

INTRODUCTION

THE ECOGOTHIC AS A CATALYST OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY: THE IMPACT OF MONSTROSITY*

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The present issue means an opportunity to discuss the application of Ecogothic as a theoretical approach to literary and filmic texts. This public demand responds to a growing tendency to expand the studies on ecocriticism towards new fields of research. It is also clear evidence of the human preoccupation about the future of the planet Earth in a world in permanent crisis: politically, ideologically, economically and foremost environmentally. Climate emergency has stopped being a threat and has become a reality with irreversible consequences. The effects of the so called “natural catastrophes” have derived in a growing awareness of the damage we have inflicted on nature. There is a real fear of meteorological phenomena or of the melting of the Polar ice caps as they impact on the world and may transform it dramatically even to the point that life may no longer be possible in it. In fact, current ecogothic fiction also focuses on the terror writers feel when they observe the lack of conscience and awareness humanity shows on climate emergency and the certainty that the world as we know it today is going to disappear at a near future, as apocalyptic narratives such as *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy have been announcing. Simon Estok in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (2018) states that: “We become agitated but remain passive “spectators to future ruin” rather than active witnesses” (49).

Since Simon Estok coined “ecophobia” to define “the contempt and fear we feel for the agency of the natural environment” (2009, 218), scholars from all over the world have debated and reflected on the concept in multiple ways and the debate continues open today. The articles in this issue attempt to demonstrate that this irrational fear comes from our anthropocentric view of the world and our failure to identify the representatives of the more than human world as allies in our preservation of the planet. Instead, human beings have traditionally transformed the environment to make life more comfortable for only one single species disregarding the others: the human being, and not even for all the representatives of the human species, since race has been understood as a parameter for separation and devaluation of certain groups of people based on the color of their skin. The idea of “the Other”



embodies chaos, the opposite of the order and control that defines the construction of the domesticated world as we have inherited it from a Humanist tradition. This other can be depicted taking a feature of his/her personality as seen from the eyes of the colonizer. Instances of bestiality or cannibalism from the part of this “other” have been the norm in most narratives written before postcolonial times. When connected with postcolonialism, the ecogothic deals with the alter-human, represented mostly in terms of monstrosity from an Anthropocentric perspective, as liminal creatures inhabiting a threatening third space such as forests, oceans, swamps, haunted houses or devastated landscapes. Witches, ghosts, vampires and other similar creatures are the dwellers of the magic and supernatural realm located in this feared third space. Elizabeth Parker in *The Forest and the Ecogothic* (2019) introduces the forest as a haunted place that provides shelter but also as a frightening site, such as in folk tales and she discusses how nature is used to provoke fear. In the same vein, current studies on blue humanities such as Serpil Opperman’s provide a new setting for the ecogothic.

Thus, representations of women, queer or minoritized cultures as a monstrosity, as the abject, belong fully to the realm of the ecogothic through material feminisms which deal with the consideration and transformation of bodies by paying attention to the porosity and viscosity of matter addressed in Alaimo, Haraway and Braidotti’s theories.

Again, Estok in his *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (2018) advocates for a more posthuman approach to nature, one that aims at eliminating such differences in terms of race, ethnicity or gender among human beings but also in relationship to the more than human world.

Ecogothic appeared for the first time in 2013 with the publication of the homonymous volume edited by Andrew Smith and William Hughes. The introduction points out that their volume is “the first to explore the Gothic theories of ecocriticism” (1). The collection shows different narratives located in different geographies and historical times, like the articles included in this special issue which range from the Romanticism to contemporary times, thus, proving that this theoretical approach emerges as a necessity to understand the evolution of the relationship between the human beings and the more than human in terms of fear.

Smith and Hughes also discuss the differences with ecohorror which the editors consider a new literary genre deriving from classic gothic texts but engaging with the effect of mainly natural disasters on Earth, with a focus on apocalyptic narratives and films showing what humanity can no longer control. As Simon Estok affirms in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis* (2018) human beings are currently unable to control their own life much less their surroundings (10). The monster we have created

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with our capitalist and neoliberalist practices threatens to engulf us, finally displacing our anthropocentrism, signaling the triumph of nature in ecogothic narratives.

Ecogothic has contributed greatly to boost the popularity of the Gothic literary genre as can be perceived by the increasing amount of collective works that have appeared in recent years, most of them included in the works cited of the contributors of this issue. Together with the collective volumes, the periodical publication *The Gothic Nature Journal: New Directions in Ecohorror and the EcoGothic* created and first published in 2017 has acquired an enormous reputation in the field. Lest not forget the number of Gothic conferences taking place in different parts of the world.

Thus, “Ding Dong, the Evil Witch is Not Dead: Monstrosity and Ecophobia in *The Witches of Westwood* and *Wytches*” by Cristina Casado Presa, examines the portrayal of witches as ecogothic monsters symbolizing nature’s chaotic and uncontrollable forces. She argues that these witches challenge human-centered views of the environment, embodying nature’s raw power in contrast to the structured world humans seek to impose. Central to this article is the concept of “ecophobia,” an irrational fear of the natural world, which both works emphasize by depicting nature as a dangerous and decaying space. Her analysis ultimately underscores humanity’s vulnerabilities and anxieties about the limits of its control over a powerful and often threatening natural world, encouraging a reconsideration of human-nature relations.

José Manuel Correoso Rodenas’ “Land Property, Land Destruction: Ecogothic vs. Capitalism in Bram Stoker’s *The Snake’s Pass*” argues that Stoker uses Gothic motifs to address the destructive consequences of capitalism in rural Ireland, particularly the environmental degradation and social inequalities it fosters. The analysis centers on the “gombeen man,” a vampiric, treasure-hunting capitalist figure that symbolizes the exploitation of land and community. Additionally, Dick Sutherland, an engineer employed by the gombeen man, is portrayed as a victim of this capitalist system. The article interprets the destruction of the bog as a metaphor for the erasure of Irish identity and the advancement of British imperialism.

Imelda Martín Junquera’s “Et Verbum Caro Factum Est: Monstrosity and Transcorporeality in *Mexican Gothic*” analyzes Silvia Moreno García’s novel through its engagement with ecogothic themes, and demonstrates how ecogothic literature functions as a decolonial force. Set in 1950s Mexico, the novel centers around an English family, the Doyles, who attempt to preserve their lineage through the exploitation of natural resources and indigenous labor. The novel employs traditional Gothic tropes, like the haunted house and monstrous figures, to comment on colonial exploitation and patriarchal oppression. The article also discusses indigenous resistance and women’s solidarity as central to the characters’ emancipation. Additionally, the article examines the concept of transcorporeality in the novel, which blurs the boundaries between human and non-human, particularly through the influence of fungi and mold on the characters’ consciousness.

Aylin Walder’s article, “Gothic Nature in Fantasy Fiction: The White Walkers as Dreadful Agents of Nature in *Game of Thrones*,” examines the eco-Gothic themes in the television series *Game of Thrones*. Walder asserts that the show’s use of Gothic elements—wild landscapes, monstrous beings, and pagan religions—serves to critique



anthropocentrism and colonialism while reflecting human anxieties about climate change. This analysis draws upon Parker's seven indicators of the Gothic forest, Alaimo's concept of transcorporeality, and Morton's hyperobject within the context of Haraway's Chtulucene.

Juan Ignacio Torres Montesinos' "The State of Nature: EcoGothic (Mo) Other in Catalina Infante's *Todas Somos una Misma Sombra*" offers an ecogothic interpretation of Chilean writer Catalina Infante's short story. Drawing on Thomas Hobbes' concept of the "state of nature," the article highlights how Infante portrays the connection between humanity and the environment, particularly within the context of the Anthropocene and its environmental crises. Montesinos suggests that Infante envisions a new social pact rooted in ecofeminism, where nature serves as a refuge and protector for women. In a world devoid of sunlight, the story explores how women adapt their bodies and ways of life to the perpetual darkness, thereby redefining the meanings of light and shadow. This ecofeminist perspective advocates for gender equality and the preservation of nature.

Lydia Freire Gargamala's article, "Rebellion and Wilderness: Female Agency and Irish Nature in Elizabeth Griffith's *The History of Lady Barton* (1771)," links female characters to the Irish wilderness in Griffith's Gothic novel. Gargamala argues that Griffith's portrayal of the natural landscape mirrors women's experiences within a patriarchal system, highlighting their marginalization and denial of agency. The analysis focuses on two key figures, Louisa Barton and Olivia Walter, whose struggles for freedom reflect the wild and unpredictable Irish landscape. Furthermore, the article challenges preconceived notions of Irish identity and its connection to English dominance, revealing a deeper, more complex depiction of the country.

In "*Tears in Rain: An Ecogothic Hardboiled Tribute to Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?**" by Emilio Ramón García, Rosa Montero's novel *Tears in Rain* is considered through a postmodern ecogothic lens. Set in a dystopian Madrid in 2109, the novel addresses themes such as fear, the breakdown of identity, and the dehumanization of individuals portrayed as monstrous "others". Ramón explores how Montero's work critiques the impact of climate change and unchecked corporate exploitation of resources. The article further examines the roles of science, technology, and memory manipulation, considering how these elements contribute to the fragmentation of identity.

"None of Them Knows About Floods or Anything About the Rivers: Monstrous Kinships and Agency in Michael McDowell's *The Flood and The Levee*", by Gianluca Calio, critically examines Michael McDowell's "Blackwater" saga, showcasing how the Southern Gothic genre reflects the fraught and intricate relationship between humanity and the natural world. Central to this analysis is Elinor Dammert, a shapeshifting figure who rises from the Lost River after a flood, challenging conventional boundaries between humans and the environment. Calio contends that Elinor functions as an ecogothic figure, forging connections between people and the landscape. Her mission involves resisting environmental devastation, even resorting to violent means to protect the natural world.

Lastly, Irene Sanz Alonso argues in her article, "An Ecogothic Reading of Sea Monsters: *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) and *The Meg* (2018)," that we can categorize

these films within the ecogothic genre. Both films make use of traditional Gothic elements –enclosed spaces, monstrous creatures, and a pervasive sense of fear– to highlight the consequences of humanity’s interference with marine ecosystems. Alonso contends that the films illustrate “ecophobia,” a fear and disdain for the natural world, and examine how this fear justifies the destruction of animals and ecosystems that threaten human survival.

Building on the growing recognition of ecogothic, this volume aims to further enrich and advance this dynamic and expanding field. The essays presented here engage with key themes that align with current scholarly discussions, offering fresh perspectives on the complex relationship between human and non-human nature. By addressing these critical issues, the volume seeks to deepen our understanding of the intricate connections between ecological concerns and the Gothic tradition.



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