
Humans versus Nature: An Ecophobic Study of Vasconcelos’ “The Boar Hunt”

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Abstract

*This paper examines the short story *The Boar Hunt* by Mexican writer and philosopher José Vasconcelos through the lens of Simon C. Estok’s concept of ecophobia. The study analyzes the ways in which the characters in the story demonstrate hostility toward the natural world and explores the underlying factors contributing to this animosity. Additionally, it examines the consequences of this irrational hatred and how it ultimately affects the characters themselves. The analysis concludes that the characters’ inclination to exploit nature is a clear manifestation of ecophobia. Their behavior—engaging in the hunting and killing of boars for mere personal pleasure—emerges from a deep-rooted perception of nature as hostile, untamed, and dangerous. This adversarial outlook fuels ecophobic tendencies, prompting the characters to exploit the natural world without considering the potential repercussions. Moreover, the study reveals that such exploitative mindsets ultimately result in harmful consequences for the characters themselves. The violent retaliation by nature, symbolized by the boars’ counterattack, serves as a powerful reminder of the risks involved in viewing nature solely as a resource to be dominated. The findings underscore the urgent need to re-evaluate human attitudes toward the environment. By shifting from exploitation to coexistence, humanity can begin to reverse the damage inflicted on the environment and move toward a more sustainable and balanced future.*

Keywords: Ecophobia, Ecocriticism, Human-Nature Conflict, Environmental Exploitation

Introduction: The world is rapidly advancing toward urbanization and technological development, entering a new phase in human history. Since the Industrial Revolution, the human population has expanded significantly, particularly in recent decades, due to advancements in science and medicine. However, as industries grow, the natural environment continues to diminish. Humans now exert more control over animals and the environment than ever before, exploiting them to record-breaking levels. In response to these actions, natural disasters are becoming more frequent. Human activities, along with other factors, are major contributors to global warming and climate change. Rising temperatures are causing floods, droughts, and other extreme events, severely impacting the lives of millions.

As environmental issues become the focus of intense debate among scientists, literary theorists are also turning their attention to these concerns. In recent years, this has led to the emergence of a critical approach known as *ecocriticism*. Camilo Gomides defines ecocriticism as "The field of enquiry that analyzes and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature, while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations" (Gomides, 2006). Over the years, significant research has been conducted in this field. Unlike traditional criticism, which often adopts a human-centered approach, ecocriticism emphasizes the environment as a central concern. It explores how nature is depicted in literary texts and examines how these depictions shape societal views of the natural world.

A leading figure in ecocriticism, Simon C. Estok introduces the term "ecophobia" in his influential work *Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia*. He defines ecophobia as "an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia, racism, and sexi.sm" (Estok, 2009). Estok has analyzed various texts through the lens of ecophobia, emphasizing the antagonistic portrayal of the natural environment in literature. He notes that, throughout human history, nature has often been depicted as indifferent and hostile to humanity. Viewing nature as an enemy and menacing, humans have sought to dominate the natural world for their own purposes, pleasures, and comforts.

Keeping in view Estok's concepts related to ecophobia, I will analyze how José Vasconcelos' short story *The Boar Hunt* explores the interaction between humans and nature. This study will examine how the characters in the story exhibit hatred toward the natural world and investigate the underlying causes of this animosity. What type of view do these characters have of nature? Do they consider nature indifferent or not? Furthermore, it will explore the impact of this irrational hatred on humans themselves. By addressing these questions, this paper aims to encourage a shift in our perspective on nature and propose ways to address the environmental issues currently affecting countries worldwide, including Pakistan.

Literature Review

According to a definition provided by Collins Dictionary, nature encompasses all living organisms and natural elements not created by humans, as well as events and processes that occur independently of human intervention. Different fields—such as religion, psychology, sociology, literature, and science—interpret the concept of nature in unique ways. Religions like Hinduism and Buddhism regard nature as sacred, often worshipping it. For instance, the Ganga River is considered a purifier of sins. In Christianity, nature is often viewed as something that exists primarily for human use and benefit. Sociology, on the other hand, frequently treats nature as a social construct. As Alan Liu famously remarked, "there is no nature" (Liu, 1989). Sociologists argue that our understanding of nature is shaped by cultural, economic, and historical factors. Science disciplines, such as physics, perceive nature as governed by universal laws. Meanwhile, psychologists emphasize nature's healing power, highlighting its ability to improve mental health. Edward O. Wilson, in *The Biophilia Hypothesis*, explores humanity's innate connection to nature and its psychological benefits.

Similarly, literature engages with the concept of nature through various forms, including poetry, novels, and dramas, often using it as a backdrop or metaphor to explore human experiences.

The depiction of nature varies significantly across literary traditions. Romantic poets, for instance, view nature as a source of joy, solace, and inspiration. Sofi (2023) discussing P.B. Shelley's treatment of nature, notes that Shelley believes nature "exercises a healing influence on man's personality. He finds solace and comfort in nature and feels its soothing influence on his heart" (sofi, 2013). Shelley, in his poem, *To a Skylark* urges human to get bliss with nature through the bird. Sofi (2013) writes, "He considers the Skylark the source of its happiness" (sofi, 2013).

Unlike romantic poets, Thomas Hardy considers nature both as hostile and beautiful in his novels and poems. Mohammed (2021), analyzing Thomas Hardy's perspective, assert that nature in Hardy's works "is continually changing and attracts man's life point after point" (Liwaa Ahmed Abdullah, 2021). Hardy portrays nature as a driving force in shaping human destiny, reflecting both its beauty and its cruelty. These varying portrayals demonstrate that nature has been treated as more than a backdrop; it is a powerful and active force in literature, shaping human experiences and fates.

Considering the hostile and indifferent representation of nature in literature, Simon C. Estok introduces the term "ecophobia". Environmental scholar David Sobel, like Simon C. Estok, addresses the rise of ecophobia, particularly among children. Sobel emphasizes the need for better education to help children reconcile with nature rather than fear it. Sobel (1996) argues that children, being highly sensitive to information, often develop a fear of nature when exposed to distressing facts about climate change caused by human activities (Sobel, 1996). He warns that such education, rather than fostering a connection with nature, can alienate children from it. Sobel proposes age-appropriate educational strategies to prevent the development of fear toward the environment, suggesting that children should not be exposed to aspects of nature that might instill fear or anxiety.

Although the concept of ecophobia is relatively recent, it has been applied to various literary texts. Saindane & Mhalunkar (2023) explore ecophobia in Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*, highlighting how prolonged exploitation of nature through urbanization, modernization, and trade unionism transforms it into a destructive force. The study establishes a relationship between ecology and the novel's characters, interpreting nature's violent reactions as cries for help.

Jana (2020) examines the relationship between tragedy and ecophobia, exploring how ecophobic tendencies have been internalized in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* (Jana, 2020). The researcher applies Simon C. Estok's concept of ecophobia to analyze these works. In *Macbeth*, King Macbeth exhibits ecophobic anxiety as he perceives the "unruly" and "rough" night as ominous and becomes deeply disturbed by the mysterious movement of Birnam Wood. His fear of nature's unpredictability underscores a broader theme of humanity's struggle to control the natural world. Similarly, *Riders to the Sea* portrays nature as an overpowering and merciless force in human life. The play depicts the sea as an agent of destruction, relentlessly claiming Maurya's five sons, her husband, and even her husband's father. This repeated loss at the hands of nature instills a profound sense

of dread and helplessness. The researcher concludes that such devastation fosters a deep-seated resentment and fear of nature, reinforcing the presence of ecophobia in tragic literature.

While the concept of ecophobia has been widely explored by researchers, there remains a lack of focus on why characters exhibit ecophobia and how this attitude leads to problems for humans themselves. This research aims to address this gap by applying Simon C. Estok's theory of ecophobia to the short story, examining how it reflects humanity's complex and often antagonistic relationship with nature.

Theoretical Framework

Although David Sobel has contributed to the concept of ecophobia, this study adopts Simon C. Estok's framework to analyze José Vasconcelos' short story *The Boar Hunt* because Estok's concept of ecophobia is more closely related to the analysis of literature than Sobel's. Among numerous ecocritics, Estok stands out as an influential figure who coined the term "ecophobia." According to Estok, ecophobia is "an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world, as present and subtle in our daily lives and literature as homophobia and racism and sexism" (Estok, 2009)

Estok argues that humans have historically sought to control and exploit nature to fulfill their desires and needs. Throughout history, humans have used natural resources to survive and thrive in their environment. As Estok explains, "human history is a history of controlling the natural environment, of taking rocks and making them tools or weapons to modify or to kill parts of the natural environment" (Estok, 2009). From the earliest times, humans developed tools to hunt animals for survival, treating nature as an object to dominate. He also links this conceptualization of nature to Biblical teachings, which encourage humans to subjugate the environment and animals for their needs. Viewing themselves as the center of the universe, humans have justified exploiting the environment for their pleasure and utility. This desire for power and control over the natural world is a manifestation of ecophobia. He asserts, "It is about power and control; it is what makes looting and plundering of animal and non-animal resources possible" (Estok, 2009).

The human tendency to exploit nature stems from deeply entrenched, negative perceptions of the natural world—perceptions that are ecophobic in nature. He states that "representations of nature as an opponent that hurts, hinders, threatens, or kills us... are ecophobic" (Estok, 2009). Such portrayals, often perpetuated by literature, shape people's perceptions of nature as hostile and dangerous. For instance, writers like Shakespeare contributed to this narrative by depicting nature as an adversary. This framing influences how humans perceive animals like boars and deer, seeing them not as beings to coexist with, but as resources to be hunted and consumed for personal gain. This anthropocentric and adversarial view of nature, reinforced by literature, has driven humanity to exploit the environment without ethical consideration.

In *The Ecophobia Hypothesis*, Estok further emphasizes the detrimental consequences of this worldview, stating, "we face [environmental crises] without understanding the ethical foundations of the actions that brought us into this crisis" (Estok, 2018). The ongoing exploitation of nature, fueled by ecophobic attitudes, is a major factor behind modern environmental crises. Viewing nature as an enemy and treating it as a resource to be controlled have led to widespread ecological issues such as smog, floods, droughts, and other

disasters. These crises highlight the devastating effects of ecophobia, as humans fail to recognize the ethical implications of their actions.

This exploitation of nature, driven by a negative view of the natural world, is evident in José Vasconcelos' short story *The Boar Hunt*. The story reflects how humanity's ecophobic perspective and relentless exploitation of nature result in disastrous consequences, offering a poignant critique of the human-nature relationship.

Analysis

José Vasconcelos' short story *The Boar Hunt* is narrated in the first person by an unnamed character. The story revolves around four hunters who frequently hunt animals and birds for leisure. One day, they decide to hunt wild boars and set up camp in a jungle. At night, after finishing their preparations, they retire to rest before their planned hunt. However, they are awakened early in the morning by an unusual noise. As they wash their faces, the sound becomes louder, and they realize something is approaching.

The hunters climb onto their hammocks with guns and ammunition. Soon, large groups of wild boars appear before them. The hunters begin shooting at the boars, deriving great enjoyment from the massacre. They laugh and joke about the helplessness of the boars, finding gratification in their slaughter. However, the boars keep coming in increasing numbers and start digging at the trees to dislodge the hunters. As their ammunition runs out, the hunters helplessly watch as the boars' persistent efforts bring the trees down, killing all but the narrator, who narrowly escapes. After witnessing the horrifying deaths of his friends, the narrator vows never to hunt for pleasure again.

The short story *The Boar Hunt* illustrates various aspects of Simon C. Estok's concept of ecophobia. One key aspect is the human desire to exploit nature for personal purposes. In this story, that desire manifests as hunting for pleasure and entertainment. After spending the weekdays engaged in work, the characters find pleasure in hunting as a recreational activity. At the beginning of the story, the narrator explains how they frequently hunted for amusement:

“On Sundays we used to go on hunting parties. ... We entertained ourselves killing birds that flew in the sunlight during the siesta hour” (Hall, 1965).

The language used by the narrator reveals significant insights into the underlying purpose of the hunt. For the characters, the killing of animals is not merely an act of survival but a form of entertainment—akin to a celebratory event. They derive amusement and a sense of relief from the act of slaughtering animals. Furthermore, their journey to the Marañón River, which serves as the central setting of the story, is motivated by the same desire: “the hunting of wild boars.” Upon encountering the boars and beginning their attack, the hunters exhibit a complete disregard for the animals' intrinsic value, treating them as mere objects of amusement rather than living beings. They find immense satisfaction in their actions, relishing the sheer abundance of their prey. The narrator explicitly conveys this sentiment, stating, “The slaughter was gratifying” (Hall, 1965). The act of hunting instills in them a sense of triumph, akin to that of a soldier achieving victory. Their behavior suggests a

perception of their actions as an accomplishment, reinforcing their indifferent attitude towards natural world.

As the story progresses, the characters' sense of pleasure in hunting becomes even more pronounced. The relentless shooting continues as the boars approach in large herds. Due to prolonged and continuous gunfire, the barrels of their rifles overheat, forcing them to pause momentarily. During this break, rather than reflecting on their actions, the hunters engage in smoking and mock the animals. They ridicule the boars' helplessness and laugh at what they perceive as the animals' lack of intelligence, finding amusement in the fact that, despite witnessing their own kind being slaughtered, the boars continue to advance. This ongoing massacre is treated as a moment of triumph, as reflected in the narrator's words: "...celebrating our good fortune. The impotent anger of the boars amazed us... We laughed at their snorts, quietly aimed at those who were near, and Bang! A dead boar... The slaughter lasted for hours" (Hall, 1965). The manner in which this event is recounted mirrors the tone of a sportsman narrating a victory in competition. The phrase "impotent anger" underscores the hunters' perception of the boars' rage as both ineffective and comical, reinforcing their hatred towards nature.

In the story, the boars symbolize nature. Their indiscriminate killing of the boars reflects humanity's ecophobic tendency to exploit nature without considering the consequences. The hunters not only kill for pleasure but also mock and trivialize the lives they are taking, highlighting the lack of respect for the natural world. According to Estok, this lack of respect for nature is seen in humans and the literature they produce.

This pleasure derived from exploiting nature is rooted in ecophobia, which Estok describes as a condition enabling humans to harm the natural world. He writes, "ecophobia is a condition that allows humanity to do bad things to the natural world" (Estok, 2018). According to Estok, ecophobia is linked to how humans perceive nature. In the story, the narrator demonstrates an antagonistic view of nature, often describing the boars with hostile and degrading language: "Our enemies, like enormous angry ants, stirred beneath us." (Hall, 1965) At another instance, the protagonist narrators: "Presently the tree was bound to fall and we with it, among the beasts. From that moment we neither thought nor talked. In desperation, we used up our last shots, killing more ferocious beasts." (Hall, 1965) The narrator refers to the boars as "vicious," "enemy," "beasts," "angry ants," "black monsters," and "industrious rats." This language reflects the ecophobic mindset that Estok highlights—a perception of nature as hostile, threatening, and something to be fought or dominated. For the narrator, nature is an adversary to be subdued, which justifies its exploitation.

This framing not only dehumanizes non-human life but also mirrors how literature historically constructs nature as the "other." By drawing on militaristic and violent metaphors, the narrator distances himself from nature emotionally and morally, enabling violence without guilt. This is a typical feature of ecophobia—it desensitizes humans, allowing the destruction of the environment without remorse. Furthermore, such language reveals a broader cultural narrative that encourages domination over the natural world, reinforcing ideologies of human supremacy. This narrative is deeply ingrained in literature, religion, and even educational systems, perpetuating an illusion that humans are separate

from and superior to nature.

This hatred of nature leads to its reckless exploitation and ultimately causes problems for humans. Ecophobia drives humans to destroy the environment, resulting in crises like smog, floods, and pandemics. Similarly, the hunters in *The Boar Hunt* face dire consequences for their actions. Initially, the hunters believe they have the upper hand, shooting at the boars with confidence. However, as the boars keep coming in increasing numbers, the hunters soon realize the limits of their power. They watch in horror as the boars begin digging at the trees they are perched on, gradually bringing them down. The once-powerful hunters are now helpless victims of the very creatures they sought to dominate. The boars retaliate by throwing down the trees with their tusks, killing all the hunters except the narrator.

The story demonstrates how the ecophobic desire to exploit nature leads to destruction. The hunters, driven by pleasure and a disregard for the natural world, pay the ultimate price for their actions. The death of the narrator's friends serves as a poignant reminder of the consequences of disrupting the natural environment. Furthermore, this episode serves as a symbolic reversal of power. The hunters, who once viewed themselves as dominant over nature, are ultimately humbled and destroyed by it. The boars, which symbolized the natural world, respond to violence with violence, turning from passive prey into active agents of justice. This shift disrupts the anthropocentric worldview that humans are superior and entitled to manipulate the environment for leisure. Estok's theory is exemplified here, showing how ecophobia can generate both ecological imbalance and existential threat. Through this, *The Boar Hunt* becomes a cautionary tale about the perils of environmental arrogance and the urgent need to reframe our relationship with the non-human world.

Conclusion

José Vasconcelos' short story *The Boar Hunt* explores the complex relationship between humanity and nature. Using Simon C. Estok's concept of ecophobia, this research examines how the hatred of nature is manifested through hunting for pleasure and why the desire to exploit and dominate nature exists in the story's characters. Through thorough analysis, this research concludes that the characters' desire to exploit nature reflects ecophobia. Their actions—hunting and slaughtering boars for personal gratification—stem from a deeply ingrained perception of nature as an enemy: wild, brutish, and threatening. This antagonistic view fosters ecophobic tendencies, driving the characters to exploit nature without regard for the consequences.

Furthermore, the research highlights that such exploitative attitudes lead to destructive outcomes for the characters themselves. The catastrophic retaliation by nature in the form of the boars' attack underscores the dangers of treating the environment as an object of exploitation. This study emphasizes the need for humanity to rethink its perspective on nature. Adopting a positive and respectful view of the natural world is essential to mitigate the ecological crises we face today. By fostering harmony with nature instead of exploiting it, we can work toward overcoming the environmental disasters caused by our current attitudes and actions.

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