

EXPLORING DARK ECOLOGY IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S *THE RAVEN*: TIMOTHY MORTON'S FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This study explores Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven* through the dark ecology framework developed by Timothy Morton to reveal the dark, ambiguous, and tense relationship between humans and nonhumans. The background of this study is motivated by the lack of studies that explicitly apply dark ecology theory to 19th century Gothic poetry, despite the work's rich potential for ecological analysis. The main objective of this study is to interpret how the raven, the atmosphere, and the ecological interventions in the poem act as nonhuman agents that undermine anthropocentric assumptions and reveal uneasy ecological connections. The research employed a qualitative textual analysis method through close reading of the poem and linking the findings to Morton's key concepts, such as strange strangers, painful interconnectedness, and ecological penetration into domestic space. The data were analyzed through three stages: data reduction, presentation, and theoretical interpretation based on four analytical categories: the agency of the raven, the intervention of nature into domestic space, the failure of anthropocentrism, and forms of painful interconnectedness. The results of this study indicate that the raven functions as an autonomous ecological agent, not simply a Gothic symbol, and reveals the fragility of the human and nonhuman boundary.

Keywords: *dark ecology, Edgar Allan Poe, The Raven, Timothy Morton*

1. Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven* published in 1845 is a literary work that attracts attention due to its ability to combine nuances of sadness, irrational atmosphere, and nonhuman elements that disturb the narrator's psychological space. This poem is often read with emphasis on personal symbolism (Lenore), melodrama, and Poe's rhetorical techniques. However, readings that use contemporary environmental theory such as Timothy Morton's dark ecology uncover new interpretations that place the raven and natural phenomena as agents and actors that disturb the boundaries between the narrator's domestic, biological, and geological spaces. This approach creates a new analysis that focuses on the painful interconnections and failures of the anthropocentric perspective in the poem (Morton, 2016). Timothy Morton's dark ecology is a way of ecological thinking that emphasizes the discomfort,

ambiguity, and weirdness of human and nonhuman relationships, as well as concepts such as hyper-objects that indicate the scale, distribution, and interconnectedness of ecological phenomena that transcend single human understanding (Morton, 2016).

Recent studies in environmental criticism show that Morton's theoretical application extends to contemporary cultural and media discourses, such as studies that read television series, audiovisual works, and creative practices through the lens of dark ecology, which confirms the relevance of this theory for analyzing the uneasy and interconnected relations between human and nonhuman (Ashraf et al, 2024).

Ağın and Yılmaz (2025) also emphasize that contemporary literary studies are increasingly moving toward an ecological posthumanist framework, an approach that rejects human hierarchies as the center of meaning and positions nonhuman entities as integral parts of a mutually influencing ecological network. They argue that literary language, representation, and imagination need to be read as a field where human and nonhuman exist, rather than as separate subject and object relationships. This concept aligns with Morton's notion of dark ecology, particularly in its emphasis on the blurring of the boundaries between the human and nonhuman worlds, often fraught with tension, and often unsettling. Ağın and Yılmaz's (2025) findings strengthen the theoretical basis for the analysis of *The Raven*, where the raven is not merely a gothic symbol but acts as a nonhuman agent that undermines the narrator's anthropocentric claims and places him within a broader, darker ecological network. Given the proliferation of these studies, this article aims to fill this research gap by explicitly applying Morton's dark ecology framework to the nineteenth century Gothic poem, *The Raven*. *The Raven* is a thematically and formally rich poetic text with potential for ecological readings but relatively rarely analyzed through the lens of contemporary environmental theory that emphasizes nonhuman agency and large-scale interconnectivity. This research situates the poem within an ecological perspective that calls attention to how raven, spaces, and natural phenomena intervene in domestic structures and thwart claims of human superiority.

More specifically, this study is designed to answer research questions such as, How can the raven in *The Raven* be read as an agent embodying the principles of dark ecology? In what ways does the poetic text depict nature's intervention into domestic space and the ecological consequences of this event? How is the failure of anthropocentrism represented in the narrator's actions, social responses, and symbolic discourse of the poem? And finally, how is the painful interconnectivity, the intertwining relationship between humans, animals, and larger phenomena, manifested in the poem's language, atmosphere, and repetitive motifs?

2. Literature Review

Timothy Morton's dark ecology thinking undermines the dichotomy of "nature" versus "human" and has become the foundation of a new wave of ecocritical studies. Morton (2016) asserts that ecology must be understood in a dark way, that is, as full of unpredictability, discomfort, and inextricable interconnectedness. Konrad (2020), in his review of *Dark Ecology*, also emphasizes that Morton's contribution lies in his courage to define ecology not as a harmonious system, but as a relational network that traps humans in a haunting proximity to nonhuman entities. Dark ecology provides a theoretical framework that opens up reading spaces with new perspectives on literary texts, including gothic works, where the presence of nonhuman agents often appears as an existential disturbance.

Over the past five years, ecogothic studies have flourished, drawing heavily on Morton's ideas. Within the ecogothic realm, contemporary studies highlight how dark (gothic)

aesthetics have become a powerful medium for articulating environmental crises. Parker (2020) examines the representation of the “dark forest” as an ecogothic location. In the introduction to the special issue of *Ecogothic Studies*, Sivils (2023) explains that gothic aesthetics are currently understood as one of the most potent media for revealing contemporary ecological crises, such as alienation, darkness, and horror, which are synonymous with the ecological experience of modern humans. Sivils' (2023) research on the proliferation of ecogothic provides a framework that the “disturbing” presence of animals is a key characteristic of dark ecological aesthetics. This literature consistently demonstrates that a dark ecology approach demands a reading of animals as ecological actors that disrupt the normalcy of human space, a characteristic that is particularly apt for the raven in Poe's poem. Martín Junquera and Casado Presa (2024) also assert that ecogothic can serve as a catalyst for understanding the climate emergency through its monster motifs. This position is reinforced by studies examining ecohorror and contemporary literature's relationship to the climate crisis (Siby, 2025; Tynan, 2023).

This concept has also been adapted and applied to literary studies by Hart (2020), who applied dark ecology to the novel *Naked Lunch* and demonstrated how the narrative structure displays human dislocation within ecological networks. Flores (2021) also extended the concept's application to the works of Gabriel García Márquez, demonstrating the connection between fictional narrative and ecological scales that transcend locality.

In terms of nonhuman agency, modern ecocritical studies have focused on how animals and objects influence affective and narrative structures. Kautz (2024) offers a framework for understanding anthropomorphic agency as an ecocritical analytical tool, and Mahid et al. (2024) apply an ecocritical perspective to Ted Hughes's poem *Hawk Roosting*, which serves as a comparative study when reading Poe's raven as an agent.

Finally, bibliometric reviews and disciplinary studies also confirm that ecocriticism is thriving and producing numerous studies linking environmental theory to modern literary practice (Yadav & Sinha, 2024; Usman & Anis Nina, 2025). Konrad's (2020) review of Morton's work also provides academic legitimacy for the use of dark ecology in literary studies.

Ambroży's (2023) research also makes an important contribution to ecogothic studies by demonstrating how natural phenomena in literary works can function as agents that disrupt the stability of human perception. Through an analysis of the diffractive gaze in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Snow-Image*, Ambroży demonstrates that natural elements have the capacity to shape aesthetic experiences filled with uncertainty, fear, and alienation. This approach aligns with Morton's notion of dark ecology, particularly in emphasizing the ambiguous and uneasy relationship between humans and the nonhuman world. Ambroży's findings help broaden the understanding of how ecogothic tropes operate within narrative textures and serve as a theoretical basis for reading *The Raven* as a poem that presents a gothic atmosphere through the presence of nature intervening in domestic spaces and destabilizing the center of human subjectivity.

Although there are many studies related to ecology, there has not been a study that specifically uses dark ecology theory in reading classic 19th century gothic poems such as *The Raven*. Modern Poe studies are still dominated by psychological, structural, and symbolic approaches, without placing the raven as an ecological agent within the Mortonian framework.

3. Research Method

This study uses qualitative textual analysis to examine how Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The*

Raven represents Timothy Morton's principles of dark ecology. Qualitative textual analysis was chosen because it allows researchers to conduct close readings, explore layered meanings, and connect literary texts to complex theoretical foundations.

The primary data source for this study is the full text of the poem *The Raven* (1845). Secondary data sources include scholarly articles, books, and research on dark ecology, posthumanism, and ecocriticism published between 2020 and 2025, in accordance with the need for updated references in ecological literary research. Morton's book, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (2016), serves as the primary theoretical reference underlying the analysis.

The data collection technique was carried out through several stages, including a close reading of the entire poem to identify imagery, symbols, diction, atmosphere, and structure related to the concept of dark ecology. Then, notes and annotations were made on lines that indicate nonhuman agency, natural intervention, ecological disharmony, and depictions of dark connections between entities, concepts that align with Morton's theory.

The analysis was conducted using an interpretive qualitative analysis model that includes three main steps: data reduction, which involves selecting lines of poetry relevant to the four categories of analysis, the raven as an agent of dark ecology, nature's intervention into domestic space, the failure of anthropocentrism, and painful interconnectedness.

The next analysis is carried out by presenting the data, namely displaying excerpts from the poem and grouping them based on analysis categories. Finally, there is theoretical interpretation, namely connecting the textual data with Morton's concept of dark ecology, as well as referencing supporting research that strengthens the interpretation.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Raven as Agent of Dark Ecology

Within Timothy Morton's (2016) dark ecology framework, nonhuman agents are positioned as part of an interconnected existential web that often reveals the darker side of existence. The raven in *The Raven* is an ecological figure that transcends the boundaries of human perception, disrupts the stability of domestic space, and reveals the darker side of ecological connectedness that human subjects reject. The presence of the raven is first marked by its movement into human space, "In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore" (38); "...perched above my chamber door," (40); "Perched, and sat, and nothing more." (42). This depiction suggests that the raven is not present as a stray, wild creature, but as an autonomous agent that enters human space with authority. In Morton's framework, this suggests a nonhuman presence that can never be fully recognized, always transcending human definition (Morton, 2016). The raven functions as an agent of ecological disruption, illuminating the fact that the boundaries between human and nonhuman are never truly stable. The position of the raven above the bust of Pallas, "Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door." (41)

This marks the symbolic takeover of human wisdom space by nonhuman entities. From a dark ecology perspective, this is a manifestation of the strange, stranger, and agentic nonhuman that challenges human interpretive hegemony (Morton, 2016). This kind of reading finds precedent in studies of animal agency. Mahid et al.'s (2024) interpret the hawk in *Hawk Roosting* as an actor challenging humanistic narratives, while Kautz (2024) suggests critical anthropomorphic tools to understand how nonhumans are assigned agentic roles in narratives.

The repetition of the single word, "Nevermore," is the Raven's constant response and serves as a rhetorical interruption that undermines the narrator's expectations. "Quoth the

Raven 'Nevermore'." (48, 84, 90, 96, 102). This repetition functions as a nonhuman linguistic intervention that consistently returning the narrator to a state of unresolved entanglement, a condition Morton focuses on in dark ecology (Morton, 2016). Thus, the raven in the text acts as an ecological agent that alters the reader's interpretation and affect. Overall, the raven in *The Raven* functions as an agent of dark ecology, revealing the fragility of human domination over the nonhuman world. The raven appears as a strange stranger, not merely a symbol, but as an active, disruptive ecological entity that represents the darkness inherent in human ecological relations.

4.2 Natural Intervention into Domestic Space

The intervention of nature into domestic space is a crucial aspect of Morton's (2016) dark ecology. According to Morton, humans have consistently attempted to create the illusion of separation between a "safe," "clean," and "controlled" living space and the chaotic and threatening outside world. However, dark ecology rejects this illusion and demonstrates that nature is ever-present and transcends human-constructed domestic boundaries. In *The Raven*, this intervention is evident when the elements of wind, ecology, darkness, and especially the raven invade the narrator's private space. The narrator's anxiety begins to emerge when he hears a knocking sound that disturbs the silence of his domestic space, "...suddenly there came a tapping, As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door." (3-4).

This sound is an early form of nature's penetration into the internal space, so that domesticity loses its stability and this kind of disturbance marks the erosion of the anthropogenic boundaries that humans have tried to create between the "inner world" and the "outer world." When acoustic disturbances turn into physical interventions, ecological intensity increases. The narrator says, "Surely that is something at my window lattice; Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore." (33-34). The function of windows as material boundaries between humans and nature is beginning to be questioned. From a dark ecology perspective, these boundaries never truly hold back the outside; they merely temporarily distract humans from their inescapable ecological interconnectedness. The peak of nature's intervention occurs when the narrator opens the window, "Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter, In there stepped a stately Raven" (37-38).

The act of opening the window is not simply a physical movement, but a symbolic gesture that erases the distance between humans and nonhumans. The raven "takes over" the space through its position atop the statue of Pallas. Atmospheric changes are also a significant ecological intervention. The narrator describes how the air becomes "dense" and "scented," "Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer." (79). This condition suggests that nature is not merely present visually or physically, but through sensory qualities that affect the human body. Thus, the domestic space in *The Raven* becomes a place where humans are forced to confront the ecological reality that separation from nature is an illusion. The intervention of wind, darkness, and raven reveals that the home is not a fortress, but rather a pore of a broader ecological network. Morton (2016) calls this condition intimacy without proximity, a close yet uncomfortable connection, where nature is always present but never fully understood or controlled.

4.3 The Failure of Anthropocentrism

One of the central concepts in dark ecology is Morton's (2016) rejection of anthropocentrism, the idea that humans are the center of meaning, knowledge, and control in the ecological world. In *The Raven*, the failure of anthropocentrism is evident through the

narrator's inability to maintain his epistemic dominance over the raven as a nonhuman entity. Every attempt by the narrator to subjugate meaning, reinterpret, or control the raven's presence results in utter failure.

The narrator initially tries to explain the arrival of the raven with anthropocentric rationality, "Then the bird said 'Nevermore.' (60) / ... 'Doubtless,' said I, 'what it utters is its only stock and store'." (62). He insists on the interpretation that raven are merely repetitive machines imitating human voices. In this case, the rationalization doesn't last long. The word "Nevermore" keeps returning as the answer to every existential question the narrator has, thus dismantling his belief in himself as the center of meaning.

The failure of anthropocentrism is also reflected in the position of the raven in human space, as instead of avoiding or submitting, the raven chooses the most symbolic and most intellectual place in the room. "Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door." (41). This position marks the takeover of the symbol of human wisdom by a nonhuman agent. The peak of anthropocentrism's failure is seen in the line, "Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from out my door!" (101) / Quoth the Raven 'Nevermore.'" (48, 84, 90, 96, 102).

Here the narrator tries to regain control of the space and his body, but fails miserably. The raven's response is not only a literal rejection, but also a statement of ecological superiority, that humans do not have complete control over the nonhuman world. Thus, The Raven demonstrates that anthropocentrism is not only fragile, but also illusory. The raven, as a stubborn, repetitive, and untamable ecological agent, reveals the fragility of the assumption that humans are the center of meaning in the ecological world. Morton (2016) calls such moments ecological thought, a profound awareness that humans are never the center, but rather a small part of a network of entities that cannot be fully understood.

4.4 Painful Interconnectedness

The concept of interconnectedness in Morton's (2016) dark ecology rejects harmonious, balanced, or romantic ecological understandings. Morton asserts that ecological connectedness is often painful, frightening, and full of discomfort. Human relationships with nonhuman entities reveal existential depths that threaten human psychological stability. In *The Raven*, this connectedness is clearly demonstrated through the intense interaction between the narrator and the raven. This relationship is unavoidable and unstoppable, yet it becomes a source of suffering.

From the moment he first laid eyes on the raven, the narrator realized that he could not escape this nonhuman presence, "Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing." (25). This gaze demonstrates a visual connection that forces the narrator to recognize the presence of another entity he cannot control. This interconnectedness intensifies as the raven establishes its emotional and psychological presence. The line "This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining (75) / On the cushion's velvet lining... She shall press, ah, nevermore!" (76-78) demonstrates how the narrator connects every aspect of his life, such as hopes, memories, and personal sorrows, to the raven's presence. The nonhuman creature becomes a physical extension of the narrator's trauma and forces him to acknowledge that nature (through the Raven) is not external to him, but interwoven within his affective structure. This painful connection culminates when the narrator realizes he cannot free himself from the raven's shadow.

The poem's final line cements this entanglement, "And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor / Shall be lifted, nevermore!" (107-108). Here, the connection is

not merely physical or emotional, but ontological. The narrator's soul is trapped by an ecological presence that dominates space, light, and meaning. From a dark ecology perspective, this illustrates what Morton calls entanglement, no entity stands alone, yet this connection often brings unavoidable suffering.

The raven also forces the narrator to confront an ecological reality he refuses to acknowledge: that nature is not subject to human will. The line "Leave my loneliness unbroken!" (100) indicates the narrator's desire to sever that connection, but the raven's response, "Nevermore," serves as an affirmation that ecological connections cannot be severed by human will. Overall, the interaction between the narrator and the raven in *The Raven* demonstrates a form of ecological connectedness that is neither romantic nor harmonious, and in fact, painful. This connectedness reflects the core of Morton's dark ecology, that humans are part of an ecological network that they cannot control or separate from themselves, and that the recognition of this connectedness often presents as a traumatic experience.

5. Conclusion

An analysis of *The Raven* through the lens of dark ecology demonstrates that Edgar Allan Poe's poem depicts an unstable yet complex relationship between humans and nature, far from the harmony often assumed in classical ecological perspectives. First, the raven appears as an ecological agent that reveals the fragility of the boundaries between the human and nonhuman worlds. Its presence is not merely a symbol of death, but also a sign that nature has the autonomous capacity to intervene in human life and reshape the subject's perception of reality. Second, the raven's entry into the domestic space reveals that human private space is never truly sterile from ecological influences. The narrator's personal and mental space is shaken by the presence of a nonhuman creature that imposes its presence, shattering the illusion of separation between humans and the environment.

Third, this poem also demonstrates the failure of anthropocentrism through the narrator's inability to maintain cognitive and emotional superiority. The narrator's transition from logical to irrational responses emphasizes that the belief in human control over nature is a fragile construct. Fourth, the relationship between the narrator and the raven demonstrates a painful interconnectedness. It is an ecological network that unites human and nonhuman entities in a disharmonious, tense relationship that does not allow for absolute separation. This interconnectedness aligns with the idea that ecology is not a system of balance, but rather a network of continuity that also contains ambiguity, threat, and alienation. Thus, *The Raven* can be understood as a poetic text that challenges the paradigm of romantic ecology and proposes a more critical reading of humanity's position within the ecosystem. Through the instability of space, emotion, and agency, this poem asserts that dark ecology is an existential experience revealing that humans are always part of a broader ecological network, even if the presence of that network feels haunting, disturbing, and painful.

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