https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2023.89.kaukio

MESSY AFFAIRS WITH IMAGINED SWAMP CREATURES: THE HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP IN SWAMP MONSTER NARRATIVES

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Abstract: This article examines what kinds of expressions the human-nature relationship in mire environments have taken in the context of imagined swamp creature narratives, and what the presence of swamp monsters reveals about the wider changes in the human-nature relationship in mires and other wetlands. The theoretical framework of this study is based on environmental humanities, including environmental aesthetics and ecocritical theory. The analysis deals with a range of fictional narratives (comic books, TV-series, literature for adults and children, and video performances) and folklore which feature diverse swamp creatures. Mires have often been considered as strange and fearsome, and both mires and monsters are linked to anomalies and burdened by negative preconceptions. However, attitudes towards mires have slowly changed. For example, along with monsters who sometimes transform into heroes or non-human friends, people's fears of unpredictable mires are now transforming into fears for these unique environments. In conclusion, the imagined swamp creatures reflect the human-nature relationship of the mires, and at the same time, actively transform it.

Keywords: environmental aesthetics, fear, human-nature relationship, imagined environments, marginal places, mires, non-human creatures

INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on Western fiction and narratives of the 2000s about swamp creatures and monsters that share a culturally marginal habitat in the mire. Mires have been imagined to be home to a wide variety of supernatural beings over time (Giblett 1996: 179–201; 2014: 159–160; Wilson 2005: 48–60;

Laurén 2006: 98–108; Laaksonen 2008: 266–271). Despite their diversity, the imagined inhabitants of the mires share several common features that are worth exploring, in order to trace the relationships between humans and nature that these swamp creature narratives reflect. As natural areas, mires, bogs, swamps, marshes, peatlands and other types of natural wetlands vary from one geographical location to another. However, the word 'mire' is used in this article to refer to the mire environment, regardless of the site-specific habitat type. On the other hand, the word 'swamp' is used in connection with various swamp creatures because it is the most common description used in fiction. 'Monster' and 'creature' are the labels that are often used interchangeably, but the context they are used in highlights the difference between the two meanings.

Imagined and narrated environments play a significant role in the human relationship with the environment, and influence the attitudes to and interpretations of nature (Kaukio 2013: 304–312). In the field of environmental aesthetics, there have been vivid discussions about whether some background knowledge is relevant for an aesthetic experience of the environment. In ecologically oriented environmental aesthetics, which started from the aims of applied aesthetics, the knowledge provided by the imagination, art and fiction has either been ignored or considered as harmful to a proper appreciation of the environment (Carlson 2000; Eaton 1998). But fictional environmental narratives are not meaningless (see Kaukio 2013), and through an ecocritical reading they can reveal a multifaceted view of the relationship between humans and nature. They also shape the human mindscape and guide the perception and interpretation of our living environment. Here, it will be argued that fictional environmental narratives contribute to creating our cultural heritage, and not only reflect environmental attitudes, but also reshape our views and ways of using or caring for nature.

This article examines what kinds of expressions the human-nature relationship has taken in mire environments in the context of imagined swamp creature narratives, and what they reveal about the wider changes in the human-nature relationship in mires. As habitats of imagined non-human creatures, mires highlight themes of a marginal place. Human relationships with the mire environment have often been dominated by their use and management, and from this perspective, mires have been demanding places. In lowland mires frost may have destroyed crops, and in tropical mires, the scourge of various predators (alligators and other animals) and malaria-spreading mosquitoes is ever-present. The inaccessibility, unpredictability and submergence of mires have long aroused a sense of fear (Giblett 1996: 103–126, 180–183; Knuuttila 1999; Lehtinen 1999; Laurén 2006: 17–19). Accordingly, imaginary swamp creatures are often like monsters, that is, creatures who raise issues of fear or alienation.

Among monsters – represented as ambivalent non-humans and inhabitants of remote places – swamp monsters are not mainstream in monster fiction, and by empirical observation they nowadays mostly populate novels for children and young people, and popular culture products such as comics and films. There have been relatively few previous studies on swamp monsters. One reason for this is that, as folklorists have pointed out, compared to other natural spirits, the supernatural creatures of the mire in particular are relatively rare (Ranta & Ranta 1996: 22; Jauhiainen 1999; Laurén 2006: 38; Laaksonen 2008: 266–271). In the monster gallery of popular culture, swamp monsters have also formed a rather marginal category (Landis 2012 [2011]), as well as in so-called cryptozoology, a pseudoscience subculture that searches for animals whose present existence is disputed (see Loxton & Prothero 2013). So, rather than presenting a comprehensive swamp monster study, this study is based on observations of parallel phenomena and studies the human-nature relationship in swamp monster narratives, and is largely oriented to research material.

The research proceeds as follows: First, the research materials and interpretive methods are presented as the themes that have influenced the selection of the mire creature narratives under study, and structure their interpretation. The cultural and material contexts of the imagined swamp creatures are discussed next. In the following four sections, swamp creatures are analyzed through issues of fear, attraction, monstrosity, and their relationship with non-human beings. The study concludes with a reflection on the heritage that swamp creatures offer for the future relationship with the mire.

RESEARCH MATERIAL AND INTERPRETIVE METHODS

The study focuses on the cultural products of Western fictional narratives in the 2000s, but also refers to some earlier or more occasional descriptions of imaginary and supernatural mire dwellers. The narratives in question stem from both fiction and folklore. A detailed list of the works of fiction (6 novels and 7 comic books, both for adults and children) and audiovisual products (5 titles) studied is provided in the references. The examples of various swamp creatures are chosen according to the post-humanistic thought that fictional texts and other imagined representations of swamp creatures are not so much objects of analysis or interpretation, but rather ones that start a discussion of the human-nature relationship of the mires (see Lummaa & Rojola 2014: 22). In a way they also offer a test for possible future relationships.

The metaphor of 'messiness' referred to in the title is an idea that not all of the aspects involved are necessarily interrelated, but they can still have

relationships with each other (Hyttinen & Lummaa 2020: 7), and form part of a speculative way of studying swamp creatures. In the context of swamp creatures, this also means that ideas from different times and spaces overlap and create new narratives. Swamp creatures can be found in myths, old and modern folklore (for example in belief stories and urban legends), as well as in popular culture, superhero fiction and fantasy (Giblett 1996: 179–201; 2014: 159–160; Ranta & Ranta 1996: 22; Wilson 2005: 48–60; Laurén 2006: 98–108; Laaksonen 2008: 266–271; Landis 2012 [2011]; Eriksson & Blixt 2019 [2018]: 27). Imagined swamp creatures in general do not seem to have a single strong genealogy, and they do not have the same basic and well-established rules as seen, for example, in vampire stories. Instead, they are like collections of variable properties placed under test. The material basis of these creatures is found in flora, fauna, fungi, or combinations of different substances, and some of them have no material substance at all. Only the mire environment as their natural habitat is the common factor that unites them all. Sometimes, swamp creatures or monsters are presented without a specific definition or description, as if their features were predefined. These cases underline the fact that swamp creatures are subject to certain expectations that arise from the imagination of what kind of creature could possibly adapt to such a frightening or hostile environment. The most stereotypical features of swamp creatures are their sliminess and deformity. However, in their representations, swamp creatures can also challenge assumptions. As inherently marginal places, mires become narrative spaces where it is possible to present something both new and different. Consequently, these swamp creatures not only represent the human-nature relationship with the mires, but also create and modify it.

The research material used in the swamp creature fiction featured in this study was selected with considerations of the themes of marginal places, the element of fear as an affective relationship with the mire, and issues related to non-human beings. The mires are seen as marginal places because of their wild nature, remoteness, and wasteland status. Meanings of marginality specifically emerge in relation to the perceptions of culture and wilderness, which are defined by people in the same way that peripheries are defined in relation to the culturally central or conventional (Saarinen 1999; Wilson 2005: 62; Kaukio 2013: 35). However, mires have provided refuge in the face of various threats or social pressures, and the aspect of exclusion may also have been voluntary. In the light of these meanings of marginality, fear is not always the dominant feature when talking about mires. Mire use is currently under global scrutiny, as problems such as peat energy production are linked to climate change and biodiversity loss. One trend is that attitudes towards mires have been shifting towards a more experiential and conservation-orientated approach (Laurén 2006; Kaukio 2022; Laurén

et al. 2022). These changes are also reflected in the swamp creature narratives, which raises the question that if swamp creatures are no longer always feared, what might our new relationship with the imaginary non-human creatures of the mire be like? Considering this relationship reveals something about these imaginary fellow travelers in the mire, but it also reveals something about us humans.

The attitude towards imagined non-human creatures living in the mire is linked to notions of monstrosity. The swamp creatures of horror fiction represent a monster identity that contains fear and loathing, but also seduction. Overall, the concept of the monster has begun to be questioned in the swamp monster fiction of the twenty-first century. The theme of monstrosity is explored through Finnish author Marko Hautala's horror novel *Leväluhta* (2018), the title of which refers to an Iron Age water burial site in Finland. Reinterpretations of monsters and mires also continue through the children's book *Multakutri ja suon salaisuus* (Moldylock and the secret of the mire, 2017) by Jukka Laajarinne, and the shift from scary swamp monsters to non-human friends features in several other children's books that provide a background for the discussion.

Further ethical implications of the transformation of swamp monsters are examined in the television series *Swamp Thing* (2019), based on the 1960s superhero comics created by DC Comics' legends Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson (Fig. 1). However, Swamp Thing had already debuted in a single comic strip in the 1950s, and Marvel Comics published a Man-Thing comic strip based on a similar character almost at the same time as *Swamp Thing* came out.[1] In the 1980s, Alan Moore began to rewrite the *Swamp Thing* story as a continuation of Wein and Wrightson's character. Collections of Moore's *Swamp Thing* comics were published in six books in the 2010s. The comic strip and the television series are examined in parallel in this article, and both deal with the relationship between humans and nature through the mire environment in an era of eco-crises, and conflicting monstrous superheroes.

Figure 1. *The Swamp Thing saga began in the 1950s and continues in various forms today. A cosplayer dressed as the Swamp Thing with creator Len Wein at CONvergence 2005. Photograph Lex Larson, Wikimedia Commons.*

Finnish outsider artist Rampe-Raven has created his own version of the ecological monster hero called Hillasuon kummajainen (the freak of the cloudberry mire). My analysis looks at two of his performance videos of *Hillasuon kummajainen* published on YouTube in 2018, as evidence of a change in the perceived fear of mires in an era of environmental crisis. This "freak" character can be interpreted as part of the folklore tradition of supranatural beings, or as an updated version of it.

This study draws on environmental aesthetics theory to reflect on how imaginative narratives influence the experience of, and attitudes towards, nature (see Haapala 2002; Brady 2003: 146–190; Kaukio 2013). The analysis is based on an ecocritical reading complemented by speculative post-humanistic thinking. Both approaches challenge our assumptions about the relationship between human, non-human, nature, and culture. The ecocritical view focuses on nature which also exists apart from human thought structures. However, post-humanistic thinking emanates from the human being itself, and the questioning of its role as a producer of perceptions (Lummaa & Rojola 2014: 21–22; see also Braidotti 2013: 1–6). Although human belonging or exclusion from nature is a matter of constant rethinking, examining the human-nature relationship requires a conceptual distinction between the parties involved.

Interpreting the representations of swamp creatures as an expression of the relationship between human and nature in the mire extends the ecocritical premise that human responsibility towards nature should be included in the ethics of the texts (see Buell 1995: 7). This precondition is met only in part of the subjects considered in this study. The ecological orientation is clear in the *Swamp Thing* saga and "The Freak of the Cloudberry Mire" videos, but with the *Leväluhta* novel and most of children's books, it is more a result of an ecocritical reading practice which extends to cultural criticism. Ecocritical reading includes the idea of nature as a reality that is seen through linguistic signs, cultural symbols, and as a conventional history-bound means of representation and of humanly filtered experience. However, reading as an ecocritical tool does not ignore the sensory and experiential basis of nature, and any meanings of the environment are shaped both discursively and as a matter of material reality (Garrard 2004: 3–4; Lahtinen & Lehtimäki 2008: 16–18). In this study, ecocritical reading refers to the interpretation of representations of the mire and the swamp creatures as affective images that influence emotions and perceptions.

An ethical orientation is further embedded in the relationship between human and nature in the mire, and whether the mire is considered as a mere natural resource or valued on its own terms. Ethics is also seen as part of the human interaction with the swamp creature as a non-human. The concept of monstrosity is often associated with an attempt to control something alien and

alienated, and the need to overcome fear also justifies resisting or subjugating the monster. Through other-than-human swamp creatures, we can examine the ways in which human culture conceptualizes its non-human companions, and with what ethical consequences (Karkulehto et al. 2019: 1). As non-humans, swamp monsters can criticize the human position and distinctness from outside the human species (Raipola 2014: 48). The ecocritical reading in this study is justified by the fact that the relationship with nature presented through the swamp monsters deals in many ways with typical human practices that seek to manage nature. Mires have been seen as something to be tamed and exploited because of their nature that defies human capacity and has, to some degree, been morally resented (Giblett 1996: 180–181; Lehtinen 1999: 80–83). Consequently, ideas about what could, should, or should not be done to mires are based on the assumption that mires are for and under human control, which is the case even when humans are intent on protecting or restoring mires.

INHABITING IMAGINARY MIRES

The habitats of the swamp creatures are located not only in the mires, but also in the cultural environments where their narratives have taken root. One of the earliest swamp creatures was the multi-headed, snake-like monster known as Hydra (Fig. 2). In antiquity, hydra plagued farmers in southern Greece, so they were afraid to pass the mire where it lived on their journey to find water. Hydra was interpreted as a metaphor of human vice, a lack of morals, and a lust for extravagance, which were as difficult to eradicate as the monster's regrowing heads (Eriksson & Blixt 2019 [2018]: 27). Thus, fear was born in relation to humans' perception of themselves, which is a motif not lost in today's swamp creature narratives.

The supranormal inhabitants of mire in local folklore add their own imaginative layer to the swamp creature repertoire. For example, in Finnish folklore the creatures living in mires have been seen as guardians of the mire, and the guardian spirit must be asked for its consent to enter and work in the area (Sarmela 2009: 384–385). In comparison to other nature spirits, the mire guardian spirits have been depicted as relatively unknown, and seen as demure and ethereal, benevolent beings, such as the healing maiden called Hetteenhaltija (the spirit of the morass) (Ranta & Ranta 1996: 22; Laaksonen 2008: 266–271). As such, it is hard to find monstrosity in them. But it is interesting to note that in the mire that has oft been stigmatized as a place of illness (Giblett 1996: 103–126; Knuuttila 1999: 68–69), such beings have also been found to have healing powers in earlier folk narratives.

Figure 2. *An Attican amphora from the 6th century BC depicts Heracles and Iolaus fighting the Lernaean Hydra. Photograph Louvre Museum, Wikimedia Commons.*

People in modern Western culture have imagined monsters as disgusting, frightening or dangerous, although in earlier history, monsters also reflected 'otherness' and curiosities that were not always particularly scary, but otherwise rejected things (Lawrence 2018). But when monsters are interpreted as projections of human fears (Gilmore 2003: 6) and are seen to challenge prevailing cultural categories, norms and concepts, they provoke reactions of impurity (Douglas 1984 [1975]: 50–56; Carroll 1999: 31–32). This idea of impurity in a categorical sense draws parallels between the mire and the monster, as neither fits neatly into the categories given but remains in an impure intermediate state. Thus, as an object of mire-related fears, monstrosity cannot be uniquely delimited to include material creatures. For example, the monstrousness of a mire without a clear material monster figure has been explained by the mixing of archetypal elements – earth and water or water and fire (firelights) – and a disruption of the expected order of things (Giblett 1996: 3, 182–185).

An early version of the swamp monster in popular culture was introduced in the horror sci-fi film titled *Curse of the Swamp Creature* (1968), in which the swamp monster is a Frankenstein-like creation of a scientist who eventually destroys its creator. In the film, the swamp creature is a fish-like male character made to demonstrate the possibility of a kind of reverse evolutionary process, and is an example of man's dangerous attempt to rule nature. The hubris of the scientist character is linked to the fear that every new technology will get out of hand (Soikkeli 2015: 66–69). Swamp creature fiction is also inspired by urban legends known as modern folklore. For example, the Honey Island Swamp Monster in Louisiana was allegedly discovered by Harlan E. Ford in 1974. Sightings of this bigfoot-like monster were reported through various channels that were ignored by official scientific research (Holyfield 2012; Loxton & Prothero 2013, x–xi; Honey Island Swamp Monster 2014). But the presented interpretation of the creature as a missing link relates to the intermediate nature of both the mire and its monsters.

In the case of urban legends, monstrosity has often been the result of unexplained events. There are also cases where natural living species and natural phenomena have been 'monsterized', when something has not corresponded with previously acquainted objects dominated by rational understanding. An example of such a process is the attitude towards the giant squid, which only began to be considered a monster when naturalists could not fit the animal into their classification system. Accordingly, monster tales have emerged from the interaction between nature and humans and are tied to the culture and concepts of nature of their respective eras (Latva 2019). Swamp creature narratives can also be seen as a result of the interaction between nature and humans, and tell us about the concepts of and the relationship with mire environments. The attitude towards different entities in the intermediate realm can serve as a mirror for changes in the worldview. The imagery of monster-like non-human figures can serve as metaphors for existing things but can also describe possible futures (Raipola 2014: 50).

While the cultural environments of the swamp creature are diverse, so are the mires that can be found around the world. The *Swamp Thing* saga is set in Louisiana, where the wetland area includes swamp and coastal marshland (Wilkins n.d.). The Louisiana marsh is an environment of human livelihoods. Nevertheless, it is also a periphery and a wasteland that provides a hiding place for the people's shadow activities. So, rather than a geographical point, the *Swamp Thing* is set in a certain atmosphere, where the symbolic meanings of the marginal are accentuated.

In Hautala's novel, the sacrificial spring of Leväluhta can be located with the precision of GPS coordinates to the province of southern Ostrobothnia in

Finland. Leväluhta is an Iron Age water burial site, and archaeological research has revealed that at least a hundred corpses, mostly women, were buried in the marshy pond in prehistoric times. Leväluhta is as limited as possible as being defined as a mire, and further research has suggested that it is not a mire at all, but rather a small lake. But while there is no typical mire flora (Wessman 2019: 49–53; see also Maijanen et al. 2021), Leväluhta has been conceptualized as a mire, and this has influenced its experienced meanings which have intensified around the ancient mystery of the purpose of the site. In the *Leväluhta* novel, the source of the horror comes from events within fiction, and the imagery of the mire provides a platform for this horror. On the ground, however, the mystery of Leväluhta is more intriguing than frightening. But as an unsolvable mystery, the mire continues to resist any human ability to cognitively control it.

Imaginary mires do not always follow the characteristics of their geographical location, and instead, they are changing combinations of different mire imaginaries. A common undercurrent in the conception of the mire is that something is imagined to lie under the surface or be hidden. The theme of a different world beneath the mire appears in a range of narratives from folklore to children's books. In folk tales, treasure has been believed to be hidden under the firelights or 'will-o'-the-wisps' in the mire. It may have been guarded by a human or animal guardian, and to get the treasure you may have had to make a sacrifice or meet a difficult or impossible condition (Jauhiainen 1999: 293–302; Laurén 2006: 37; Laaksonen 2008: 267–269). These beliefs, myths and legends have their continuity in contemporary narratives. For example, in the Finnish children's book *Luke ja suosammakot* (Luke and the bog frogs), the protagonist guinea pig searches under a mire for a treasure that could save his frog friends from enslavement. The treasure is guarded by a hairy arachnid, and there is also an underwater temple similar to the ruins of ancient Atlantis under the swamp (Mäki 2010: 80–111).

The swamp of the *Swamp Thing* and the sacrifice spring of *Leväluhta* are both gateways to an alternate world. The monster of the *Swamp Thing* takes a classic journey into the underworld of the swamp to the afterlife in order to retrieve his beloved, and beneath he finds the Dantean circles of hell. Although, the mire itself has sometimes been interpreted as hell-like, because it combines elements – water and earth or water and fire (firelight) – into impure mixtures (Giblett 1996: 183). At the bottom of the novel's Leväluhta spring, another world with buildings emerges, with doors inviting you to pass through, and the enticing sight beckons visitors into danger. Imaginations about the dimensions that exist beneath the mires include the idea that there are laws that are different from the norm (Giblett 1996: 3). In Finnish folklore, when nature spirits were believed to live 'on the other side' (as in the twisted reality of subterranean

levels), it offered a projection of the present into an invisible, inverted, or opposite world (Sarmela 2009: 417–419).

Hillasuon kummajainen is an artistic performance filmed by its creator on the Finnish aapa mire, which could be experienced in its material reality. The depths of this and other mires in the physical environment, such as the thickness of the peat layer, can be determined by scientific methods and measurements. However, what is experienced in the mire, on the site, also involves images of the world beneath the mire. 'Bog eyes' are submerged, watery, moss-covered areas in a mire, and similar to the representations above, they can be seen as passageways to the underworld. In everyday life in the countryside, they have also been seen as scary holes into which grazing cattle or small children can disappear (Laurén 2006: 98–101). These bog holes have been the primary fear elements of the mire, regardless of whether they were interpreted through empirical experiences or mythical ideas. So, while the fears associated with the mire do not necessarily require monsters, the underworlds and alien dimensions are equated with monsters in their ability to mirror the familiar in an unusual way.

FEAR AND ATTRACTION OF THE UNKNOWN

There has long been a need for a conceptual takeover of an unpredictable and alien mire, and the fiction of the swamp monster has contributed to this task. In Finnish folklore, perceptions of the mire have traditionally been negative (Knuuttila 1999: 70–74; Laurén 2006: 36–43). Mire-related expressions are still used as metaphors for various negative features, both in everyday language and in various cultural products that are either wholly or partially detached from the natural mire environment. Also, in past and present crime fiction[2] the presence of corpses discovered in the mire tends to perpetuate negative images of the mires, even without the presence of non-human monsters. 'Uselessness' is an aspect often repeated in expressions related to the mire, and when the mire has resisted human efforts to exploit it, it has come to be seen as an enemy, or even a monster (Giblett 1996: 180–183; Lehtinen 1999: 80–83). Overall, negative images of mire environments are often associated with experiences of alienation and fears generated by the unknown. Thus, the swamp monster narratives can be seen as attempts to explain and deal with the unknown.

In the horror novel *Leväluhta*, fear is caused by a completely alien and incomprehensible non-human creature that draws people into another world through the bottom of a sacred mire spring. The creature has a spongy texture with black dots or holes like eyes on its surface. It evokes an overriding repulsion,

a kind of trypophobia or hole phobia, where the survival instinct associates the hole pattern with potential danger, for example from poisonous animals or images of rotting or corroding skin (Cole & Wilkins 2013; Hautala 2018: 172). At the same time, however, *Leväluhta*'s strange creature arouses a reluctant fascination and curiosity. The seductiveness of the creature is comparable to the way that the subterranean level of the mire has always fascinated as well as frightened, and in the novel the creature starts to have an obsessive effect on the people who have visited the site.

The Leväluhta mire is next door to the childhood home of the novel's protagonist, Meeri. Her father was found drowned there years before. Meeri's brother Lari is in a psychiatric ward where he was sent after diving into Leväluhta. It is possible that Lari's girlfriend Aino also disappeared into Leväluhta, along with others who had responded to its dangerous lure. Leväluhta is not a place to accidentally sink into. Rather, its attraction is mental, and Lari and the others have seen things like another world, buildings, a door, or a lost person under or through the bottom of the spring which is possibly a creature of Leväluhta imitating their loved ones. But not satisfied with dragging people into the depths, the monster is trying to get out of the Leväluhta mire and into the midst of people. It reaches beyond the mire, sometimes as a fungal mass blocking a car engine, but more often in the shape of a deceased person. The creature understands humans to the extent that it is capable of exploiting them. Humans, on the other hand, have no real means of understanding this non-human being.

Years earlier, Aino had carried a strange object resembling a mask from Leväluhta to Lari's home. It immediately aroused an instinctive revulsion, but its strangeness did not leave Lari alone. The monstrosity of the object is realized in its incongruity with any other known category. It is not a plant, although it can grow into an indeterminate shape. It is not an animal, even though it can move. The spongy texture intensifies the creature's disgusting character. A biologist in the novel defines the creature as a plasmodium: "In that form it... moves. It preys. It's basically a predator" (Hautala 2018: 175, transl. VK). But a biological taxonomy – which is a human-based theory of explanation – does not diminish the creature's frightening alienness. The goal of the Leväluhta creature remains a mystery, and its non-human consciousness is still unknown. If the creature is driven by a predatory instinct, its action appears to be only a mechanistic means of survival. But the natural science explanation of a predator organism does not absolve the creature of its monstrosity, because it does not dispel the sense of repulsion which is caused by the creature's ability to intrude into people's minds and private space.

In Hautala's interpretation, Leväluhta retains all of the old fear aspects associated with the mire, while introducing new prejudices and trepidations. One

character in the novel describes Leväluhta as "an archaeologically significant shit pit" (Hautala 2018: 74), and at no point does the mire, which serves as the milieu for the story, become any more charming. Its monster also retains its scariness and, above all, its revulsion from start to finish. While the novel does not challenge the reader's perceptions of the mire as a marginal place and narrative milieu, the mire offers a place to deal with one's own fears. As a symbol of wrong, evil or alien, or as a surprising and eccentric place, the mire stretches or breaks the narrow boundaries of normality, but at the same time allows for speculative interpretations. However, attempts to rationalize the scariness of a mire or demystifying it could be seen as underestimating its own unique quality, and the fact that a mire is scary is not always a negative assessment. Fiction is a good medium in which to safely deal with fear. At best, it can be seen as learning from fiction (Novitz 1983: 47), and literary and cultural texts can teach us by helping us explore what it means to live, feel, and think, and encourage us to imagine the world differently (Siperstein 2016: 37). From the mire's point of view, considering it as frightening is part of respecting it as such, regardless of human preferences.

REINTERPRETING MONSTERS AND MIRES

The written environment can be viewed as a description of an actual place, a description of the author's subjective landscape, or a description of a social situation (Porteous 1985; Brosseau 1994). In addition to these perspectives, in fiction the environment can function as a symbol or metaphor for something, but in such a way that the representation is not separate from the material environment, and the environment with its physical characteristics is an integral part of the symbolic meaning. A later meaning is essential in cartoonist Miha Rinne's comic book *Ison Mustan Pöön Suo* (The bog of Big Black Boo, 2011), where the mire as a symbol of fear is reinterpreted through the swamp monsters. The monster of Boo's bog is in fact fear itself. The bog is nestled in a crater surrounded by a lagoon that resembles a mangrove swamp. In the comic book, a rafter conducts travelers on a voyage to the bog (as a mirror of the ferryman in other underworld mythologies), and says that the swamp air can make visitors see hallucinations. In the bog, Boo is like a black fog and attacks people through their minds. This monster had no material essence at all, but its origin lies in negative emotions. The story of Big Black Boo presents the mire in the traditional way, with its mists and sinkholes, and its illusions and treasures, but the idea is that this is what a mire should be. Cultural material has constituted a fictional mire environment which bears only a trivial or stereotypical relationship to the mire

of the physical world. However, in this comic book the mire is not a source of fear, but rather, people bring fears there themselves in their own minds. Consequently, in the story the mire becomes a place of overcoming fear, and it is significant that the mire serves as a place for breaking down preconceptions.

The monster in Jukka Laajarinne's *Multakutri ja suon salaisuus* (Moldylock and the secret of the mire, 2017) also turns assumptions on their head. The book belongs to the 'cool kids' literary genre, in which rebellious child characters define themselves against adult expectations. It has also been argued that childhood tends to bring children closer to monsters, because the child deviates from the adult-led norm (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 125–126). In the book, the heroine Multakutri lives on the edge of the forest, on the margins of today's urbanized culture. One night, something has eaten one of the family's chickens. The incident paralyses both the chickens and Multakutri's parents, and in their helplessness, they become like each other. When food starts to run out at home, Multakutri takes action and heads for the forest. On reaching the mire in the fog, something splashes and rustles, and a creature is revealed but it is uncategorizable: it has hands, but it is not human; it has leathery wings, but it is not a bat; shiny scales, but it is not a fish; long claws, but it is not an eagle, and so on. Such a creature could only be found in a mire.

The creature grunts the word Kuklu (apparently its name), which sounds a lot like the name of the sea god Cthulhu, created by classic horror writer H. P. Lovecraft, and it even looks like a creature from Lovecraft's 1934 drawing (Fig. 3). Kuklu starts rumbling towards Multakutri, and chases her until she becomes too scared. But then something unexpected happens: the girl no longer dares to run away but turns around and shouts to the creature: "No! Stay!" (Laajarinne 2017, transl. VK). But here, fear is seen as what Multakutri says no to, and not the monster itself. Instead, Multakutri gets the pet of her dreams in Kuklu, who is, after all, a bit like a puppy. Nor in this story is the mire the initial source of fear, but rather associated with the ideas of powerlessness and overcoming fear. Consequently, the mire again serves as a place where norms are reconfigured by both the rebellious child and the anomalous creature.

The common theme found in children's books of taming the untamed is played out here (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 125), and in Kuklu's case it implies yet another version of the utilitarian view of the mire and of the relationship to non-human. Kuklu begins to guard the chickens, and the tamed swamp monster justifies its existence by becoming useful. Through the swamp monster, the book opens up the perspective of accepting difference to some extent at the expense of the monster, and taming it to make it less alien. But the mire is not explicitly redefined, and letting the mires be what they are (possibly frightening) suggests that there is nothing to change – they are good as they are.

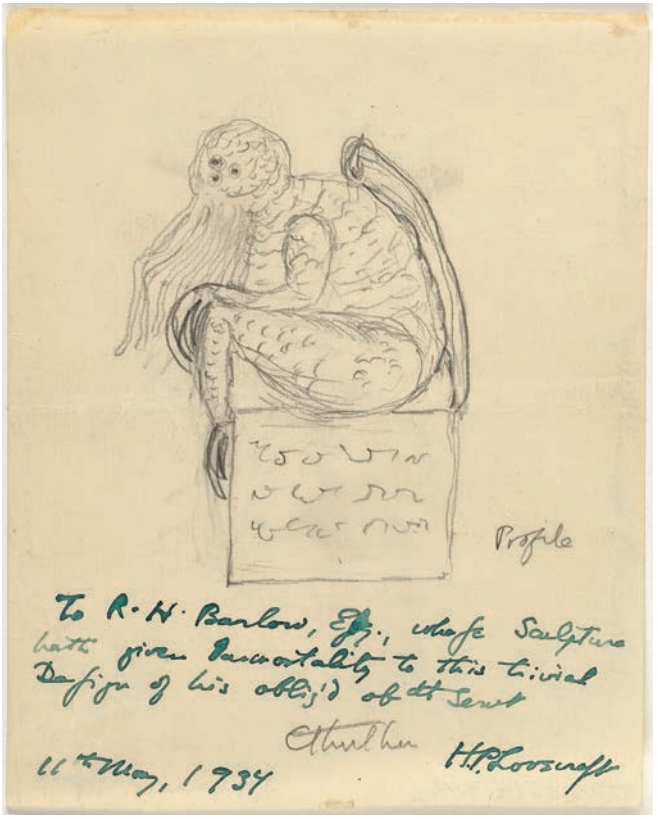

Figure 3. *Cthulhu in a pencil drawing by H. P. Lovecraft (1934). Photograph Wikimedia Commons.*

Popular culture has always loved its monsters, but monsters have also become more lovable, and seen as individual defenders of difference. The monsters that inhabit the mires of children's fiction are like a species of their own, for which the mire happens to be a natural habitat. They have also somehow become funny or playful. For example, in J. K. Rowling's novel *Fantastic Beasts & Where to Find Them*, 'Imp' is classified by the Ministry of Magic as "harmless / may be domesticated", and prefers to live in a damp and marshy terrain, and is often found near riverbanks where it amuses itself by pushing and tripping up careless people (Rowling 2001: xxii, 22). Friendly swamp monsters are widely adopted in Western children's fiction. For example, in Harri István Mäki's children's books, talking sea captain guinea pigs, marsh herons, bog rats, swamp frogs, alligators and water spiders (Mäki 2010) as well as ghosts, slime creatures, dragons and scaly worms (Mäki 2004) all roam the mires, and the swamp monsters are not distinguished by their abnormality. Despite their frightening appearance, swamp monsters can be docile and kind (Mäki 2004: 55; 2010: 5, 46). French author Paul Martin describes the swamp monster in his book as follows: "the

small muzzle eyes and a voice like the bubbling of watery pea soup hardly added to its charm, but the warm tone of its voice indicated that its heart was gold" (Martin 2006 [2001]: 17, transl. VK). When the monsters in the mire are depicted as normal inhabitants, the mire is not a very strange place, simply different. Thus, the traditional educational purpose given to the monster in children's literature in the sense of dealing with fears (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 125) has been transformed into a form of tolerance education in the case of the docile supranatural creatures of the mire.

In Mäki's children's book *Sihis Haamusuolla* (Sihis in the Ghost Swamp, 2004), the swamp monster is at first grumpy because he has a toothache. When the main character Sihis – the world's smallest chihuahua – and its companions help the Swamp Monster by pulling out the tooth, and so make a friend of the monster (Mäki 2004: 36–46), in this story it is not so much about taming the untamed, because the other characters are equally non-human and untamed. But what makes the worn-out storyline interesting is that the monster is defined as a sentient and conscious being through the experience of pain. The capacity to feel suffering has been one of the tests of the extent to which animals have been considered to have minds of their own. For example, when fish have been scientifically found to experience pain (Telkänranta 2015: 169–172, 183), it has become problematic to treat them as mechanical, plant-like natural resources whose own experiences and needs are not valued. This may be too far-fetched an interpretation to apply to a swamp monster's toothache. However, an understanding is present that there is an intelligible reason for the monster's angry mood and that transcending 'monstrousness' can lead to an idea that the monster (or mire) is good in its own right, and may even be a friend to another species, and is the case for a fair number of swamp monsters.

Because fiction defines its own rules and values, it can explain any assumption or characteristic in any way that it wants. According to this principle, fiction can present the monster as lovable, seducing and so on. But the audience's emotional reaction to the monster is intended to be like that of the fictional character with whom the reader feels a connection (Carroll 1999: 149). The relationship to swamp monsters as non-humans is determined by the experience of this implicit reader. Empathy for the monster blurs the line between human and non-human (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 136), and friendly monsters shape the relationship between humans and non-humans accordingly.

The transformation from alienating monsters into expressions of accepted otherness has continued in the form of various commercial cultural products such as the Honey Swamp doll featured in *The Monster High* series, or the Swamp Creature featured in the *Lego* films. Toy swamp monsters' stories are created and brought to life in games, on TV shows, and on fan pages. The

temporary nature of play keeps the monster different, but at the same time it can bring the extraordinary into ordinary everyday life (Fig. 4). At best, the naturalization of swamp monsters can lead to a reduction in the generally negative value given to the culturally marginal mire environment.

Figure 4. *The stories of the swamp monster have always taken many forms. As part of play, monsters remain fascinating strangers, but become part of ordinary life. Photograph by Eveliina Kaukio 2023.*

A MONSTER AS A DEFENDER OF NATURE

The inability of humans to understand and their tendency to manipulate nature still leads to monstrous consequences in regard to human relations with nature. In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) added the previously unknown 'disease X' to the list of diseases threatening the world (see WHO n.d.). It is believed that it could have been created through genetic manipulation, accidentally or deliberately, as a tool of biological warfare or terrorism. However, zoonoses in which a disease is spread from animals to humans are considered more likely to cause disease X. In 2020, COVID-19 became seen as a disease X, but the classification did not eliminate the threat of an unknown disease in

the future. According to a report by the International Panel on Biological Diversity, the risk of new pandemics is being driven by the same human activities that are accelerating climate change and biodiversity loss (see IPBES 2020).

In the television series *Swamp Thing*, a schoolchild in a small Louisiana town gets sick in class and spits algae-like goo onto her desk. The unknown disease originated in a swamp where the girl's father had worked before suffering a fatal illness, in which the infection takes over the human body as a parasitic plant-like growth. It is nothing new that a dreaded disease has been said to have come from the mire. However, the developing story of *Swamp Thing* relieves the mire of the role of culprit, and like disease X, presents the disease as a risk caused by human activity. Thus, it fundamentally becomes the consequence of a hierarchical relationship of utility with the mire, which maintains the separation between human beings and nature. But, in this scenario, the ethical responsibility towards nature falls on the shoulders of the non-human being, the Swamp Thing himself.

The title character of the *Swamp Thing* television series and comic book is a huge, green, man-shaped plant organism. In both the comic book and the television series versions, the Swamp Thing is the result of a scientific experiment that has gone wrong or been sabotaged when a scientist – called Alec Holland in the story versions referred to here – ends up in a swamp as a result of an explosion. Although the creature is not a deliberately created monster, he carries with him an excessive scientific ambition that takes its toll. The Swamp Thing is a strange hybrid – a terrifying-looking swamp monster with supranormal powers, which doubles as a superhero. This makes him doubly non-human. As a monster, the Swamp Thing is something to be rejected, and it is also justified to exploit and control him by defining him as the opposite of human (see Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 127–130). However, the Swamp Thing's superhero qualities make him difficult to master. The frightfulness of the Swamp Thing lies not in his monstrosity, but in his combination of monstrosity and heroism, which questions humans' own goodness and humanity.

The origin of a monster has a part in determining how to deal with its alienation, and whether its strangeness can be overcome (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 127). As was seen with the Leväluhta creature, alienation is not necessarily an issue that is resolved in swamp monster fiction. The origin of the Swamp Thing lies in the fallible actions of humans, and through its origin, its non-humanity rises to a new level, and the human relationship with this different other becomes the central content of both the comic and the television series. Traditionally, superheroes have needed their opponents or monsters, and vice versa. Since then, powers that superheroes have acquired through mutation have become the rule rather than the exception. But in a way, Alan Moore broke the hero-monster dichotomy by writing a rebirth for the Swamp Thing.

In one of the key scenes in the comic and the television series, having just killed his archenemy, the Swamp Thing is caught up in an existential questioning of the meaning of his existence. In both storylines, the Swamp Thing is literally dissected into pieces, and it turns out that it is not Alec Holland who has turned into a plant, but rather a completely vegetable organism that thinks he is Holland because his consciousness has Holland's experiences and memories (Moore 2010a: 37–60; *Swamp Thing*, season 1, episode 9). The Swamp Thing blurs the nature-culture distinction, and is a hybrid creature that reminds us of the anthropogenic nature of that distinction, and that the distribution of species should not be taken as a given (Mustola & Karkulehto 2019: 133). When the human consciousness of the plant organism remembered that it had a heart and lungs, it grew them, even though they had no practical function. The human form keeps the creature in contact with the human world. The comics take the story further than the television series, which was only made for one season. Later in the comics it is revealed that the Swamp Thing can regrow itself from a seed, but it still repeatedly takes the form of a man, with variations reflecting the local vegetation.

There is also an important scene in the comic where the knowledge of false memories throws the Swamp Thing off balance, and it tries to uproot itself into the swamp vegetation. The creature is tempted to stay in the non-human green world (Moore 2010a: 93); however, it senses the presence of another kind of mind, an evil that is virtually linked to humans. While all organisms use nature to live, only parasites use it with the same ruthless exploitation as humans. As a consequence, the Swamp Thing wakes up to the threat posed to the swamp by man, and finds its own purpose as a defender of nature (Fig. 5).

Although nature's revenge on mankind is a recurring theme in horror films (Landis 2012 [2011]: 184–199; Hänninen & Latvanen 1996: 265–304), there have been few botanical monsters. Carnivorous plants, including the mire-dwelling sundew, are the best-known manifestations of plant monsters. However, plants are immobile, and their exaggerated size does not necessarily make them threatening (Hänninen & Latvanen 1996: 293–295). The Swamp Thing can move but appears to be quite powerless at first. The creature only uses his ability to grow super-fast and master the vegetation around him when someone attacks him or the people he loves. Those moments are dominated by human motives springing from memories, yet the humanity of the Swamp Thing is as frightening as its alien nature. As a striking example, his relationship with a human woman is considered inappropriate because it violates the species norm, and when Swamp Thing's beloved Abigail refuses to claim that she has been abused by the monster, she is paradoxically accused of a crime against nature (Moore 2015a: 15). In this way, categories that are defined as natural are questioned in the pluralistic space of the mire in the *Swamp Thing* saga.

Figure 5. *Swamp Thing did not like to be captured on the game camera and knocked it over. Screenshots from the trailer for the TV series* Swamp Thing.

Gradually the Swamp Thing lets go of his human mind. The greatest strength of the Swamp Thing emerges as his connection to vegetation on a global scale, and his ability to regenerate which makes him immortal. Through a connection to the botanical world, for example, the Swamp Thing protests against corrupt authorities, and the inhabitants of a city transformed into a beautiful jungle cheer on the monster. But those in power see a danger in this, and the monster ceases to be merely a monstrous and repulsive stranger, and becomes something that is to be got rid of once and for all. As a further extension to the story, the

regenerative core of the Swamp Thing, his consciousness, was sent into other dimensions (Moore 2016: 82–128). But the involuntary journey irreversibly changes the Swamp Thing's relationship with humankind.

When the Swamp Thing finally returns to his home swamp, he is faced with rethinking his own purpose. On his journey, he had saved a society that had shortsightedly destroyed the very nature that sustained life from famine. The Swamp Thing realizes that he would have the opportunity to become the equivalent of a savior of the Earth. But he chooses Abigail and retreats with her to the swamp to observe the world without interfering. The Swamp Thing ultimately proves to be a self-worthy individual, not bound by the demands of the heroic role, nor by the role of the monster as a rejected other. In the storyline, the reason for the decision not to seek revenge against humanity is driven by a lesson: there would be nothing to stop humans from continuing their greed-driven destruction of nature, even if the Swamp Thing were willing to save the world over and over again (Moore 2016: 196). Here the plant teaches people what humanity is, and what anthropocentric thinking taken to its extreme might mean: a responsibility of the human species for its own actions and deeds. As a monster, the Swamp Thing reveals frightening truths about human's relationships with the non-human, and the definition of the human species as non-nature highlights this separateness. In this narrative context, the human being is not seen as better than nature, but rather as being exiled from nature.

FROM FEAR *OF* THE MIRE TO FEARS *FOR* THE MIRE

The changes in mire-related fears are further illustrated through another eco-hero in the form of a creature who defends the mire. Outsider artist Rampe-Raven's work *Hillasuon kummajainen* (The Freak of the Cloudberry Mire, 2018) has a serious message for humans about their relationship with the mire. An ecocritical interpretation of his performance requires a slightly different approach than that taken with narrative films and comics. *Swamp Thing* deals with the issue of a responsibility towards nature as a question of humanity. Despite being video performances, this work brings the issue of responsibility towards nature closer and even under the skin of the individual audience member by emphasizing sensations rather than words. In these videos, the mire creature expresses its message in a non-human language, through a whirring, coruscating and peculiar music that comes from a didgeridoo made from a sewer pipe that is part of the creature's head structure (interview with Rampe-Raven 2020). The resulting 'voice' can be described as earthy, and imagined as having risen out of a mire similar to the Freak of the Cloudberry Mire itself.

In the first video (Rampe-Raven 2018a), the mire is seen through the eyes of a creature. Offering a creature's perspective to the human viewer blurs the line between human and non-human living beings. The nature of the creature is experienced through the sounds and movements it produces, and into which the viewer, as a corporeal being, can become immersed. The Freak rises from the soil at the roots of a scrawny tree, and begins to gaze out over the open mire landscape. Its breath rattles and the vegetation rustles as it moves. The sounds indicate that it is a fairly large living being. It hoots low and song-like tunes as if listening for others nearby to answer. The mire landscape is quiet and still. It is autumn, but the autumnal colors are not captivating, and no attention is drawn to the subtle details of nature. The summer of 2018 was very dry, which is visible in the autumn mire, and one can see why the mire may have been considered as a monotonous or unscenic landscape (Saito 1998). In the creature's mind, however, everything is as it should be in the mire. Nothing arouses its concern, not even the unresponsive silence. However, in order to reach this interpretation, one must also see the second video of *Hillasuon kummajainen*.

In the second video (Rampe-Raven 2018b), the perspective changes and the Freak is seen as an animal captured by a game camera: as 'the other', a non-human living being in the mire (Fig. 6). The creature again crawls up from the soil of the mire and begins its echolocation of the space. It is now possible to see its head which is formed by a gas-mask-like headgear and a trunk-like mouthpiece. The human-shaped figure is otherwise naked but has a breathing mask to cover its crotch like a garment of fur or bark. The Freak of Cloudberry Mire belongs in principle to the category of monsters: it is something strange and extraordinary, and as such, potentially terrifying. If it were, say, in a street without an art context, it would be intimidating because it would be in the wrong place. But in a mire, it is in its own habitat and as naked, for example, as a bear in its fur.

As a guardian of the mire, the Freak is part of a continuum of folklore narratives of supranormal natural spirits. Also, as a non-human creature belonging to the mire, the Freak has the right to criticize the human relationship with the mire. But the Freak of the Cloudberry Mire turns this question of monstrosity the other way round. Caught on a game camera, the Freak finds a plastic bag in the mire and becomes angry. It seems to say: Do you people have to come and litter the mires too? This message reflects real life events, and in the previous spring before the video, the newspapers had reported startling news that scientists had found a plastic bag nearly at 36,000 ft down in the world's deepest ocean trench (see The Telegraph 2018). Thus, the tragedy of the Anthropocene or the human era is encapsulated in this plastic bag.

Figure 6. *In the video* Hillasuon Kummajainen (part 2)*, the freak is seen as an animal captured by a game camera. Screenshot from the YouTube video.*

The angry Freak leaves the bag on a branch and stomps off into the desolation of the mire with a grumpy growl. As an argument, the burst is primordial, but as a solution it is powerless. But what else could the Freak do? In real life, the human impact on nature has become so overwhelming that the traditional spirit of nature seems to have become stunned. But in the artistic work, the Freak of Cloudberry Mire might also have come to the same conclusion as the Swamp Thing in the comics: let humans learn to take responsibility for their own actions. In the first video, things in the mire were also not as they should be. The dry and globally warm summer was one indicator of the changes in mires caused by climate change (Strack 2008). Today's swamp monster can still be seen in the 'eyes of the bog': not from the depths, but from the surface as a reflection of human interaction and perspective. Thus, the human is seen as a monster to the mire, and while this idea was already present in the *Swamp Thing* narratives, Rampe-Raven's performance takes it further – our fears *of* the mire have turned into fears *for* the mire.

THE MESSY LEGACY OF IMAGINED SWAMP CREATURES

In an ecocritical conception of reality, environmental meanings are shaped both discursively and as a matter of material reality. For example, the knowledge of the dry summer and its probable causes undoubtedly influenced the interpretation of the *Hillasuon kummajainen* videos. Also, people's lived experiences and

a learned or informed background knowledge can affect the interpretations of narratives. However, the effect can also be reflected the other way round, where experiences in imagined mires influence the perceptions of material nature. Art and other narratives therefore create images that influence attitudes and perceptions on the ground (Kaukio 2013: 111–137).

From the outset of this study, as messy images of our relationship with nature, imagined swamp creatures have revealed the problematic nature of the relationship between humans and the mire. Along the way, the works challenged initial assumptions. There was a hypothesis of an evolutionary process where the swamp monster would change from a terrifying alien to another kind of companion. While this was sometimes realized, alongside the evolutionary path there were other threads, and in swamp monster fiction, there are coexisting characteristics that both preserve and renew narrative conventions.

The perceptions of both the mire and its creatures raised in swamp monster fiction have both confirmed and challenged preconceptions. Ideas have been transferred from narratives to cultural and social memory. In the same way as has been argued that the English artist William Turner 'invented' the London fog (as a romantic notion) with his paintings (see Haapala 2002: 48–52; Kaukio 2013: 125–126), swamp monster narratives have created collective images of swamp monsters in people's minds that influence human relations with the mire. The imprint of such fictional images on people's minds has sometimes been argued to interfere in the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of the environment (Carlson 2007: 104–105). But while a fear of nature may have increased due to contemporary alienated lifestyles, swamp monster stories can hardly be considered to have induced this – and, in fact, quite the contrary. Furthermore, imaginations and descriptions can also help to 'tame' the landscape, making it understandable and homely (Sepänmaa 1986: 6–7). As such, both imagination and storytelling are ways of dealing with the unknown, and even defeating the monster, if necessary.

Swamp monsters have focused people's fears of the mire on the wildness of nature. Categorically ambiguous mires and monsters are not more easily subjected to conceptual ordering than to practical exploitation. But swamp monsters have caused a frightening dent in the human self-image because they have revealed the limits of the human ability, or even legitimacy, to control nature. The purpose of the monster in general is to be seen, so that its strangeness can be confronted. Monsters require you to look at the other and the different, and in the process to remake yourself. In this context, the effect of swamp creature stories can be seen as different from how, for example, a romantic painting can change the viewer's perception of an issue. Swamp creatures change not only the perception of the mire, but also the self-perception of the observer. In this context, swamp monster stories are essentially about people. The fear of losing control is still part of the

mire relationship, but it is addressed in several ways, as the fear *of* the mire has become a fear *for* the mire. Such a relationship is tinged with guilt and recognition that mistakes have been made in relation to the non-human that cannot be corrected by human efforts and abilities. The emphasis on environmental values in contemporary fiction is not limited to mire narratives. However, breaking preconceptions seems to have become one of the life-bloods of recent swamp monster narratives. This has brought to the surface the idea that something initially seen as alien and frightening can be good in itself. There is no need to defeat the mire, and instead, the mire can acquire meanings for overcoming fear.

Swamp monsters seem to suggest a fundamental change in our perspectives in relation to the environment, as their representations question the boundaries between the human and the non-human. The line is also blurred in seemingly simple children's books, where the swamp creature blends seamlessly with other species. The monster as an animal also offers humans a place as one of these species, although the concept of species in general can be questioned. The mire can also be thought of as a conscious, experiencing and feeling organism. Any activity that damages it affects all of those connected to it, and even drainage activities in real-world mires can be thought of as a mire's 'wounds' (Kaukio 2022: 78). Thus, in both fictional and non-fiction narratives, equating mire suffering with human pain is not just an anthropomorphization of our interpretation of nature. Instead, it raises the idea of the mire as an intrinsically valuable, non-verbal agent. While it is not possible to fully understand the non-human other, it is still possible to respect it. So, at their best, swamp creatures teach us to let go of prejudice and to take responsibility for our mutual environment, paving the way for a more equal relationship with non-human nature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the two peer reviewers and my colleagues in the Mire Trend research project for their insightful comments. The research was funded by the Kone Foundation.

NOTES

[1] See fandom internet pages: Marvel: Man-Thing and DC Comics: Swamp Thing. See also about the predecessor of Swamp Thing: DC Comics: Alexander Olsen (New Earth).

[2] See some recent crime novels: Elly Griffiths' *The Crossing Places* 2009; Susanne Jansson's *Offermossen* 2017 (The Forbidden Place), or Spanish film *El silencio del pantano* (The Silence of the Marsh) 2019; and Polish TV-series *Rojst* (The Mire) 2018 and *Rojst 1997* (The Mire '97) 2021–.

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