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Ecogothic Agency and the Uncanny Reimagining of Nature in *The Woman in Black*

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Abstract

*This paper proposes a novel perspective in the field of ecogothic literary criticism, wherein nature functions not as a passive backdrop but as an active agent within the Gothic. Through a closed, textual, qualitative ecogothic discourse analysis of *The Woman in Black*, this research draws upon Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny (unheimlich), Keetley and Sivil's notion of ecogothic spaces and the lack of ecological control, and Timothy Morton's definition of dark ecology to contend that nature can assume the form of a supernatural force. The analysis focuses on representations of ecogothic spaces, natural phenomena, and human-nonhuman interactions to trace how ecological instability produces uncanny affect and ecophobia. By examining the familiar-turned-unfamiliar relationship between human and nonhuman entities, the findings suggest that nonhuman agency invokes uncanny affect, manifested through recurring hauntings mediated by nature. This effect is further intensified by its 19th-century English setting, where natural phenomena such as weather and the sea operate as modes of haunting, thereby inducing a fear of the nonhuman, or ecophobia, in Arthur Kipps. The study ultimately argues that, through ecophobia, the nonhuman compels both characters within the narrative and readers beyond it to confront ecological instability and human vulnerability. The paper thereby bridges literary analysis with ecological thought, suggesting that Gothic texts can cultivate environmental awareness in ways traditional ecocriticism often overlooks.*

Keywords: *ecogothic; ecophobia; Nonhuman Agency; uncanny*

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Introduction

This paper explores Susan Hill's novel *The Woman in Black*, from an ecogothic perspective. The book is perhaps the epitome

of 20th-century ghost fiction with a distinct Gothic style that Hill is known for, even in her non-supernatural fiction. While the novel's setting is not primarily the forest as a Gothic space and includes the castle-like mansion at

its core, the surrounding environment and atmosphere are active entities that can be analyzed through an ecogothic framework. This study is significant as it aims to explore the dark side of nature, where the Gothic elements actively signify ecological breakdown resulting from human actions. It further suggests that Gothic elements can cultivate environmental awareness in ways traditional ecocriticism often overlooks by insinuating that some human actions are taboos that harm the society, nature, and any hope of harmonious coexistence in the future.

The theoretical framework of ecogothic, a portmanteau of ecocriticism and Gothic studies (Baldick, 2015), draws upon Freud's (1919/2017) idea of the uncanny, which explores supernatural entities in the Gothic text – more often marginalized than not –, to study the forest as a Gothic space in ecogothic theory (Smith & Hughes, 2015), to the uncanny feeling of ecophobia as dark ecology (Morton, 2016). Ecogothic primarily posits that there exists a fear of the natural world in humans, as well as an uncanny affect towards ecological phenomenon that exist outside human control; that nature may be a manifestation of under or misrepresented voices related to human crisis where spreading awareness is one such role of ecogothic literature; and that the human form may overlap with nonhumans – or supernatural and ghostly as a body bound to the natural “wilderness” (Del Principe, 2014). The theoretical resources as such characterize three major elements of ecogothic: 1) a condensed form of uncanny, fear, and contempt in humans while confronting the natural world; 2) a literary mode that uses an external nature or wilderness to spread awareness of the crisis in practices of representation; and 3) a terrain in which the human and nonhuman intersect, as the body becomes mentally and emotionally permeable to ecological and supernatural forces within the Gothic landscape.

Early intersections of Gothic and nature identify naturalized Gothicism in Ann Radcliffe's novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) as “tame the delicious fear by explaining the natural causes of the disturbing phenomena” (Rabkin, 1976, p. 185). Kroger (2015) also examines the same concept in

Radcliffe's novel by postulating that characters who exhibit malevolent intentions lack an intrinsic connection to the natural world (p. 19). In one of the early applications of the theory, Goode (2015) argues that Sansay's *Secret History* novel shifts Gothic horror from racial violence to an ecogothic fear of unsettling, entangled relationships between humans, nature, and the environment, where boundaries collapse and meaning becomes unstable (p. 449). Siby (2025) observes that much of contemporary environmental literature like Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* combines “Gothic tropes with environmental realism, producing a narrative that situates climate anxiety within deeply rooted cultural trauma” (p. 12). Moreover, recent scholarship demonstrates that ecogothic discourse extends beyond classic Gothic as it can also be applied to broader social and cultural contexts, including decolonial studies (Devi & Daimari, 2023) and transcultural science fiction (Dories, 2022).

Despite being a staple of late 20th-century Gothic literature, Hill's novel *The Woman in Black* has a dearth of literary analysis and criticism associated with it. While extensive research has been conducted with respect to the critique of motherhood in 19th-century Victorian England, the Gothic castle as a labyrinth of locked doors, the female agency in Gothic texts (Scullion, 2003), maternal rage (Cox, 2000), debate about absence and erasure of the ghost as well as female presence (Scullion, 2003; Cox, 2000; D'Arcy, 2022), dynamics of gender, and the comparative analysis with other famous Gothic texts such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) on the subject of the archetype of ghosts (Miquel-Baldellou, 2023) the ecocritical perspective remains unexplored. Scullion does expand upon Humfrye's ghost's complete freedom of space and time, unbound by geographical constraints (Scullion, 2003), yet does not factor in any environmental phenomenon.

Mullan, in his review of the text, notes the uncanny emotion Arthur Kipps experiences arises not solely from the unfathomable nature of the spectral figure but also from his own uncertainty and lack of reliability as a narrator. The writer notes that “the storyteller talks of coming out from under the long shadow cast

by the events of the past” (Mullan, 2012), implying a lack of control and connectedness with the atmosphere of the setting and hence nature. This uncanny atmosphere is translated to the screen by the director of the film adaptation, John Watkins. He asserts that the experience captures elements that exist in the periphery of vision, and if one blinks, they subtly encroach upon the edges of the frame (ScreenSlam, 2012). The intellectual uncertainty of the nonhuman entities present in the periphery of the frame not only invokes Freudian *unheimlich* but ecophobia as well.

The author’s vision (imparted through an interview) elucidates several key themes regarding the phenomenon of ghosts in *The Woman in Black*: 1) the motivation of spectral entities as instruments of vengeance for any perceived injustices – be it social or ecological; 2) the ability of ghosts to transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries and as such, ecological boundaries as well; 3) the significance of setting and atmosphere when shaping the narrative; and 4) the implications of child loss or abduction as indicative of threats to future generations. This suggests a possible connection of ecocriticism with ghosts. Additionally, Hill references a practice she encountered in her own childhood; the marking of trees with white rims to facilitate navigation in complete darkness, which may imply a sense of disorientation arising from a familiar-turned-unfamiliar environment within the natural world.

As mentioned previously, the scholarly critique of Hill’s novel is largely feminist and Gothic, and has been limited to the mansion; ignoring the supernatural “wilderness”. Thus, there is ample research gap to explore. Moreover, the role of nature in the uncanny atmosphere, the extent of environmental control which belongs to the ghost who is not only propagating ecophobia but raising eco-awareness and with that social awareness, presents a gap in theory as well as the topic of this discussion.

Through the theoretical frameworks of Freud, Keetley and Sivils, and Morton who blur the lines of the nonhuman and the landscape, that is embedding the haunting into the landscape, this paper aims to explore the ghost

and nature as a single intertwined force. Sivils further mentions in his article, “Vegetal Haunting: The Gothic Plant in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction,” the concept of vegetal haunting (p. 161), plant life in Gothic texts may function as both the haunted and the haunting, embodying environmental and historical trauma. Building on this, the present study conceptualizes the ghost and the natural environment as mutually constitutive, wherein the supernatural emerges through ecological forces rather than existing as a separate entity. This force invokes uncanny feelings in humans similar to ecophobia, in order to raise social and ecocritical awareness. Thus, through the research paper, the following research objectives will be explored:

1. To highlight the relationship between the ghost, nature, and humans in the novel.
2. To explain the source of the uncanny feeling in the characters through dark ecology and lack of ecological control.
3. To analyze the imagery which is used in the novel to invoke this uncanny feeling in the characters.
4. To clarify the ghost’s purpose of haunting through the environment that also coincides with the social context of 19th-century England.
5. To examine how effectively the uncanny feeling raises eco-critical and social awareness in the characters of the novel.

Methodology

The general methodology used in this research paper is qualitative, interpretative, and primarily focuses on the primary text, *The Woman in Black*. The primary text is chosen based on the criteria that it portrays nature as a force that can inspire change and cultivate awareness through its themes, in this case its uncanny atmosphere. This research paper analyses the meaning, context, and themes in the text, as well as careful analysis of imagery and symbolism. It juxtaposes the human to the character of Arthur Kipps and the other members of the town of Crythin Gifford as the Anthropocene that enacts injustice on the nonhuman and shows, through the actions of the nonhuman, that their actions are detrimental to not only nonhumans but also themselves.

The broader discourse approach used in this paper is ecocritical discourse analysis, which focuses on human and nonhuman relationships and the importance of nature and ecology. Specifically, ecogothic discourse analysis is used to observe how Gothic tropes intersect with nature, the environment, and the human element. The secondary theoretical resources used in this paper include Keetley and Sivils' (2018) chapter "Introduction: approaches to ecogothic" in *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-century American Literature*; Del Principe's (2014) article "Introduction: The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century"; and Smith and Hughes' (2015) chapter "Introduction: defining the ecoGothic" in *EcoGothic*. Moreover, Freud's (1919/2017) paper "The Uncanny" and Morton's (2016) book *Dark Ecology* are also used as supporting theories in the paper.

Due to ecogothic theory being relatively new, there is a lack of a concise, coherent theoretical model encompassing its complete elements. Therefore, a plethora of book chapters and articles are used as theoretical references. The dearth of research on ecogothic also acts as a limitation for this research paper. The primary text has not been explored through any eco-critical lens but inspires a range of Gothic studies, including feminist Gothicism. While secondary sources are selected based on peer-review status, relevance to ecocriticism and ecogothic studies, and availability in major academic databases such as JSTOR, Routledge, Edinburgh University Press, and Oxford University Press, this paper also includes reviews of the text from newspapers and interviews. Interpretative validity is ensured through consistent grounding in textual evidence and triangulation with established theoretical perspectives. As a textual study, no human participants are involved, and therefore no formal ethical approval is required. Also, as the study focuses primarily on the textual representation of nature in the novel, only brief references are made to film adaptations and authorial background for contextual purposes; these are not used as analytical material and do not form part of the core interpretive framework.

The analysis proceeds in three stages: identification of nature-related imagery, examination of Gothic tropes, and interpretation through ecogothic and ecocritical frameworks. The identification criteria for nature related imagery includes specific instances of natural phenomena threatening human individual based on these instances capacity to invoke fear, personification of nature, loss of control, and psychological disturbance in human subjects. This imagery is at times also compared to a relatively peaceful imagery which denotes the absence of the selective criteria: an absence of fear, presence of human control, and lack of any psychological disturbance in individuals. The results and discussion part is organized according to the research objectives in the introduction to explore the aim of the paper and support the thesis statement. To highlight the role of the ghost and nature in producing ecophobia, the first research objective explains the actions of each being and how it establishes a relationship between them. The second research objective emphasizes that ecophobia is primarily produced by the uncontrollable aspect of nature, while the third objective examines that this feeling may be produced by imagery. The fourth objective situates the start of the human-nature antagonistic relationship at the peak of the Industrial Revolution and links it with not just ecological injustice but also social injustice. The last objective aims to explore whether Kipps is affected by the Gothic elements and whether the idea of humans dominating nature is subverted in his consciousness.

Results and Discussion

Unlike previous studies that limit themselves to only Gothic Criticism and focus on common Gothic tropes like female Gothic agency, the haunted space and its boundaries, and descent into social taboos, this paper primarily focuses on the uncanny natural phenomena and its effect on human sensibilities. Since Hill's fiction has an inherent dark and uncanny ambiance, it is an excellent source material to explore human relationship with other nonhuman entities. For example, her novels often paint a romantic image of England with darker undertones, locked rooms and evil preying on the innocence of

childhood. Other than the chosen primary text, her novels like *The Various Haunts by Men* (2004) are placed away from the modernity of society, in small cathedral towns. The romantic feeling of the era she writes about is frequently steeped with darker images as shown in her novel *I'm the King of the Castle* (1970). Her short fiction collection *The Boy who Taught the Beekeeper to Read* (2003) is filled with odd relationships between teenagers and older people which highlights the author's ability to portray the uncanny in any setting, critiquing much of the social injustice enacted by humans.

The *Woman in Black* stands out as a specific dark work, as it was released after a long hiatus in her writing career, after the death of her first child, hence, child loss is a theme abundantly explored in her novel. The grief portrayed by the ghost of Jennet Humfrye in the novel is personal grief, towards society and the natural order of death in the absence of an accuser. Humfrye unleashes her anger at humanity as a whole and her environment is just one tool she uses in her quest for revenge. The setting of the novel presents a perfect backdrop to her hauntings. It is a mansion called Eel Marsh House surrounded by sea and connected to the rural town of Crythin Gifford with a narrow mud path with ruthless marshes on either side, frequented by sea-mists. Most of the narrative unfolds when the ghost of Humfrye and the narrator (Arthur Kipps) are alone in the Eel Marsh House, cut off from the town due to the tide overtaking the narrow connection – a highly Gothic trait of the nature surrounding them.

The novel, set between the 19th and 20th centuries, encompasses three distinct timelines: the first depicts Jennet Humfrye, an unmarried mother who experiences the tragic loss of her child twice (initially when she is forced to give him to her married sister, and later when he drowns in the marshes); the second timeline follows Arthur Kipps, a lawyer, as he settles the will of Alice Drablow and uncovers the secret of her sister, Jennet, and her son's death, resulting in Jennet causing the demise of Kipps' son; and the third timeline presents Kipps, several decades later, narrating the haunting experience to the readers. This paranormal encounter leaves

Kipps with a transformed perspective on both Jennet's motivations and her relationship with the natural world.

1. The Dualistic Relationship between Human and Nonhuman

The paper suggests that the relationship delineated by *The Woman in Black* between the ghost, nature, and humans is inherently dualistic. It is simultaneously symbiotic and antagonistic, wherein familiarity and unfamiliarity, awe and fear, and understanding and malice coalesce to present a complex dilemma. Marland (2017) cites Laurance Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* to reaffirm that in environmentally oriented works, the nonhuman environment emerges as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history (p. 1510). In the novel, imagery pertaining to the personification of natural elements, be it the fog or animal supports this dualistic relationship. Prior to Humfrye's transformation into a spectral entity, her scandalous circumstance of bearing a child out of wedlock is absorbed by the marshes during a mist-induced accident. It is this traumatic event that Humfrye subsequently re-enacts to ensnare Kipps in Eel Marsh House. Kipps, too, observes that this fog felt "as though it were made up of millions of live fingers that crept over me, hung on me and then shifted away" (Hill, 1998, p. 86). In this instance, the nonhuman (the ghost and nature) and human intersect such that their forms merge into an apparent unity within the fog. Consequently, the fog or rain-mist becomes an "ecogothic space" (Keetley & Sivils, 2018), where nature, nonhuman, and human entities converge. Furthermore, the presence of the town dog named Spider, who functions as a companion and protector to Kipps, exemplifies that within a specific ecogothic space, the Gothic element does not entirely negate the interdependence between humans and the nonhuman environment. In the numerous instances where Kipps is enveloped by mist and surrounded by marshes, nature not only invokes fear but also serves as a harbinger of impending threat. Subsequently, the ghost relies on the human to uncover the injustice perpetrated against her, nature claims her

infant as much as society does, and the townspeople both vilify the ghost and the natural surroundings of Eel Marsh house. As a result, an embodiment of the intricate connection between the human and nonhuman realms emerges.

2. The Uncanny Environment

Regarding the ominous atmosphere surrounding Eel Marsh House, the paper further argues that the spectral entity elicits not only fear but also an uncanny sensation in the characters of the novel due to the inscrutable and unknowable aspects of nature, such as the abruptness of ecological phenomena and the absence of human control over the environment. The vastness and incomprehensibility of the environment inducing an uncanny feeling was previously termed “dark ecology” (Morton, 2016), derived from Freud’s (1919/2017) definition of the uncanny, where “the uncanny would always be that in which one does not know where one is” (p. 593) or in other words, the unfamiliarity of the landscape and nature surrounding an individual. This feeling of unfamiliarity largely stems from Kipps’ own anthropocentric upbringing where “ecophobia constructs nature as an enemy to be feared, loathed, resisted, countered, and overcome” (Ryan, 2020) Drawing upon imagery that compares the same two landscapes, Kipps narrates his experience based on his anthropocentric views of nature. When he is not at Eel Marsh House, the imagery is painted as sublime, familiar, and homely. He elaborates as he observes the town of Crythin Gifford: “There was a touch of warmth in autumn sunshine.... russet and golden leaves clinging to the end of their (trees) branches.... I had looked at Crythin Gifford on the map.... I felt very much home and content” (Hill, 1998, p. 48). This affectionate description illustrates how deeply Kipps is situated in the non-ecogothic space. Conversely, as the imagery shifts to the Gothic space, the mansion is depicted as set upon a “wide expanse of marsh and estuary” which was “most astonishingly situated, isolated, uncompromising but handsome” (p. 68). Kipps’ sense of wonder and novelty, however, soon transitions to an uncomfortable dread as the natural environment merges with a cemetery

possessing a “decayed and abandoned air” and an “ugly-satanic looking vulture,” resulting in Kipps becoming “suddenly conscious of the cold and extreme bleakness and eeriness of the spot and the gathering dusk of the November afternoon” (pp. 72-74). It is noteworthy that, there was no significant alteration in the day or the weather. Only it was Kipps’ perception of the same autumn day in November, that has shifted dramatically as soon as he traversed the boundary between the Gothic and ecogothic space.

Keetley and Sivils (2018) assert that “whether in the realm of the real or of signification, nature poses a problem of control, inciting human efforts at dominance” (p. 3). Kipps, similarly, exhibits this compulsion to have all his affairs meticulously arranged, intensified by his profession as a lawyer. His abrupt loss of motor and psychological functions during the Pony and Trap incident leaves him destabilized, apprehensive, and at the mercy of the ghost and nature. As Kipps spends a night at the house, he is drawn by the sound of a Pony and Trap, analogous to the one that resulted in the death of Humfrye’s son approximately fifty years prior. He loses all control of his surroundings as illustrated by the following excerpt:

I wondered how deeply the path went under water when tide was at height. But, on a still night such as this, there was plenty of time to cross in safety.... I had never been so alone, nor felt quite so alone, nor felt quite so small and insignificant in a vast landscape before, and... (I was) struck by absolute indifference of water and sky to my presence.... Above all it was the suddenness of it (the mist) that had so unnerved and disoriented me. (Hill, 1998, pp. 85-86)

Evidently, Kipps operates under the erroneous assumption that he could accurately assess the weather patterns, the distance in the wilderness, and his own ability to navigate through the wild path based on familiarity and past experience. However, the ghost and nature reveal their unpredictability and ensnare Kipps until the tide rises and nearly reaches him.

Moreover, the recurring sound of the Pony and Trap that signifies the horrific incident has become integrated as the historical haunting remembered by Eel Marsh House. Recurrences or repeated events stem from the uncanny “double” where an individual is compelled to experience a loop. In ecogothic literature, history repeats on the same land where it once occurred. Freud describes a similar situation in the following excerpt:

When one is lost in a forest in high altitudes, caught, we will suppose, by the mountain mist, and when every endeavor to find the marked or familiar path ends again and again in a return to one and the same spot, recognizable by some particular landmark. (Freud, 1919/2017, p. 602)

Kipps experiences the sound thrice. The auditory haunting on the marshes occur regularly, as reported by the townsfolk. In tandem with this occurrence, the ghost’s own curse causes the death of one of the town’s children; as if on a loop. As previously highlighted, this “recurrence” signifies the “doubling” in all three actors: 1) the ghost of Humfrye as both victim and malevolent specter; 2) nature as both an uncanny, active, ecogothic, historical site of hauntings and a familiar, comforting presence; 3) and humans who construct circumstances that propagate social injustice, as well as Kipps who aims to uncover and rectify it. Hence, the imagery becomes metaphorically synonymous to peeling onion layers that transform the unfamiliar into the familiar and vice versa.

3. Control in an Ecogothic Space

The height of callous industrialization and contemptuous attitudes towards unwed mothers are key social characteristics of 19th-century England. Thus, this paper contends that the ghost merges with the environment allowing it a higher degree of control. The theme of exploitation of nature often coincides with the exploitation of women under eco-feminism, which may have led to Humfrye’s inclination towards the land. She had not only lost custody of her child due to social stigma, but the land where her son was buried may have provided her a domain or space far

superior to that she had under humans. Consequently, the ghost merges with her environment and acquires the ability to navigate through locked doors. She is able to permeate through the town among the living people and even reaching London. This quality is extremely similar to the mist and fog. In London, where her only reach is through fog, she ultimately causes the death of Kipps’ son. Kipps, in his urban element, proclaims the following upon seeing the ghost:

They (Kipps son and wife) were almost back, they had almost reached me, I would retrieve them and then we would go, for I didn’t want to stay a second longer. I made ready. They had almost come to a halt when they passed the tree beside which the woman in black was still standing and, as they did so, she moved quickly as if to step into the pony’s path. The animal severed violently.... whining and out of control. (Hill, 1998, p. 199)

As Keetley and Sivils (2018) previously suggested, the human (and all that is associated with human civilization – order and technology) and the nonhuman (the ghost, nature, disorderliness) contend for supremacy their spaces clashing and overlapping with each other. Kipps had once entered her space, and at this moment Humfrye forcefully brings the ecogothic space to him to reinstate that that there is no escape from social or ecological injustice, and Kipps can never feign ignorance.

4. Social and Eco-critical Awareness

This paper further asserts that the uncanny sensation Kipps experiences while at Eel Marsh House effectively contributes to raising his eco-critical and social awareness, as well as that of the readers. Del Principe (2014) observes that there exists an estrangement between human and nonhuman components, specifically nature in this case, and that this estrangement stems from “human reluctance to come to terms with their nonhuman ancestry and the common biological origin of life” (p. 2). He contends that Gothic literature reminds humans how to interact with nature. Keetley and Sivils (2018) expand on this notion, stating that in ecogothic texts, the “traditional boundaries between the human

and the nonhuman become blurred in grotesque ways by human atrocities” (p. 11), which indicates evidence of social issues. It is precisely this uncanny and grotesque perspective that develops an ecophobia in humans, necessitating a rectification of this notion. The transition from ecophilia to ecophobia can be understood through Freud’s (1919/2017) explanation of the relationship between “Heimlich, meaning familiar, native, belonging to the home; and that what is uncanny (Unheimlich) is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar” (p. 593). Consequently, after several decades, Kipps’ behavior towards nature has dramatically changed from his youth, as evidenced from the beginning of the novel set a few decades later. The imagery describes air, whether “sweetly scented or balmy” or of “pungent bonfire,” and the “pasture river valley” that surrounds Arthur Kipps’ house, Monk’s Piece (Hill, 1998, pp. 1-2). The house is thoroughly integrated into the comforting natural environment, providing a stark contrast with the uncanny atmosphere he had encountered at Eel Marsh House. The harmonious family gathering during a holiday also contrasts with the broken family of Humfrye’s ghost. It both reinforces and negates the social construction of a happy family: 1) A complete assembled family would experience a joyful and festive mood; 2) Arthur Kipps’ nervous illness resulting from his encounters at Eel Marsh and the death of his first son does not prevent him from being a good father, nor Humfrye’s social position as an unmarried mother should’ve prevented her from having natural maternal instincts for other children.

In this regard, the contrast between the new imagery of nature and festive atmosphere around Kipps’ new dwelling, Monk’s Piece, and the imagery of nature near Crythin Gifford demonstrates the duality of nature. Kipps’ development of ecophobia, where he confesses that his “spirits (are) excessively affected by the ways of the weather” (p. 2), indicates that the uncanny environment was successful in raising eco-critical awareness. Kipps exhibits sensitivity to the environment, unlike what would be expected of a practical and rigid lawyer in his youth. Moreover, he finds contentment in the remoteness of his surroundings, away from civilization, in the

vastness of the landscape. This integration with nature and family demonstrates how Kipps’ uncanny encounter with the nonhuman has enabled an awareness stemming from his ecophobia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper showed that in *The Woman in Black*, the ghost and the natural environment worked together inside a specific ecogothic space, where both operated as one force. The ghost used the fog, the mist, the marshes, and especially the recurring sound of the pony and trap to trap the humans, and the humans tried to rely on their understanding of natural patterns to control the situation. This created a struggle of dominance in which neither nature nor humans were fully in control. The study also showed that Kipps’ view of nature changed depending on whether the woman in black was present or not, which indicated that the environment did not remain neutral but became uncanny when the ghost occupied it.

The analysis also demonstrated that the uncanny atmosphere came from the collapse of ecological control. Kipps thought he could predict nature, especially after his homely descriptions of Crythin Gifford where he felt very much at home and content, but once he entered the ecogothic space of Eel Marsh House, the same natural elements became frightening, unfamiliar, and grotesque. The mist that felt like millions of live fingers and the tide that closed off the path suddenly created a situation where Kipps’ control on the environment as a man of science vanished. This directly reflected Freud’s definition of the uncanny as the moment when the familiar becomes unfamiliar, and Morton’s dark ecology where nature becomes threatening due to its vastness and unpredictability. The 19th-century setting of the novel further supported the conflict between the human and nonhuman forces. This period was defined by industrial growth and strict social norms, especially towards women like Jennet Humfrye, who had her child taken away from her due to society’s judgment of single mothers. The analysis suggested that she merged with the landscape because the land

gave her more power than society ever did. This also explained her ability to move beyond physical restrictions, like locked doors or geographical boundaries, and how she eventually reached London to cause the death of Kipps' son. The study showed that the novel linked ecological injustice with social injustice, which strengthened the ecogothic reading.

The paper also argued that the uncanny environment was successful in changing Kipps' perspective. His later life at Monk's Piece, where he became extremely sensitive to weather conditions and described the environment with comfort instead of fear, showed that ecophobia had shifted into ecological awareness. This highlighted that his encounter at Eel Marsh House did not just frighten him but permanently altered his understanding of the natural world. His earlier confidence as a rational, practical lawyer disappeared, and he accepted that nature was not something humans could fully control.

Overall, the study added to ecogothic criticism by showing how Hill's novel presented nature and the ghost as one active agent. The findings also addressed the research gap around the absence of ecocritical readings of the novel. Future research could focus on human-animal interactions in the ecogothic space or explore other Gothic texts where nature participates directly in haunting.

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