

Indian Burial Grounds in American Fiction and Film

The 'Indian burial ground' is such a well-worn plot device in American horror that it has long passed into the realm of cliché. Even a critical analysis of the theme risks descending into circular argument as its meaning is so seemingly self-evident: it reflects guilt, or simply fear, over the possibility of revenge enacted by the wronged Native American dead. This lends itself easily to the assumptions of Gothic criticism, centring around notions of cultural anxiety that are always lurking in the background of society but brought to the fore by horror narratives such as the haunted house story. There is still much, though, that the prevalence of the theme can reveal. This chapter aims to go beyond accepted truisms by combining historical analysis, postcolonial criticism and Gothic genre studies to place the Indian burial ground in a wider chain of cultural connections, and also to signal its demise.

It is crucial to first establish the principle that the Indian burial ground is not a genuine facet of Native culture, but a malleable trope that appears in American Gothic fiction for a specific narrative purpose. The typical narrative is about a (usually white) family who move into a new home, are subject to a set of disturbing supernatural events, and eventually uncover the fact that the house has been built on an old Indian burial ground. The desecration of this sacred land has triggered vengeance in the form of hauntings by spirits, possession of individuals, or even the possession of the house itself. Either way, what drives the narrative is the torment inflicted on characters who are personally innocent of wrongdoing or at least well-intentioned. As Hawthorne writes in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*ⁱ (1851), 'the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones' (Hawthorne 1851, iv). Leslie Fiedler's influential claim that 'the slaughter of the Indians, who would not yield their lands to the carriers of utopia' (Fiedler 1966, 143) provides a Gothic sensibility to American literature, which cannot help but return obsessively to the notion that the sins of the nation's past will be avenged, even by supernatural means.

The archetypal Indian burial ground story describes here stems from a limited flourishing in horror from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, leading to subsequent parodies in television shows like *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, and an entry in the website *TV Tropes*, which considers it hackneyed enough to qualify as a 'dead horse trope' (TVTropes, 2022). Notable examples include Jay Anson's *The Amityville Horror* (1977) and subsequent film adaptation (1979), Stanley Kubrick's film version of *The Shining* (1980), and Stephen King's novel *Pet Sematary* (1983), as well as its own later film version (1989). Colin Dickey's reading of these narratives echoes Fiedler's idea of colonial guilt:

The narrative of the haunted Indian burial ground hides a certain anxiety about the land on which Americans - specifically white, middle-class Americans - live. Embedded deep in the idea of home ownership - the Holy Grail of American middle-class life - is the idea that we don't, in fact, own the land we've just bought. Time and time again in these stories, perfectly average, innocent American families are confronted by ghosts who have persevered for centuries, who remain vengeful for the damage done. Facing these ghosts and expelling them, in many of these horror stories, becomes a means of re-fighting the Indian Wars of past centuries (Dickey 2017, 45).

These past centuries will be returned to here, but it worth noting the specific socio-political circumstances that drove the creation and reception of these highly-influential Indian burial ground stories. Following decades of activism by Native Americans, the *Indian Self-Determination and Assistance Act* was passed in 1975, ushering in greater Native sovereignty. This was seized on by

individual tribes and nations, who used copies of old treaties as the basis for restitution, winning significant settlements in states such as Alaska, Massachusetts, and Maine (Tindall & Shi 1984, 1084-1085). Maine, of course, is setting for much of Stephen King's fiction, including *Pet Sematary*, in which King explicitly brings in the Native American land debate. When Louis Creed and his family move into their idyllic new home, one of the most striking things about it lies beyond the house itself: 'I know it sounds funny to say your nice little house there on the main road, with its phone and electric lights and cable TV and all, is on the edge of a wilderness', neighbour Jud Crandall tells the family, 'but it is' (King 1989, 30). This 'wilderness' is specifically undeveloped due to restitution claims:

Beyond the house was a large field for the children to play in, and beyond the field were woods that went on damn near for ever. The property abutted state lands, the realtor had explained, and there would be no development in the foreseeable future. The remains of the Micmac Indian tribe had laid claim to nearly 8,000 acres in Ludlow, and the complicated litigation, involving the Federal government as well as that of the state, might stretch into the next century (4).

Events similar to this were contemporary with the publication of King's novel in 1983. Some Mi'kmaq peoples do indeed live in Northern Maine, in Aroostook County on the Canada-United States border, where the real town of Ludlow is situated, although issues over contested treaties stretched much further. As Joy Porter points out, 'when King wrote his novel, the state was embroiled in a legal fight over sixty percent of its territory with the Maliseet, Penobscot, and Passamaquoddy bands of the Wabanaki Confederacy' (Porter 2018, 53). Despite large payments and land concessions, the state 'continues to fight Indian peoples over clean water, potential gaming revenue, and the treaty obligations inherent in its 1820 constitution' (53). The wilderness has been long synonymous in the American imagination with the threatening figure of the Indian, stretching at least as far back as the 'captivity narratives' of the seventeenth century, such as Cotton Mather's account of Hannah Duston's capture and subsequent bloody revenge, or Mary Rowlandson's autobiographical account of her own capture and ransom.

In *Pet Sematary* it is not the house itself that is built on an Indian burial ground, but a patch of ground in the wilderness beyond. Moving past a pet cemetery (which a previous generation of children have misspelled on a sign) into this deeper territory, Louis Creed discovers that the ground has the power to resurrect first his cat, killed on a busy road, and then with horrific inevitability, his young son who is likewise victim to a speeding truck. Both come back from the dead, but changed. Although the physical bodies are more or less restored, both pet and son become evil, tainted by the process of their return. Old Jud Crandall relates the story that the Micmacs had stopped using the place because 'the ground had gone sour' (36). King's chilling description works well to create atmosphere, but bears little relation to any real Native burial practices. Nor does it claim to: what is often missed in a reading of the novel is that King uses a device straight from H.P. Lovecraft. The Micmacs have no memory of how and why their ancestors used the land, and this is clearly connected to an ancient and malign force that may be older than the human race itself. Jud suggests that the Micmacs had resorted to cannibalism during harsh winters, invoking the evil spirit of the Wendigo, but it is highly possible that this is hearsay and projection. As Porter notes, 'Indian ghosts, like other ghosts, increasingly became inhabitants and products of the mind rather than exterior entities' (51); a repository of sorts for settler fears and justification of violence enacted by the colonisers rather than against them. It is interesting to note that in King's earlier novel *The Shining* it is European pioneers who are associated with cannibalism with reference to the historically documented case of the snowbound Donner Party in the Sierra Nevada in the winter of 1846-47.

Although it is inevitable that some Native American groups did indeed resort to such measures at some point in history, it was early pioneers who were more likely to find themselves starving to death in an unfamiliar and unforgiving land. This projection of anxieties onto another group is embodied in the figure of the wendigo. Rooted in the folklore of the native Algonquian peoples of the northern US and Canada, the wendigo is a spirit associated with starvation and cannibalism, but also greed and destruction in the broader sense. This symbolic aspect is more important than the notion of the wendigo as a literal monster akin to a European werewolf. It is little wonder, then, that stories of the wendigo abound in colonial encounters and that Europeans would become so fascinated by a creature that so closely reflects their own rapacious plundering of the American continent.

The power of the association of ancient vengeance and Indian burial grounds is such that one of the most popular horror films of the 1980s, *Poltergeist* (appearing a year before *Pet Sematary* in 1982), is frequently cited as the prime example of the theme when in fact there is no mention of an Indian burial ground in the film. Set in a planned community in California, a family home has been built over a cemetery but the developers have failed to move the bodies, only the gravestones. The two key strands of the Indian burial ground discussed here (the disturbance of the dead and ancient evil) both have a long history in Gothic novels and ghost stories that have no reliance on an appeal to Native American traditions. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), generally considered to be the first Gothic novel, even specifically prefigures the anxieties of the Indian Burial Ground narrative. Manfred, the owner of Otranto, is forced to flee his castle when the original owner (murdered by Manfred's grandfather) returns in giant ghostly form to take his revenge, killing Manfred's son. The sins of the fathers, as with Hawthorne's outlook, are indeed visited on the children. In the American context, it is the 'original sin' of colonial theft and violence that poisons the well and leads to an uncertainty about ownership that is easily exploited in horror. In the case of *Poltergeist*, the expectation is so strong that it overrides the actual content in the popular imagination. *Poltergeist*, in fact, is very much a ghost story in the vein of nineteenth-century spiritualist belief, where the restless dead simply need to be appeased through recognition and treatment with respect. This is a theme mercilessly skewered by Shirley Jackson in *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959), where the idealistic Mrs Montague insists that 'empathy' and 'pure love' (Jackson 1999, 217) are what is needed to resolve the supernatural occurrences. In the case of *Hill House* such naïveté does not account for the possibility that the house itself has become a force of pure malevolent evil, and that humans can only ever become victim to its insane whims.

The tone of the American haunted house story is, generally speaking, one of deep pessimism. In *The Haunting of Hill House* this is played out through the protagonist Eleanor Vance. Invited to take part in a scientific investigation into hauntings, she puts all of her hopes and dreams for the future in the invitation to stay at the house, where independence, adventure, and even romance seem to be possible. Instead, her deep investment in this prospect results in madness and death. The message is clear, and it is also one that applies to the prosaic business of buying a home: if it seems too good to be true, it probably is. Haunted house stories reflect the socio-economic conditions of their production, and global recessions in the 1970s and 1980s no doubt contributed to the appeal of owning a dream home, no matter what the catch might be. This partly explains the cultural phenomenon of the *Amityville Horror*. Jay Anson's original book was published in 1977, and details the events that drove George and Cathy Lutz, together with their three children, to flee their home two years earlier. It is presented as a true story, rather than fiction, and has now become a franchise which has spawned at least five further books and more than a dozen films, although many of these stray very far from the potential plausibility of the original. Early US editions went so far as to print the title as *The Amityville Horror: A True Story*, and the 1978 UK edition uses the following

tagline: 'More hideously frightening than *The Exorcist* because it actually happened!' (Anson 1978). *The Amityville Horror* is constructed along the lines of a factual account, even containing floor plans of the property interior. Anson's book reads like a true crime novel, except the crimes committed are largely supernatural in nature. It is here where supernatural and human horrors become entangled, as 112 Ocean Avenue had actually seen traumatic violence at the time of the Lutz's purchase. In 1974 Ronald 'Butch' DeFeo Junior was convicted of killing his parents and four siblings with a high-powered rifle in their sleep. He claimed to have heard voices, but as he testified, 'whenever I looked around, there was no one there, so it must have been God talking to me' (Anson 1978, 17-18). In this case it probably wasn't God, but something, Anson's book suggests, was indeed whispering in his ear.

The Lutzes are shown the property (ironically given the name 'High Hopes' by a previous owner) by a real estate agent who admits to this being the DeFeo house but then comments, 'I wonder if I should have told you which house this was *before* or *after* you saw it' (17).ⁱⁱ The house is for sale at a bargain price, although still outside the Lutz's budget. None of this seems to matter to the Lutzes, who are so unconcerned that they even purchase the furniture left in the house by the DeFeos, including the beds they were shot in. As Anson says, 'The tragic history of 112 Ocean Avenue didn't matter to George, Kathy, or their three children. This was still the home they had always wanted' (17). Despite this, they become less satisfied with their purchase when strange faces appear in the windows at night and the doors are ripped from their hinges. It is not only the external forces that affect the family, however, but their own sense of identity. The family begin to sleep on their stomachs, as the DeFeos were found on the night of the murders. George grows a beard generally begins to resemble Ronnie DeFeo, surprising the barman in the local drinking spot, 'The Witches Brew', with the resemblance. George becomes ever more irritable and his potential for violence becomes as threatening as the supernatural happenings.

George takes on the aspect of DeFeo, or perhaps something older that is coming into being through him, just as it did to the earlier inhabitant of the house. 112 Ocean Avenue becomes the archetype of the 'Bad Place' to use Stephen King's terminology. As he writes in his non-fiction *Danse Macabre*, 'the good horror story about the Bad Place whispers that we are not locking the world out; we are locking ourselves in ... with *them*' (King 1993, 299). King's dramatic use of the term 'them' is indicative of the Othering that occurs within such narratives. In the case of Indian burial ground stories the image is a dual one: on one level the Indian has returned to carry out revenge, but as this is an imaginative construction of the Indian, rather than being related to any real Native people, then the horror is already within, and further to this, becomes intertwined with colonial anxiety and guilt. The forces of historical violence are so powerful as to become cosmic. In the case of *The Amityville Horror*, it is here that the narrative turns towards this source of horror. The ancient evil that is brought into being through George, and Ronnie DeFeo before him, is explicitly associated with Native history, albeit not strictly a burial ground:

It seems the Shinnecock Indians used land on the Amityville River as an enclosure for the sick, mad and dying. These unfortunates were penned up until they died of exposure. However, the record noted that the Shinnecoeks did not use this tract as a consecrated burial mound because they believed it to be infested by demons [...] In the late 1600s, white settlers eased the first Americans out of the area [...] One of the more notorious settlers who came to the newly-named Amityville in those days was a John Catchum or Ketcham who had been forced out of Salem, Massachusetts, for practising witchcraft. John set up residence within 500 feet of where George now lived, continuing his alleged devil worship (Anson 1978, 80).

None of this holds up to scrutiny. The Shinnecocks did not inhabit this area, none of these practices are genuine, and Native beliefs (in a long tradition of American Gothic fiction) are conflated with Christian mythology around demons. The euphemism that the first American's were 'eased' out is also dubious. John Catchum is similarly invented. Despite this, it plays powerfully into the received narrative around Native Americans and mysterious ancient evil that constitutes the Indian burial ground story. Indeed, in the blockbuster 1979 film version, it is stated that Indians are actually buried in the ground. A similar tweak occurs in Stanley Kubrick's film version of *The Shining* (1980): the Overlook Hotel, which in King's novel is imbued with an ambiguous evil compounded throughout history, is given a more straightforward origin as having been built over an Indian burial ground. Perhaps in a self-conscious nod to colonial history, Jack Torrance quotes Kipling to the bartender conjured up by the hotel's malicious consciousness, declaring, 'White man's burden, Lloyd my man, white man's burden.' The 2005 remake of *The Amityville Horror* adds a postcolonial twist to this: rather than being a devil worshipper, Ketchum is now portrayed as a puritan minister who tortured and killed Natives in a demented religious quest of conversion. Political awareness of the hypocrisy and misdeeds of Christian colonists have become so fully integrated into mainstream American culture that this itself has become the source of horror, signalling the death of the straightforward Indian burial ground motif.

Structurally, these haunted house stories are at least as Pliny the Younger's Letter to Sura in the 1st Century CE, and probably older. Pliny's tale stands out due to having all of the key elements of a text like *The Amityville Horror*. Athenodorus the philosopher buys a house that seems too cheap, but he can't resist the bargain. He is then haunted by a spectre that disturbs him with clanking chains and generally frightening behaviour. It is discovered that a corpse, weighed down with chains, has been improperly buried under the courtyard. When it is reburied with the proper respect and ceremony, the haunting no longer occurs. Perhaps even more notable than the familiar plot elements is the way that it purports to be a true story. This trick would be repeated when the Gothic novelists revisited ancient superstition for their material, and sometimes claimed (as Walpole did with *Otranto*) that these were 'found' manuscripts, rather than fictional inventions of the author. Crystal B. Lake notes that *Otranto* is 'encoded with political allusions' (Lake 2013, 511), and indeed each version of this story speaks to its own socio-historical moment: sometimes purposefully, sometimes unconsciously reflecting the concerns and mood of its day. In the United States the treatment of Native Americans was always going to rise to the surface in Gothic narratives, specifically in the politically-charged era under discussion. The 1970s in particular had seen highly public protests from groups such as the American Indian Movement (AIM), including the occupation of Alcatraz (1969-71), the Trail of Broken Treaties (1972), and the Wounded Knee Occupation (1973). The events at Wounded Knee were given huge public attention following Sacheen Littlefeather's appearance at the Oscars, where she talked about Wounded Knee alongside the poor representation of Native Americans in Hollywood, and rejected the Oscar for best actor on behalf of Marlon Brando, who supported AIM. Running parallel to these wider movements was a specific focus on burial grounds. As James Riding In notes, 'throughout the 1970s and 1980s, AIAD [American Indian Against Desecration] challenged the human remains collections and curatorial policies of government agencies, museums, and universities' (Riding In 1996, 242), with AIM forcibly reclaiming artefacts and burning field notes at a Minnesota dig site in 1972 (242). Riding In comments that in Pawnee spiritual belief 'wandering spirits often beset the living with psychological and health problems' (240) and that to bring this about through disturbance of graves 'constitutes abominable acts of sacrilege, desecration, and depravity' (240-241). Thus there is a conflict between the rights of living Native Americans to maintain the sanctity of their own dead, and colonial scientific ideology that places European systems of knowledge above these rights.ⁱⁱⁱ

A seam of anxiety over these unresolved historical and continuing injustices has run through American cultural productions for a long time. Fiedler's argument, taken up by countless critics since, suggests that there is a foundational trauma that authors and filmmakers cannot help but return to. Teresa Goddu, likewise, casts this in the language of psychoanalysis:

The nation's narratives - its foundational fictions and self-mythologizations - are created through a process of displacement: their coherence depends on exclusion. By resurrecting what these narratives repress, the gothic disrupts the dream world of national myth with the nightmares of history (Goddu 1997, 10).

'History' is a crucial word here: the popular notion that the United States lacks history rests on the erasure of Native cultures, or to be more precise the mythologising of Native Americans into a timeless, stereotyped projection of Otherness. It is telling that in so many of these narratives, the most fearful spectre that can be conjured is the idea that something is incredibly *old*. In *Pet Semetary*, Jud Crandall notes how the Micmacs sanded off the top of a hill to make the flat area for the supernatural burial ground, claiming that 'no one know how, no more than anyone knows how the Mayans built their pyramids. And the Micmacs have forgot themselves, just like the Mayans have' (130). The ground, as noted earlier, has 'gone sour'. Similarly, in *The Amityville Horror*, it is not necessarily the house itself that causes problems, but the ground it is built on. A reporter after the events allegedly discovers that 'tragedy had struck nearly every family inhabiting the place, as well as an earlier house built on the same site' (12). There is a sense that this Bad Place is literally timeless, yet danger is always possible in the moment. This projected eternal immanence is summed up by a character in a slightly earlier (explicitly fictional) novel with a similar theme; Robert Marasco's *Burnt Offerings* (1973). Here a sinister old woman tries to rent out her grand old family home for the summer, claiming, 'There's centuries in these rooms, Mrs. Rolfe. This house - why it's been on this land longer than anyone can remember ... It's practically immortal. I sincerely believe that' (Marasco 1974, 54).

The Indian Burial Ground narrative conflates this sense of a sublimely terrifying past with a version of Native American history filtered through the lens of European settlers. The ideological necessity of casting colonial systems of knowledge as superior goes a long way towards explaining this. The idea that indigenous people might know more about the land, and might have access to power through this knowledge, is one that leads inevitably to the demonization of the Native. The association of Native Americans with the Devil runs deep in Puritan settler culture and continues until relatively recently. In *The Amityville Horror* there is a logical chain from Native cultural practices, to the mention of demons, to the devil-worshipping Catchum. The association is a staple of American Gothic: Hawthorne's 'Young Goodman Brown' (1835), for example, sees its protagonist embark on a journey where he fears the 'devilish Indian behind every tree' (Hawthorne 1863, 88). Hawthorne's short story, however, exposes this idea of the devilish Indian for the projection that it is. It is in fact Brown who meets with the Devil in the forest, and his pious Puritan friends and family who congregate in a ritual black mass. Alfred A. Cave makes the distinction between actual Native American religious practices and how this was interpreted in the colonial period, arguing that 'Puritan accounts of shamanic practice relied upon a false analogy with English witchcraft that reinforced long-standing prejudices and misconceptions' (Cave 1992, 15). Going further back to the first encounters with America, Cave notes that, 'those 16th century Englishmen who gave any thought to the New World generally believed that its inhabitants were cruel, degenerate Devil worshippers' (15), and indeed the famous Captain John Smith, reporting from Virginia, was 'convinced that the Powhatan Indians were ruled by Satan himself' (16).

The first notable literary work on the theme of the Indian burial ground, is Philip Freneau's poem 'The Indian Burying Ground' (1787). The speaker suggests that the spirits of the Native dead do not rest easy, but continue to hunt and feast as they did while alive. It warns, 'Thou, stranger, that shalt come this way/No fraud upon the dead commit' (Freneau 1948, 9) but does not specify any particular consequences. Instead, the atmosphere is one of supernatural frisson, suggesting 'And Reason's self shall bow the knee/To shadows and delusions here' (10). With this Romantic version of the 'Indian' (as opposed to any real Native American individual or culture) cemented in the popular imagination, it becomes a flexible tool to add plausibility to supernatural narratives. Washington Irving's 'The Devil and Tom Walker' (1824) exemplifies the swirling mixture of Indians, violence, revenge, and the Devil that characterise the Indian burial ground narrative. Set near Boston, it describes the events triggered when Tom Walker takes a shortcut past an old Indian fort, 'used as a place of refuge for their squaws and children' (Irving 1897, 96) but now destroyed and scattered with rusted weapons and bones. The blame for the traumas of the past might be put firmly on white colonialism but predictably the Indian is blamed: 'the common people had a bad opinion of it [...] it was asserted that the savages held incantations here, and made sacrifices to the evil spirit' (97). Walker finds a skull, cracked open with a tomahawk, and on picking it up is confronted by a 'black man' who is specifically 'neither negro nor Indian' (97). He is in fact the Devil, or 'Old Scratch' as he is known by. Notably, Old Scratch reinforces the stereotype of the savage, devil-worshipping Indian, but at the same time turns the table on the Puritans who have supplanted them:

I am he to whom the red men devoted this spot, and now and then roasted a white man by way of sweet-smelling sacrifice. Since the red men have been exterminated by you white savages, I amuse myself by presiding at the persecutions of quakers and anabaptists; I am the great patron and prompter of slave dealers, and the grand master of the Salem witches (99-100).

Old Scratch's declaration makes clear the way that land becomes tainted by violence, hypocrisy, and injustice. As with Goddu's argument, this resurrects what has been buried in order to exclude it from the national narrative of what Fiedler refers to as 'a dream of innocence' as opposed to 'the compounded evil of the past from which no one in Europe could ever feel himself free' (Fiedler 1966, 143). The Indian burial ground, far from being reflective of Native American culture, is rather a repository of all of the compounded evil of the American past. Walker sells his soul to Old Scratch in exchange for buried pirate treasure, but when he is eventually claimed as a result of this Faustian pact, his money turns to ash and dust and he is forever damned to haunt the fort. There are clear parallels between Irving's supernatural tale and later American horror narratives such as *The Amityville Horror*, where the spirit^{iv} of Ronnie DeFeo becomes attached to the house, having been affected by some ill-defined historical events involving Native Americans and the Devil.

What a study into the Indian burial ground narrative uncovers is that it is not just culturally inaccurate but it is dubious that such a story even exists at all in any meaningful way. There are no doubt examples of the theme, but there is only a small handful of books and films that are associated with it in popular culture. Of these, *Poltergeist* is wrongly credited with using it, the film version of *The Shining* uses it as a throwaway reference, in *The Amityville Horror* it is a kind of asylum rather than a burial ground, and in *Pet Sematary* the house is not actually built on the supernatural burial ground. It is more likely that the theme's currency in popular culture is due to its own parody in television shows like *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, and in 'real-life' ghost stories and documentaries. A good example is Lake Shawnee Amusement Park in Mercer County, West Virginia, which featured in a 2009 episode of the Travel Channel's *Most Terrifying Places in America*. The park was shut down in 1966 after a series of tragic accidents, and a 1988 archaeological dig uncovered

Native American bodies buried on the site. An early settler, Mitchell Clay, supposedly killed several Shawnee Natives after his son was kidnapped and burned alive. Despite this, the Mercer County Convention and Visitors Bureau advertises tours, calling it 'a true Mercer County highlight' (Visit Mercer County website). Stories such as this have some historical truth, but blend together the familiar elements of Native/settler conflict, death, and tainted land that characterizes the Indian burial ground story. In all of this, Native people themselves do not actually feature, but exist only as a symbol of past violence and to infer the supernatural. This Romantic transformation of the Indian into a mythical being continues to erase awareness of Native cultures as they exist today. Shea Vasser, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, scathingly drives the point home:

We are not all buried in some unmarked grave, driving a stepfather to murder like in *The Amityville Horror*, or turning your dead cat into some sort of demonic being like in *Pet Sematary*. For the most part, we are working to fill the gaps where the American educational system has failed to teach about our existence and are attempting to reverse the harm from underdeveloped plot devices like the IBG [Indian Burial Ground]. (Vasser 2020).

Although Native Americans continue to across the United States continue to suffer the legacy of colonialism, cultural erasure and injustice, the cultural conversation and expectations of a media-savvy audience have moved on from the possibility of using the device of the Indian burial ground in the way that it was used in the handful of novels and films that made it famous.

The likely future path in horror fiction is one that has already begun to flourish: the transformation of the device by Native creators, although most such fiction avoids the crass motif of the Indian burial ground that Vasser comments on, in favour of what Porter describes as the use of 'horror to introduce American Indian perspectives on the past, counter-memories that challenge ideas on ownership and sovereignty of material, psychological, and spiritual space (55).'^v A notable example of a horror genre novel, though, is *The Only Good Indians* (2020), by Blackfoot Native author Steven Graham Jones, which moves past the Indian burial ground as a motif but keeps the thematic element of supernatural revenge for past injustice. Here, it is the spirit of a slaughtered Elk, Po'noka, that carries out this revenge on a group of Blackfeet men who killed her and her foetal calf in a section of the reservation they lacked the right to hunt in (Jones, 2020). Although they had attempted to distribute the meat in the community to be used properly, they do not escape the consequences of their actions. In this novel, realistic Native characters are foregrounded, rather than appearing as a narrative device, seen through the distorted lens of a colonial perspective. What is more, they do not line up with stereotypes of either pagan or noble savage, but are human, flawed, and just as terrified as the reader. The Indian burial ground in horror fiction worked within a framework established by ghost stories over a long historical period, and flavoured with a specifically American aesthetic of Puritan hellfire and stereotyped Natives. It may have had only a tangential relationship with reality, but drew energy from powerful cultural anxieties. It is to be hoped that laying it to a final rest will clear space for more a nuanced exploration of America's colonial history in horror.

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ⁱ Not itself an 'Indian burial ground' novel.

ⁱⁱ Such disclosure would now be a legal necessity as the 1991 case of *Stambovsky v Ackley* established a precedent meaning that anyone selling their home in the USA has a legal obligation to disclose their knowledge of any haunting that may have occurred in the property, due to the 'stigmatized' nature of such a property.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more on this wide-ranging issue, see Roger C. Echo-Hawk and Walter R. EchoHawk's book listed in references.

^{iv} *The Amityville Horror* is a curious 'possession' narrative as DeFeo was still alive at the time of the reported events, dying years later in 2021.

^v See Porter's Chapter 'The Horror Genre and Aspects of Native American Literature', listed in references, for a full list of examples.