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Ecophobia and the Porcelain Porcine Species

What has changed in the discipline of ecocriticism since Simon C. Estok's explosive article "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia" first appeared in print in *ISLE*? What has shifted in institutionalized practices of ecophobia, a catch-all term for aversion to and avoidance of the nonhuman other. In the past ten years, Estok's use of the term has gained currency. Most recently, Routledge published a full-length study of ecophobia by Estok, entitled *The Ecophobia Hypothesis*. It and other studies, particularly those situated in the new or burgeoning areas of postcolonial ecocriticism, Marxist ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and queer ecology, have addressed ecophobia by theorizing about the ideological links between it and intraspecies kinds of odium and dread. In contrast with this embrace of the concept, discussion of ecophobia does not appear in several recent and distinguished anthologies of ecocriticism. What, for example, is behind the omission of the topic in Hubert Zapf's *Handbook of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*, Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino's *Environmental Humanities: Voices from the Anthropocene*, and, perhaps most surprisingly, Joni Adamson's *Keywords for Environmental Studies*. Given the importance of the term, these scholars at best look careless in their scholarship (and one hopes it is carelessness rather than ideological issues that are behind the omission, but one suspects the latter, since it is impossible to be ignorant of the profound and paradigm-rocking importance of the term "ecophobia"). Is the omission due in part to scholars' "shrill reaction" (Brayton 205) to the article in which theorizing about ecophobia made a debut with a bang? Did

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they want to stay out of the fray of the debate between theory and practice and so eschew one of the key terms of that debate, for the term itself is a call for more "critical theory" in a discipline that took shape by distancing itself from "continental philosophy and its twentieth-century academic legacy" (205). Is the omission because "ecophobia" is too confrontational, brazen, accusatory, and shaming a term? With the exception perhaps of its Latinate syllables, there is little about the "ungainly neologism" (205) that is remotely discreet, euphemistic, conciliatory, charitable, or decorous. Unabashedly and unceremoniously, with little trace of refinement, piety, or good will, the term "ecophobia" calls out what society largely conceals, underplays, and underestimates. Using more sedate language to persuade society to embrace ecocentrism and reduce anthropocentrism might be more effective than an all-out verbal assault on society's ecophobic and anthropocentric values, practices, and institutions. Yet, precisely because the term is brutally honest and confrontational, shaming, judgmental, and accusing, using it judiciously stands to productively contribute to the effort among environmentalists to nudge and haul society out of the rut of habitual abuses of the nonhuman ecogenic other. Critically engaging with the term might not bring about the end of what it names. However, such engagement would, and already is, bringing more attention to scores of ecophobic practices. Perfectly legal today, they may be criminalized in the future because of that attention, consigned to the dung heap in the form of thick legal tomes, shunned in practice, and shelved for the record. For literary studies scholars, teaching and studying texts by examining either their ecophobic content or their rebuke of it is an obvious strategy for making "ecophobia" and its like (for example, "speciesism" and "ecocide") household words in schools, offices, airports, gas stations, corner stores, food courts, and shopping malls. I illustrate that work here towards the end of this article, in a brief reading of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, a text that screams out ecophobia in the context of pig killing. Ecophobia in the twenty-first century is vaster and more insidious and more pervasive than it was in Golding's time, and it is as monstrous an institution as the enslavement, trafficking, and commodification of human flesh.

In 2009, Estok's "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia" called for more theoretical engagement in the discipline of ecocriticism and so re-galvanized debate among ecocritics about the conflicting pulls of activism and scholasticism. A special issue on ecocriticism and theory was published in the spring of 2011. More articles, and monographs, followed soon thereafter.[1] Estok's article also highlighted questions about the need for a more forceful ecocritical language and vocabulary in the ongoing

environmental work of challenging a seemingly universal but actually anthropocentric hierarchy in modern times. The kind of rhetoric that Estok's article called for includes foremost the term "ecophobia." Many ecocritics have embraced it, as a search of the word on the internet reflects. Others ignored or rebuked it, judging from the omission of in the indices of a few anthologies of ecocriticism published in the past ten years.

The use of the term "ecophobia" outside of ecocriticism is almost nonexistent but more understandably so. Yet, it names a patently obvious set of prejudices. Moreover, "ecophobia" should be as common a term as "racism," "classism," "sexism," and "homophobia" since, as ecocritics point out in their work of confluent theory, engaging with the term aids in the fight against the interspecies prejudices that those terms name. Ecofeminists theorize the links between fear and loathing of animals and the environment and sexist attitudes toward and treatment of women (Gaard), postcolonial ecocritics scrutinize the shared ideological grounds of colonization and exploitation of the nonhuman and human other (Huggan and Tiffin; Roos and Hunt; DeLoughrey and Handley), and queer ecology scholars interrogate the ties between hatred of the natural world and homophobia and hatred of the natural world and scientifically spurious and ungrounded dismissals of findings of sexual diversity across species (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson). Marxist ecocritics investigate the ties between ecophobia and corporate capitalism (Bellamy; Klein), critical links that Estok examines, among many others, in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis.* This kind of confluent theorizing, which also is known as "intersectional" theory (Gaard, "Ecofeminism" 68), emphasizes that fear and hatred towards the nonhuman other are "rooted in and dependent on anthropocentric arrogance and speciesism" (Estok, "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness" 216); they are both hardwired (genetic) and constructed. Learning more about them helps scholars to understand how interspecies antipathies—racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and so forth—function. Theorizing ecophobia advances discussion of environment "alongside discussions of race and gender and sexuality" (217).

Interrogating ecophobia and the links between it and other prejudices is uphill going in a society preoccupied with interspecies forms of internecine conflict and unwilling to consider that that conflict is as rooted in as it is magnified and intensified by ecophobia. To tackle the hidden connections between ecophobia and interspecies forms of hatred is to question some of our most basic concepts of personhood. For example, Timothy Morton dissects those concepts, stating that "all beings are 'people'. . .without restricting the idea of 'people' to human

beings as such. There is no Nature, only people, some of whom are human beings" ("Ecologocentrism: Unworking Animals," qtd in Gaard 651). Theorizing ecophobia also includes exploring the causes as much as the effects of ecophobia. Estok does just that in *The Ecophobia Hypothesis*, amassing and sorting through evidence for the genetic as well as socially and politically constructed bases of ecophobia. If ecophobia has "functioned, in part, to preserve our species (for instance, the fight or flight response)," then "growth economies and ideological interests" have grossly capitalized on it (Estok, *Ecophobia* 1). Theorizing ecophobia means comprehensively as well as rigorously questioning those economies and interests. They are represented by, among other industries, the fossil fuel, nuclear power, and corporate capital food industries.

Scholars averse to using ecophobia theory critique it for promoting a tendentious correlationalist dyad under which ecophobia functions as the bedfellow of ecophilia (Crosby 514). Ecophobia and ecophilia—in particular the "vampiric" version of ecophilia "promoted" under "Thoreauvian and Emersonian" environmental thought—"are in fact two sides of the same pernicious construct" (514). A "more ethical alternative," according to this same point of view, is Morton's term "dark ecology" (Crosby 514).[2] It represents a thinking that "foreclose[s] both the [ecophobic] idea that human selves are inherently distinct from or superior to their nonhuman environments and the seemingly antithetical (but actually coextensive) [ecophilic] notion that we can self-constructively lose ourselves to the world" (Taylor qtd. in Crosby 370, 369). "Dark ecology" confronts "the grief and horror of a failing environment" (Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, qtd in Crosby 514).

Does not "ecophobia" stare into the face of the same "grief and horror" that "dark ecology" confronts? Criticism of ecophobia theory may have more to do with its rhetorical nakedness. While terms such as "dark ecology" and other valuable key terms in ecocriticism, such as Stacy Alaimo's "trans-corporeality" (*Bodily Natures*), also intersect with important discussions about speciesism, the term "ecophobia" *outs* morally complex and questionable acts of speciesism through more focused and stronger ethical lenses. [3] Do scholars averse to using it (Iovino, Zapf, Adamson) think that it belies and reduces complex relationships? Perhaps. Does the term "ecophobia," like "racism," "classism," "sexism," and "homophobia," rhetorically belie gnarly, knotted, entangled, and complex relationships? No. Like those terms, "ecophobia" directly challenges society's most morally questionable, and arguably most reprehensible, relationships between humans and other species.

In "Deconstruction And/As Ecology," Morton criticizes the science and rhetoric of global warming for keeping afloat anti-environmental institutions and movements: "Global warming science deprives the anti-environmentalist right of its world;" it "enables the functioning of their two levels: the explicit, condemning sin, and the implicit, encouraging violation—a split form familiar to anyone who has survived a totalitarian regime" (299). Under that same argument, which is similar to Crosby's methodology in "Beyond Ecophilia: Edgar Allan Poe and the American Tradition of Ecohorror," Morton attacks binary thinking and so, by implication, scholars' use of the ecophobia/ecophilia dyad.

Dyads do have their uses and not only because they clamor to be deconstructed by Derridean scholars. The ecophobia/ecophilia dyad complements not undercuts euphemistic terms such as "global warming" and "climate change," effete stand-ins, in any case, for the more robust nomenclature of "ecophobia." "Ecophobia" is to "global warming" and "climate change" what a bare bulb is to light softened by lampshades. As Estok argues in "Virtually There: 'Aesthetic Pleasure of the First Order,'" "[t]he problem. . .is more serious than climate change" (5). If "ecophobia" were to become a household word in our educational, legal, and civic institutions, and on our weather channels, it would generate more debate about environmental policies and practices. Moreover, engaging with the term and like language helps in combating interspecies forms of hatred and fear. That is a point that already has been made here but bears repeating.

Thirty years ago, the biologist Edward O. Wilson brought attention to ecophobia's proximate antonym, "biophilia," defining it as referring to "the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (*Biophilia* 1); "the urge to affiliate with other, forms of life" (85); and "the connections that human beings subconsciously seek with the rest of life" (Wilson, *Diversity* 350). If, by emphasizing biophilia, a set of behaviors that is a subset of ecophilia, Wilson and others sought to garner support for arguments and acts in defense of the nonhuman other, then their efforts did not succeed spectacularly. If anything, emphasizing acts of biophilia in the popular imagination seems to have had the effect of excusing, eliding, erasing, ignoring, and underestimating institutionalized ecophobic practices. Here is Estok's argument:

> the biophilia hypothesis alone cannot account for the realities of the world, for the kinds of things that are going on in the world, the factory farms, the rainforest destruction, the biodiversity holocaust, and it cannot make the connections with theories about exploitation, about people who gain while others (human and nonhuman) foot

> the bill, or about intersections among ecophobia, homophobia, speciesism, and sexism. (*Ecophobia* 9)

Picking apart arguments in a later work by Wilson, *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, which Wilson coedited with Stephen Kellert, Estok argues that "the problem with the uses to which biophilic theories have been put is that they have failed to recognize that biophilia is a point on a spectrum" (*Ecophobia* 9). They neither "explain why environmental crises are worsening" nor "adequately encompass the complex range of ethical positions that humanity generally displays toward the natural environment" (10). Moreover, the rhetoric of biophilia most often appears in places where biophilia is least evident; on the labels, websites, and advertising slogans of the fossil fuel, nuclear power, and meat industries. They regularly and venally deploy the language of biophilia to sell ecophobic policies and practices to the public.

The ecophobia hypothesis unapologetically and unabashedly confronts kinds of suffering and death directly caused by aversion to, hostility and indifference towards, and avoidance of nature. It is analogous to "the Love that dare not speak its name" in Alfred Lord Douglas's poem about homosexuality in England in the late nineteenth century (28). "Ecophobia" names a hate that other vocabulary weakly names or utters in *sotto voce*; calls out more loudly for major concessions in humans' use of and dependence on the nonhuman; cajoles environmental thinkers to push the limits of ecocriticism's "essentially pastoral, conservationist, and preservationist sensibility" (Rozelle 376); and asks ecocritics to consider being more of a sharp thorn than a nettlesome one in the side of anti-environmentalism.

At the time of the publication of *Lord of the Flies*, critics pointed out that one of the inspirations for Golding's putatively misanthropic and dystopic fiction was R. M. Ballantyne's philanthropic and utopic novel, *Coral Island: A Tale of the Pacific Ocean*. Evidence for their point includes an allusion to Ballantyne's novel that appears in the final scenes of *Lord of the Flies*. A group of English schoolboys have been stranded on an island. The novel ends when they are rescued by a naval ship. Under the ecophobic leadership of Jack, the boys are hunting one of their ostracized peers, Ralph, and have forced him out onto an open stretch of beach close to where the ship is anchored. Ralph finds himself looking up at a naval officer, or at "a huge peaked cap. . .white drill, epaulettes, a revolver, a row of gilt buttons down the front of the uniform" (Golding 232). Observing the "kid" at his feet "need[ing] a bath, a haircut, a nose-wipe and a good deal of ointment" (233) and scanning in the distance the line of boys with spears who have been pursuing Ralph, the naval officer mistakes the deathly human hunt, which the

boys calls a "pig hunt," for a game: "Jolly good show," he says, "Like the Coral Island" (234).

In concentrating on the misanthropic/philanthropic and utopic/dystopic dyads in *Lord of the Flies* and *Coral Island*, critics overlook the ecophobia/ecophilia dyad that deeply underpins those oppositions. Reading *Lord of the Flies* by noticing moral equivalences between the schoolboys stranded on the island and the island's porcine populations points to that dyad. Take the nameless sow or the nameless boy who is identified only by the ecophobic nickname "Piggy," for example. Bits and pieces of both animals are human and porcine. Piggy is shorter than the average height of the boys, is "very fat," and "grunts" (Golding 2, 4). In the opening scenes of the novel, he defecates in the undergrowth. He does that again several pages later. He (and all of the other boys) have loose bowels because they have been consuming copious quantities of unripe fruit and other inedible or indigestible plants. These descriptions carry allusions to the ecophobic expression, "happy as pigs in shit," and to all the moral baggage that underpins that expression, for "in the Western imagination pigs have long been regarded as despicable. . .filthy, coprophagic, stinky, greedy, [and] gross" (Baker 57). Eventually, in a battle between Ralph's dwindling supporters, who include Piggy, and Jack's followers, "savages" (Golding 206), one of the latter pushes a boulder off of a cliff with the intention of hurting or killing Piggy and Ralph. Piggy is knocked through the air and falls forty feet onto a "square red rock in the sea": "His head opened and stuff came out and turned red. Piggy's arms and leg twitched a bit, like a pig's after it has been killed" (209).

Jack leads the pig killing activities and targets the largest of the pigs, a sow nursing her young. When boys first come across her, she is "sunk in deep maternal bliss. . .fringed by a row of piglets" (Golding 153). The boys fling wooden spears at her and the piglets. She gives "a gasping squeal," staggers up "with two spears sticking in her fat flank," and "crash[es] away through the forest" (153). The boys follow, corner, and kill her in a frenzy of sexualized violence:

> The trailing butts [of the spears] hindered her and the sharp, cross-cut points were a torment. She blundered into a tree, forcing a spear still deeper. . .the hunters could follow her easily by the drops of vivid blood-[she] staggered her way ahead of them, bleeding and mad, and the hunters followed, wedded to her in lust. . .the sow fell and the hunters hurled themselves at her. This dreadful eruption from and unknown world made her frantic; she squealed and bucked and the air

> was full of sweat and noise and blood and terror. Roger ran around the heap, prodding with his spear whenever pigflesh appeared. Jack was on top of the sow, stabbing downward with his knife. Roger found a lodgment for his point and began to push till he was leaning with his whole weight. . .then Jack found the throat and the hot blood spouted over his hands. The sow collapsed under them and they were heavy and fulfilled upon her. (154)

Editor and literary critic Edmund L. Epstein observed in one of the most famous critical readings of *Lord of the Flies* that the killing of the sow mirrors "sexual intercourse" (240). Were he alive today, he might use the words "gang rape." The boys brutally sodomize and orally rape an animal. Moments after the sow dies, or as she is dying, Roger, one of Jack's gang, thrusts a spear "Right up her ass!" (155). From today's critical vantage points, the description represents hatred and fear of the human other—queer, trans, female, indigenous, and so forth—as well as nonhuman other.

Pigs share a great deal of genetic material with humans (Baker 67; Carr 84; Twine 53–54, 69, 80). Golding hints at those genetic ties in his descriptions of porcine and human characters in *Lord of the Flies*. Both kinds of animals are pink and cream-skinned. Both are fragile and porcelain-like. Ironically, because of their genetic compatibility with humans, pigs are one of the most highly consumed species in the medical industry. They are prolifically experimented on, as well as eaten (Twine 53–54, 59). In *Lord of the Flies*, the sow is a poor, slain creature, as is Piggy, and as is Simon, the first boy whom Jack and his gang kill. The boys share something with the pigs in the dense dark forest, "the pink live thing struggling in the creepers" (Golding 32); they, too, are "[s]omething pink, under the trees" (67).

Epstein also observed, more accurately and acutely, that the first appearance of the sow in the novel signals the turning point in the struggle between two boys' struggle, Ralph and Jack's, to govern their lot (240). Ralph represents behaviors that if not exactly ecophilic suggest an ethical openness to ecophilia. Jack represents the habits and traditions of ecophobia. His main role in the killing of the sow replicates the role he plays in leading the other boys to light fires in an attempt to smoke Ralph out from the forest. By the end of the novel, the entire island is aflame. It too shares something with the pink pigs and the pink boys. The distinctive part of the island, jutting out from the main land mass, is "one great block sitting out in the lagoon" that is covered with guano from the sea birds that nest on it (Golding 119). To the boys, it appears as "icing. . .on a pink cake" (23). It is a "pink

cliff. . .surmounted" by more pink rock (24). The rock, which from some angles appears detached from the island, is "one bold, pink bastion" (27). The "pinkness" eventually becomes a "stack of balanced rock projecting through the looped fantasy of the forest creepers" and the entire assemble of "pink cliffs [rises] out of the ground" (24). The entire island, from what the boys can see of it from their vantage points, is covered in dense green jungle that draws to a "pink tail" at the end (25). Otherwise, the island is "thick with butterflies, lifting, fluttering, settling" (27). In *Lord of the Flies*, pink, delicate-fleshed pigs, boys, islands, and conches share bits and pieces of pink-hued exodermic matter—pink flesh, shell, rock, and so forth—in ways that might have provoked, but did not, debate about ecophobic attitudes toward pigs among literary studies at the height of the novel's popularity in the 1950s and 1960s. There was no vocabulary in place to fund such a debate.

Lord of the Flies is a novel in a long line of porcine texts and characters that include the television series *Sesame Street's* Miss Piggy; Wilbur, the livestock pig, in E. B. White's children's fiction, *Charlotte's Web*; Patrick McCabe's novel *The Butcher Boy*; director Chris Noonan's film *Babe* and the novel that inspired it, Dick King-Smith's *The Sheep-Pig*; director Mark Brozel's film *Macbeth;* and Eric Yoshiaki Dando's novel *Oink, Oink, Oink.* Each of those texts represents a continuum of positions between ecophobia and ecophilia. The discourse of ecophobia in literary studies, generated by Estok, Tom Hillard, Tara K. Parmiter, Bernice M. Murphy, Sharae Deckard, Aaron Moe, Alice Curry, and many others in the twenty-first century, epitomizes such vocabulary.[4] Re-reading *Lord of the Flies* today, few literary scholars worth their weight in critical spit would be able to avoid grappling with the questions that the novel raises about how society reifies some beings and debases others. Outside of the environmental humanities and outside of the marginal areas of animal and environmental activism, much of society continues to avoid those questions. To ask those questions is a form of ecophilia. To avoid them is a form of ecophobia, a "unique form of eco-suicide" (Christman xii) that lays waste to humans as well as "earthothers" (Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* 22).

Promoting more awareness of ecophobia has been going on since ecocriticism first emerged as a discipline in its own right. The language of ecophobia theorizing does that in bolder and more urgent terms than other language does. The number of literary texts that await ecocritical analysis from perspectives that grapple with what ecophobia theorizing explicitly names has not shrunk greatly. Probably, there is not a single work of literature that does not betray or grapple with ecophobia in some shape or form. Take, for example, the novel that

inspires this paper. Scholars have festooned *Lord of the Flies* with anthropocentric accolades, all but completely overlooking the novel's references to hatred and indifference toward, or virtually absolute moral oversight of, pigs. There are as many references to hunted pigs in the novel as there are to hunted boys. Why do most reviewers not see the patently obvious references to ecophobic pig slaughter (and references to the almost complete destruction of the island's dense green vegetation by the fire that the dominant group of boys start in an attempt to smoke out Ralph)? Why is the seriousness of pig killing (and deforestation) overwhelmingly overlooked?[5] Giving more currency to the language of ecophobia in literary theory and literature studies, whether for the purpose of denying or affirming ecophobia, opens the doors to asking more serious moral questions about our use of the planet inclusive of fellow animal species.

NOTES

1. For a list of many other studies published in the last ten years that theorize or otherwise engage with ecophobia, see Estok, *Ecophobia* (5–7).

2. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 16.

3. I do not mean to imply that Morton or Alaimo eschew the term "ecophobia"—indeed, they both embrace the potentials it offers—but rather that the term "ecophobia" has an edginess and offers a rough and insinuating challenge that seems to evoke raw, visceral responses (hence, the "Estok-Robisch Controversy").

4. Again, Estok cites many of these in *Ecophobia* , 5-7.

5. Two notable exceptions are Rohitash Thapliyal and Shakuntala Kunwar's "Ecocritical Reading of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*" and Iman A. Hanafy's "Deconstructing Dichotomies: An Ecocritical Analysis of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*."

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