

Reading J.S. Le Fanu's
Uncle Silas and *Carmilla* as Eco-Gothics

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Environmental representations within Gothic texts sometimes serve as hidden doorways. These passages to buried understandings of the world indicate not only alternative ways of living but tell us much about dominant ways of thinking. Eco-Gothic, or the study of how a text “embodies anxieties about nature within its respective cultural and historical moment” (Hillard 692)¹ has the potential, then, to bring contests over environmental practice and meaning into view. It provides theoretical space for the analysis of cultural assumptions and consideration of new directions, much as Gothic studies have done since the late 1970s.

This paper presents an Eco-Gothic reading of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* (1864) and *Carmilla* (1872). I ultimately argue that Le Fanu's representations of forests and those characters aligned with them make visible cultural as well as social and material conflicts concerning Ireland's trees and their role in Ireland's post-Famine future. Further, I link the novels' competing and sometimes terrifying portrayals of the environment to the representational violence that accompanied British colonization in Ireland. In these ways I extend conversations about Le Fanu's aesthetic strategies for embodying and addressing the social and political decay of the Anglo-Irish. I also attempt to rethink the Eco-Gothic in terms of struggles for Environmental Justice (EJ).