a glistening, flower-clenching Green Man receives the sexual attention of three bristly guys.[49]

European pre-Christian rituals are deployed by some Faeries not only to claim a gender-crossing sexuality but also to try to come to terms with personal and political issues of racial formation and colonial appropriation. The Radical Faeries were initially established in a call to gay men to discover their unique, third gender identity and spirituality; co-founder Harry Hay linked modern gayness to Native American cultures of the past, asserting the roots of modern homosexuality in an ancient and 'universal Indigenous queer nature'.[50] Radical Faerie groups in the US, whose 'core constituents' are white non-Natives, seek to claim ties to Native Americans because they understand those Indigenous societies to have honoured gay men (in the persons of Two Spirit people). The appropriative force of this desire has troubled some Faeries and put off some would-be Faeries, according to both Morgensen and Peter Hennen; Hennen reports the distress of a Faerie at the 'cultural appropriation' of a Native American name for a Radical

[46] Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, p. 127; see also pp. 134–5.

[47] John A. Stover III, 'When Pan Met Wendy: Gendered Membership Debates among the Radical Faeries', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 11 (2008), 31–55, at 32.

[48] Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, p. 136.

[49] Trailer for *The Bed at Wolf Creek*, 2014 film directed by Jared Morgan (A Radical Faerie Production in association with The Four Directions), www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6sFLGf1zXw (accessed 4 October 2015).

[50] Stover, 'When Pan Met Wendy', 34; Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, p. 150.

Faerie sanctuary.[51] Hennen, moreover, speculates that Faeries might be silently or unreflectively acceding to a long tradition of racialisation of 'fairies' originating in the age of British imperial expansion. Indeed, the critique by Indigenous writer and activist Rev. Sequoyah Ade of such cultural appropriation is sharp, noting the Faeries' 'hodgepodge' of rituals and arguing that such appropriation eventually amounts to Indigenous genocide. Contra the claim of a universal Indigeneity linking gays to Native peoples, Ade's critique is structured by what Elizabeth Povinelli analyses as the incommensurability of 'conditions of recognition' for these two groups in our current age of liberal settler diaspora.[52]

The role of paganism at Radical Faerie gatherings can be read as an attempt to address such cultural appropriation and resolve a settler colonial dilemma. Because Indigenous peoples once held the land on which Faeries now gather, and from which Faeries derive a sense of authentic, transhistorical, universal gay subjectivity and belonging, the white men occupy the position of colonial appropriators now and perform a settler colonial logic, 'disappear[ing] indigeneity so that it can be recalled by modern *non*-Natives as a relationship to Native culture and land', as Morgensen analyses the situation.[53] So *European* pagan traditions (featuring the maypole and other ritual appurtenances), Indigenous and pre-Christian, are one resolution to this settler colonial dilemma, Morgensen argues, functioning for white Faeries as a 'properly racialized' ancient tradition by which they can try to 'claim indigenized ties to Native Americans' that do not feel like ties of inherited conquest.[54] Green Man-type imagery can be understood as part of an attempt – Morgensen documents other aspects, undertaken by both white and non-white non-Native faeries – to address colonial trauma within the context of searching for a shared, transhistorical 'authentic gay subjectivity'. Morgensen is careful not to ascribe too much political significance to these gestures. There are, moreover, clear liabilities of such an appropriation of pagan imagery. Levelling many forms of historical and cultural difference, as Ade protests, in positing a universal indigeneity; risking the substitution of one racialised pre-history for another; consigning Indigenous peoples to the past: these are liabilities indeed.[55] We think again of those baleful foliate faces, putting us in mind of the traumatic weight of inhumanity borne so that Humanity can experience itself as authentic and liberated. But

[51] Peter Hennen, *Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen: Men in Community Queering the Masculine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 75; Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, p. 128.

[52] Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 119–35, esp. pp. 121, 131, quoting Rev. Sequoyah Ade, 'An Innovative Affair of Genocide': http://web.archive.org/web/20060511132249/http://angryindian.atspace.com/spirit.html.

[53] Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, p. 3 (italics original). Thrasher, 'Burning Man Founder', notes that the Burning Man festival is held on land once inhabited by Native Americans.

[54] Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, p. 136.

[55] Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*, p. 152.

Morgensen documents several positive interactions between Radical Faeries and Native gays working toward decolonisation, and we can at least see the lineaments of the complex political negotiation that would link Green Men to a challenge of settler colonial logic.

European culture is as well the medium for another confrontation with historical trauma in a novel written right around the time the Radical Faeries emerged. The Green Man presides over *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, Randolph Stow's 1980 novel set in a village in Suffolk, England. Stow was a Western Australian writer who eventually settled in England, which he claimed as the land of his ancestors, living there until his death in 2010. The book not only is set, but also was written in Suffolk, and its colonial memories are wrenching.[56]

In the opening scene of the book, on New Year's Day in a cottage nestled in a very English landscape, the protagonist, Crispin Clare, wakes from a dream. It is so cold in his bedroom that the water pitcher on the table next to his bed has frozen solid. Yet his pyjamas are drenched in sweat: 'It had been another fever-night', we are told in the narrative, and his dream had been a 'fever-dream'.[57] A face had appeared to him – 'a face made of summer leaves' – and not only a face but also a voice, 'the Green Man's voice', 'supernaturally loud' (p. 4). The dream has been a deeply internal experience – dreams are, of course, but this one feels especially interior: the voice sounds 'within the bones of the ear . . . internal as sound never was. And it had spoken to him, he thought he now remembered, in that language in which he so often dreamed, and would not hear spoken again' (p. 4).

Crispin Clare has come to Suffolk to try to recuperate from an experience so shattering that it has driven away the very 'idea of health' (p. 3), we are told in the first lines of the novel. The experience has also done away with the boundary between the inside and the outside world: Clare's bedroom is freezing because he sleeps with the windows open, '(for he had grown unused to white men's houses)' (p. 4), the narrative explains. He groans in reply to the fever-dream voice, using the same language as it has used – a lost language from another time and place – then catches himself embarrassedly. He's embarrassed, even in front of himself, because that language is what *non*-white men speak, in that other place. But here he is, white man, responding familiarly. The outside has come in: some colour barrier has been breached. There is something not white, now, in his very bones.

According to the cover of the first American paperback edition, the Green Man who haunts Clare's dreams looks exactly like one of the foliate heads in the

[56] Stow, born in 1935, was 'a fifth generation Australian, representing a long settled, educated, eccentric family', though he regarded his expatriation to England as 'a return to his ancestral home': Bruce King, 'Randolph Stow's Novels of Exile', *Antipodes* 1: 2 (November 1987), 75–8, at 77, 78.

[57] Randolph Stow, *The Girl Green as Elderflower* (New York: Taplinger, 1984), p. 4. Page numbers after subsequent quotations in my text refer to this edition.

cloister of Norwich Cathedral – a grim one vomiting vines, whose whiskers are leaves (Figure 14.2). But the first British edition has a different cover image that goes some way to suggest the racial dynamics of that first scene. The image (Figure 14.8) is the Green Man with green nose, eyes, lips on black skin of leaves, in a modern rendering by English artist John Piper, perhaps made expressly for the book. Piper is known for his neo-Romantic engagement with the English landscape in a large *oeuvre* of graphic works. He's also famous for representations of foliate heads, rendered as prints as well as in decorative media like tapestry, stained glass, and wallpaper – heads that he would have seen in the many English country churches that appear in his graphic works. Several of Piper's modernist and abstracted foliate heads have dark or even blackened faces; some appearing to wear what seem like beads, they have a primitivist feel.[58] Piper's foliate head on the British cover, I would argue, graphically gestures toward the racialisation of the Green Man that I have traced in the novel's first scene. This is a black Green Man. Its primitivism and darkness allude to racialised violence whose dimensions seem immense but, all the worse, in the novel are never fully revealed.

The dream leaves a 'vague affright', haunting Crispin Clare because it is so internal (p. 4). As the novel progresses, the link between the foliate head – a man's face made of leaves – and the boundary-shattering racial experience suffered by the protagonist is suggested again. Struggling to explain what had so torn him to pieces, Crispin Clare remarks to a friend: 'I'd lost the feeling of being a white man' (p. 75). And this felt 'like being lost in the woods' (p. 32). The collapse of racial boundaries feels like the collapse of the human into non-human 'nature', the white man engulfed by dark vegetation, the black man dehumanised. The fever-dream figure of the black Green Man, at once human and non-human, emerging from a world of racialised horror, hovers over this scene.

The crushing experience Clare is trying to describe has occurred in a colonial setting that remains unidentified in the novel but is identified in a companion work (Stow's novel *Visitants*, finished just after *The Girl Green as Elderflower*) as one of the Trobriand Islands in Papua New Guinea, colonised by Australia in the early twentieth century.[59] In *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, Clare identifies himself as a

[58] See, for example, 'Foliate Heads I' and 'Foliate Heads II' from 1953 (Orde Levenson, *'Quality and Experiment': The Prints of John Piper. A Catalogue Raisonné* (London: Laud Humphries, 1996), p. 63), the year work by Piper was shown in an exhibition in Perth when Stow was a student there (Daniel Brown, 'West Coast Correspondences: Randolph Stow Encounters Thom Gunn's *The Sense of Movement*', *Australian Literary Studies* 26: 1 (2011), 33–50, at 43). See also foliate heads from the 1970s, now at Tate Britain, London: www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/john-piper-1774 (accessed 30 September 2015).

[59] Anthony J. Hassall, 'Breaking the Silence', in A. J. Hassall (ed.), *Randolph Stow:* Visitants, *Episodes from Other Novels, Poems, Stories, Interviews, and Essays* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990), pp. 380–401, at p. 381. It is notable that the main character in *Visitants* is of uncertain racial status: he seems to be not quite white, but it is only in death that, as some say, he becomes 'a black man true'.

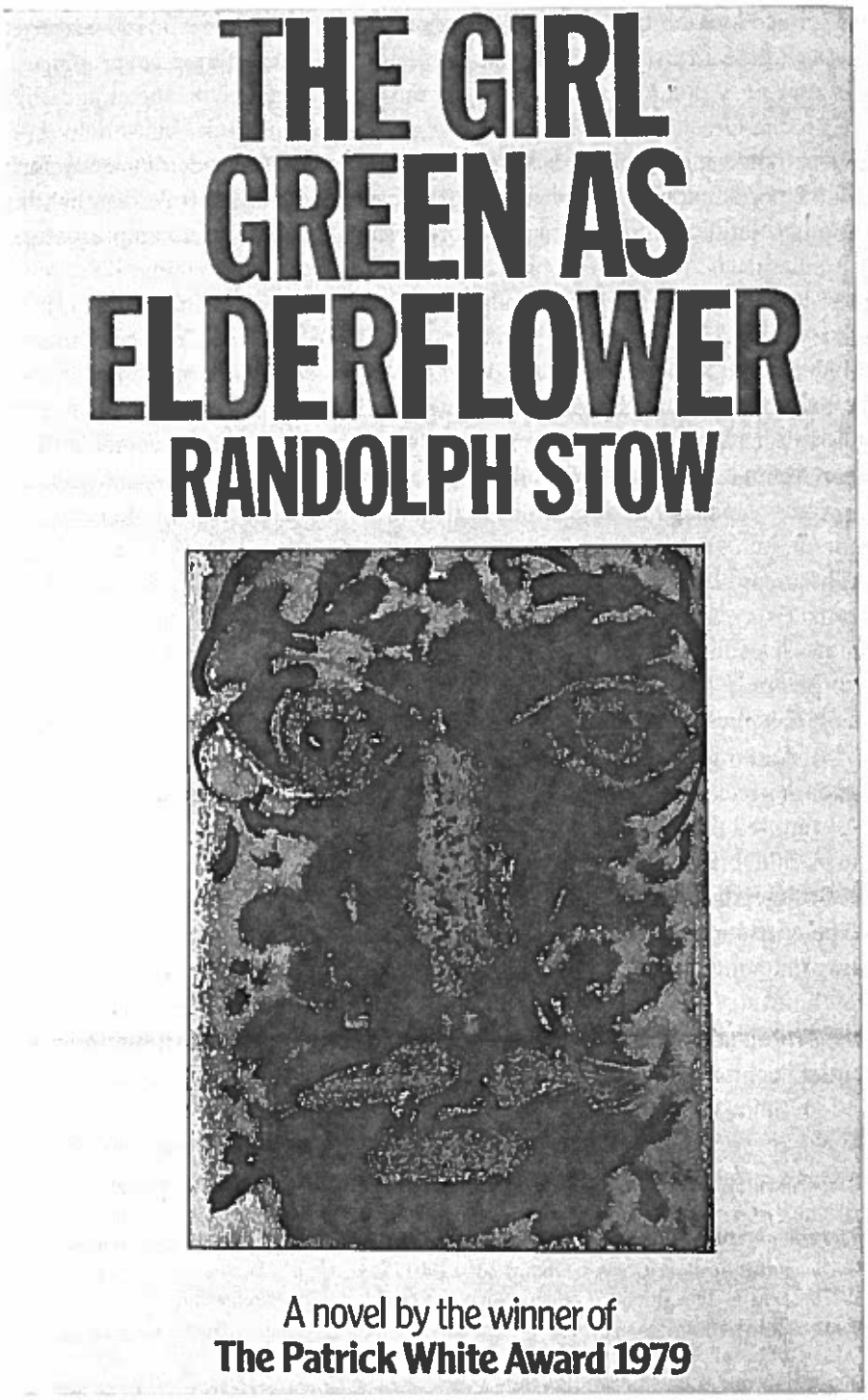

Figure 14.8 Cover of the first British edition of *The Girl Green as Elderflower* by Randolph Stow (Martin Secker & Warburg, 1980).

subject of empire, 'a relic of the past' (p. 31) as he says, in the present day of the novel, 1960: 'born in South Africa, of a New Zealand mother and a father born in India' (p. 31). 'Working for one of the colonial governments', he recounts, he became ill – 'bowled over by tropical diseases, some way from a doctor' (p. 30). But he was bowled over by more than malaria; the illness precipitated a crisis in him. It's vague and never explained clearly in the novel, but it seems that even as he has come to the islands from the outside he senses himself invaded by them, made internally impure somehow, in a recursive, toxic ambivalence that characterises the colonial encounter. He is at once 'aggressor and potential victim within a colonial pattern', in Helen Tiffin's terms, suffering a dissolution of boundaries even as he is part of an ultimately violent, racist colonial apparatus.[60] Clare recounts that during a dramatic storm one fateful night on the island, he thought to 'Put an end to it, remove myself, because nothing else was wrong there, only me' (p. 75): he tries to hang himself, yet he is, after all, not alone; he has been followed by a friend, a black man of the island, who cuts him down. We learn no more of the particulars of that incident or of the whole colonial backstory of the novel. But the weight of that background is tremendous. Clare's colonial experience of dissolution is comparable in his mind to another racialised twentieth-century trauma; he hints that it is, in fact, even more terrible. 'Plenty of worse things have happened', he concedes as he tries to explain his island experience to his Jewish friend Matthew. 'Oh, but to be so cut adrift', he goes on to lament. 'Perhaps even the German Jews didn't quite know that' (p. 76).

The solid England of Clare's forebears – his ancestors lived there, and he is named after one of them whose grave is prominent in the local cemetery – can, he comes to believe, address his dreadful experience of permeability, shadowed by violence, that the Green Man initially recalls to him. England can do this paradoxically because of the *lack* of sharp borders there between the past and present, because of the connections between the Middle Ages and the present day that Clare finds there. It is not just that Clare re-inserts himself into the flow of continuous history that has been broken by the colonial world with its different chronology; it is that past and present co-exist in an asynchronous *now*. The emphasis in the narrative is on precisely observed particulars of the East Anglian locality: local dialect is reproduced with a linguist's care (Stow studied linguistics), set off from the historically changed and changing London standard, which is also spoken; local legends that were set down in the twelfth century are rehearsed in the

[60] Helen Tiffin, 'Melanesian Cargo-Cults in *Tourmaline* and *Visitants*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 16: 1 (1981), 109–25, quoted in Andrew Lynch, '"I Have So Many Truths to Tell": Randolph Stow's *Visitants* and *The Girl Green as Elderflower*', *Australian Literary Studies* 26: 1 (2011), 20–32, at 25. 'Ambivalence' echoes Homi K. Bhabha's term; see, for example, his re-reading of Fanon in 'The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism', in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 66–84.

present moment; flora and fauna are continuous and unaltered from ancient times – indeed, the place is associated with an idyllic, prelapsarian time (p. 107) even as the inhabitants refer to Lucille Ball. The central modern characters play with a ouija board and the cards of the Tarot deck turn up through the narrative: such spiritualism links the present to the enchanted world of the Middle Ages, where spirits fly, mermen are fished out of the sea, and children are green as leeks. In this context, the affective value of the Green Man – that medieval figure who persists in the present day – gradually shifts from terrifying to consoling, and he becomes part of Crispin Clare's recovery process: the twin terrors of violence and collapse in that first chilly scene subside, and not only his personal trauma but the traumas of the twentieth century can, it seems, be redressed.

The therapy is literary. Clare is a writer, fictional proxy for Randolph Stow himself: Stow had worked as an anthropologist in the Trobriand Islands; he contracted cerebral malaria, 'attempted suicide and was invalided out', according to Martin Leer, and eventually moved to East Anglia.[61] Clare rewrites narratives from twelfth- and thirteenth-century works by Ralph of Coggeshall, William of Newburgh, Gervase of Tilbury, Walter Map, Roger Howden, and Gerald of Wales, among others. (And Stow provides his own meticulous translations from the Latin of Ralph and William in an appendix.) These are tales of visitants to and from other worlds, including the Antipodes: abducted children carried away, mermen caught by local fishermen, green children crawling out of a pit. Clare undertakes to recast these medieval stories in a collection he calls 'The Lord Abbot's Tales', populating them with people living now in the village, including his cousin and her children, living in a house near his cottage; the locals at the pub; long-lost and new friends; and a mysterious girl new to the area. Recasting these tales of medieval 'loss and exile' (as Andrew Lynch puts it), Clare works through his own racialised displacement and psychic disintegration. Images of the medieval Green Man attend this process.

So *The Girl Green as Elderflower* is a novel structured as a frame tale collection: 'The Lord Abbot's Tales' (three tales, themselves including other tales) are framed by a present-day narrative. Early on in that present-day frame, right after that chilling opening scene in Clare's bedroom, a spirit speaks through the ouija board, communicating her name ('Malkin') and place of birth through the board, speaking not only Latin but also Middle English. Further, she channels a message for Clare in Biga Kiriwina, that fever-language of his colonial past, that language of his nightmares. When he sees this message, Clare at first collapses at this threatening manifestation of his own past self – how could this be? where would that voice be coming from? – but then, prompted by details the spirit reveals, he consults his books, finds a rendition of this sprite's story in Ralph of Coggeshall's

[61] Martin Leer, 'Honour the Single Soul: Homage to Randolph Stow (1936–2010)', *Australian Literary Studies* 26: 1 (2011), 1–19, at 3.

Chronicon Anglicanum, and determines to retell it. Malkin and he are 'birds of a feather', he reflects (p. 35); she knows his past, she knows his Biga Kiriwina name, and she is as displaced as he is. In his version of her story, 'Concerning a fantastic sprite', Clare uncovers gendered violence – rape and incest – at the sprite's origin, responsible for her spectral condition and her displacement from home. Clare reworks this account into an asynchronous narrative set in an enchanted landscape, and that enchantment crosses from embedded tale into the present-day frame as the song of a cuckoo moves from the world of the sprite into Clare's bedroom in the following section. Loss and displacement still ache at the end of that tale but in the cuckoo's song there is a suggestion of cyclical regeneration. The cycle of life is linked to the Green Man in the following section. Clare takes a walk through his garden and ventures further out into the landscape, in an acute, closely observed engagement of his senses – scent, sound, sight, touch. The dog of the neighbouring farmhouse bounds to join him, but then, in a quick crunching gulp, tears into and devours a pheasant – a favourite one of Clare's in fact, wing 'hanging hideously from the dog's jaws'. Clare can view this sudden, shocking destruction with equanimity: 'What at one time would have sickened him he could now once more take with calm. It was the way of the green god' (p. 68). The death that gets meted out, he understands, is part of a cycle or union of life and death: 'the wing with its coarse feathers disappeared' down the canine throat and the dog ambles home. So 'the way of the green god' – the Green Man – allows Clare calm; death, even grotesquely violent death, he recognises, is part of a larger union.

'Concerning a fantastic sprite' is the first of 'The Lord Abbot's Tales', and I think the simplest. The second tale is the densest transfer point between twelfth- and twentieth-century ills and attempts at reparation, with the most reference to the colonial backstory. It is a brilliant recasting of another story found in Ralph's *Chronicon Anglicanum* (supplemented with other elements from a related story from Walter Map), thoroughly peopled with characters from Clare's present-day world. In Clare's version, 'Concerning a wild man caught in the sea', colonial trauma is correlated with anti-Jewish and with homophobic violence, and love between men is both intensely desired and finally impossible. There is no healing, and though there is a wild man (a traditional figure conceptually and visually akin to the Green Man), he is tragically grief-stricken at the end of the tale; there is no green restitution at all.

In contrast to the open wounds of that story comes the third and last of 'The Lord Abbot's Tales', the tale most explicitly presided over by the Green Man: in it traumatic experiences of displacement and genocide seem to be healed. 'Concerning a boy and a girl emerging from the earth' is a retelling of the famous accounts by Ralph of Coggeshall and William of Newburgh of the green children who emerged from a pit in Suffolk. In Clare's version, the girl and boy are taken in by a Fisher-King-like figure, a knight who carries a walking stick carved with the head of a Green Man. Both children stare into this face deeply and longingly, associating

it with their original home. The boy dies, but the girl eventually finds love (after much seeking) with Matthew, a Jewish and gay character from Clare's present-day life figured here as a Jew of Lynn who has escaped a massacre. (Reference is to the historically documented late twelfth-century event.) In explaining her attachment to the Green Man, the girl has said that this green figure 'is our god . . . the bringer into being, and the destroyer. He is neither cruel nor merciful, but dances for joy at the variousness of everything that is' (p. 127). The girl eventually weakens and starts to fail; a priest whom she has summoned in her last days tries to allegorise her story in a neo-Platonic assertion of 'an eternal Providential love', as Andrew Lynch has analysed this scene. But she will have none of it, dying without reply.

The Green Man's message is identified explicitly as a pagan one: he is one of the old gods, representing a cycle of death and renewal, amoral but inevitable and thus apparently consoling. His affect is pitiless amusement (p. 4). This conceptualisation of the Green Man, endorsed with solemnity in this final tale, is central to Crispin Clare's recovery, his accepting violence, death, displacement as part of existence on this earth – his finding, as Melanie Duckworth writes, a version of 'belonging that can accommodate grief, loss and exile'.[62] The frame narrative ends the novel with a short closing scene that includes a dream countering and correcting that initial fever-dream: at the last, Clare has a vision in which he is integrated with characters at once medieval and modern, including the green girl, who addresses him using his Biga Kiriwina name and speaks the island language. This time, in contrast to the opening scene, he isn't unnerved; he replies familiarly and is at ease. The frame narrative has proceeded from that wintery beginning in Clare's freezing bedroom finally to spring.

But gendered and sexualised aggression and harm linger just under the surface in that very last section, coupled with a hint of settler-colonial disgust at Native peoples. Clare receives a letter from his friend Matthew jocularly recounting a drunken scene in a bar in Alaska, a scene crackling with misogynist, homophobic, and anti-Native energies. The Green Man, construed as amoral, pitiless and amused, may dance for joy at 'variousness', but this pagan version of quietism is inadequate to address the full violence of the colonial encounter. Stow brilliantly maps the nexus of sexual, racial and genocidal violence within colonialism and suggests its long historical roots, but precisely because of this complex historical mapping no narrow interpretation of that leaf-face as the god of a timeless, amoral nature can adequately govern a vision of repair. Such a reading posits 'nature', invulnerable and bemused, as separate from humans, deploying humans as playthings. That kind of Green Man is far from a figure of transformation. Though the characters in *The Girl Green as Elderflower* want nothing more than connection to a larger universe, as Bruce King has poignantly seen, the human/non-human

[62] Melanie Duckworth, 'Grievous Music: Randolph Stow's Middle Ages', *Australian Literary Studies* 26: 3–4 (2011), 102–14, at 104.

(or human/'nature') binary is more pronounced than ever: the Green Man, interpreted as 'nature', effectively functions to distance or even exculpate humans from traumatic wounds they visit on one another.[63] The consoling face of the Green Man, over the course of the novel, may have turned from black to white, as it were – just as in the last tale the green girl's skin turns almost entirely white (like an elderflower, growing white out of a green bud); but that initial, black-faced Green Man continues to challenge us to address histories of subjugation and trauma as we close the cover and see that image again.

Indeed, although the novel's deployment of the Green Man backs away from a reckoning with colonial injustice and inhumanity, I want to suggest that what I have posited above as the transformative power of the foliate head is nonetheless hinted at in the novel – not in the Green Man as it is ultimately invoked in the final narrative but in that enigmatic green girl. I want to hold out the possibility that the green girl, 'refusing definition' (as Lynch puts it) and dying, silently and powerfully, with a 'green flush' (p. 136) in her eyes, allows Stow to intimate 'how the "world" might be re-imagined and re-inhabited after the colonialist and racist disasters of the modern era', as Lynch explains Stow's project.[64] Here, then, transformative power operates not through and beyond the masculine, as I have argued it does in the foliate heads of the Middle Ages, but through and beyond the feminine. That green girl, that figure known as both Mirabel and Amabel, is much less stabilised as a character and a concept than Stow's Green Man turns out to be, and she is really pretty odd, recounting to different enquiring people stories of her many various and contradictory origins (she is from the Antipodes, she is from Saint Martin's land, she is a Tartar sold as a slave) and exposing 'the inadequacy of the "white man" interrogative process'.[65] I do not see here that Stow is constraining this figure with a binary human gender role (thinking back to the 'Green Woman or Green Man' posited by Burning Man), though her erotic encounters – only, and eagerly, with males – might lead one toward that reading. But, rather, I want to suggest that this green character has the potential in this novel – a queer potential – for multiplicity, difference, and transformation. Conceptually and affectively exceeding the pat cyclicality of Stow's Green Man and bleeding a verdant hue through to the very last moment of the novel, Mirabel/Amabel's seductiveness and refusal of definition render the novel continually engaging and open-ended. 'Through her', Lynch argues, 'hermeneutic zeal is frustrated by multiplicity, yet consoled by endless renewal, both defeated and satisfied, and kept from the possibility of tragic finality'.[66]

[63] King, 'Randolph Stow's Novels', esp. p. 76; he notes the explorations of quietism and 'passive acceptance' in the novels, at p. 76.
[64] Lynch, '"I Have So Many Truths"', pp. 30, 29.
[65] Lynch, '"I Have So Many Truths"', p. 30.
[66] Lynch, '"I Have So Many Truths"', p. 30.

The greenness flushing those dying eyes is a 'paradox', Stow writes (p. 136). Amabel/Mirabel stares forth in death, not recognising or comprehending what is around; the green girl is going back into the unknown. She is not distanced from the human as is the green god, but has lived intimately in human community, almost white yet still green, between human and non-. Such an entity requires us to imagine, to visit, to dwell in discomfiting, upsetting, unfathomed worlds – worlds of animacies extending beyond the human, beyond the animal, beyond the plant, but nonetheless reckoning with the politics of humanism and its others. Such an entity requires us to face what is at the heart of it all: the dread that is conditioned by dehumanising practices, these histories of inhumanism, the fear of levelled hierarchies, broken boundaries, toppled sovereignty – the horror of interdependency. The balefulness of these foliate heads is deep.

Queer world-making with the Green Man, experimental and unpredictable, disrupts taxonomies, posits the unrecognisable, and asks us to linger in it. In such transformative worlds we would be planted in a radically enlarged field of agents. We would be stripped of sovereignty and dared to find another way of being. Queer world-making acts foster intimacies and animacies. Remember histories. Sprout leaves. Breathe tendrils. Utter vines.

The medieval plays a part in this world-making. The appropriations of leaf-head imagery I have discussed are variously engaged with its medievalness. Burning Man's invocation doesn't draw at all on the historicity of the figure but, rather, sees it as archetypal. Yet Stow is centrally committed to the specificities of the Middle Ages – its languages, localities, and legends – and to bringing them into an asynchronous temporality that affords opportunity for addressing historical trauma. Lady Raglan and the Radical Faeries construe the foliate head's medievalness much more generally, as pagan-ness and resistance to dominant religion. In these three treatments (Stow, Lady Raglan, Radical Faeries), the historical past writ large affords a certain resistant force. The Middle Ages are not equally important to all, but ancientness in all three instances links up with queer world-making in opening a space for resistance to dominant regimes.

Not far from my office at NYU there is a Green Man on East 9th Street. The rotund face bursts off the wall of an apartment building and disgorges foliage, challenging the increasingly gentrified East Village with histories of past lives and possibilities of weird life-forms – that we may or may not recognise, and that may or may not recognise us – in future, queer, worlds.