

BOOK REVIEW

**Simon C. Estok. 2011. *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia*.
New York: Palgrave Macmillan. xi + 125 pp.**

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This historically grounded book expands the ecocritical vocabulary of current scholarship by dialling in ecophobia, defined here as “a generalised fear or contempt for the natural world and its inhabitants” (4), expressed through human’s need to control nature. Chapter 1 argues that ecophobia can and should be aligned with other critical approaches, including “feminism, queer theory, critical racial theory, food studies, cultural anthropology, ecopsychology, post-structuralism, and deconstruction” (23) because ecocriticism is central to each one. The rest of the book proceeds to demonstrate how this can be done through close readings of a range of Shakespearean plays.

In Chapter 2, Estok considers the natural and domestic spaces in *King Lear* and rejects the essentialist idea that nature is either good or bad. Rather, its complexity and uncontrollability fuels ecophobia. Taking an ecofeminist stance, he reveals how masculine identity frequently hinges on a man’s ability to control nature. Thus, the storm is not a metaphor for Lear’s madness, it demonstrates Lear’s spiralling downfall after realising the uncontrollability of nature and of women. The link between ecophobia and misogyny is revisited in Chapter 6, which dissects the metaphors used in *The Winter’s Tale* to argue convincingly that Leontes assumes the passivity of nature and of women and uses language to exercise power over them.

In Chapter 3, Estok shows how matters of sexuality are more closely linked to the environment than scholars have realised. In *Coriolanus*, nature becomes a space for “a rehearsal of ecophobia and a scripting of normative sexualities” (39), in that Coriolanus comes to represent the “disorder and unpredictability” (35) of nature due to his alleged homoerotic relationship with Aufidius. The next chapter looks into the relationship between class structure and ecophobia, and Estok argues that any discussion of class structure must occur within the ecocritical framework because conventional understanding of social hierarchy is informed by the human tendency to commodify nature. Consequently, in *2 Henry VI*, nature is a space where rebellion resides, signalling chaos and political instability. The well-maintained garden thus symbolises the human compulsion to control nature and mirrors the efforts to thwart the political uprising of rebels such as Cade.

Monstrosity in *Othello* and *Pericles* is the focus of Chapter 5, which argues that the monstrous in literature frequently “imagines unpredictability and agency in nature” (67). Estok brilliantly points out that the portrayal of Othello’s villainy and Otherness rests heavily on his association with nature, whereas the metaphor of cannibalism in *Pericles* brings to life the human nightmare of nature going completely perverse and haywire. Estok highlights that cannibalism in the play is wrongfully blamed on nature instead of on humans and that this inaccurate mapping of responsibility is ecophobic. Unfortunately, observations about the links between cannibalism and post-colonialism are not fully fleshed out here. Engaging more fully with postcolonial theory, the subsequent chapter highlights the link between nature and the postcolonial exotic in *The Tempest*. Estok shows how the natural environment in *The Tempest* is commodified as “a showcase of exotica, of a strange and brave new world” (104), which contributes to the othering of Caliban.

Chapter 8 unravels the ecocritical unconscious, a topic new to ecocriticism that looks into the Shakespearean representation of sleep. Through careful attention to early modern historical contexts, sleep is convincingly shown to embody nature’s invasion into human life, thus casting new light on Hamlet’s hatred towards sleep. Estok further looks into the aversion to diurnal sleep in *The Tempest*, which appears to stem from the ecophobic notion that sleeping at night is bestial. Though novel, the proposed link between animality and sleep is not sufficiently convincing and would benefit from more elaboration and illustrations.

Estok's approach to ecocritical theory is valuable for its efforts to address contentions about ecocriticism and to highlight main ideas by his predecessors. However, his arguments for the links between ecocriticism and other theories can falter, especially when he attempts to apply them to his analyses of Shakespeare's plays. Given the complexity of these social and literary theories, and the layered meanings of Shakespearean texts, Estok's aim of addressing their relationships within a slim volume of fewer than 150 pages might simply have been too ambitious. Despite this, Estok's ecocritical readings of Shakespeare definitely succeed in providing fresh and exciting readings of a well-studied body of work.