

Received: 4 February 2022 Accepted: 16 March 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33182/joe.v1i2.2161>

## Book Review

Tidwell, C., & Soles, C. (Eds). (2021). *Fear and Nature: Ecohorror Studies in the Anthropocene*. Penn State University Press.

ISBN: 9780271090214.

Reviewed by Tohidur Rahaman<sup>1</sup>

In order to rupture the problematic aspect of the Anthropocene, Francesca Ferrando posits that ‘the centrality of the human implies a sense of separation and individuation of the human from the rest of beings’ (Ferrando, 2019, 103). Horror in the Anthropocene actually arises from the long standing distant relationship between Nature and human beings when gradually the gap between them is being constricted. *Fear and Nature: Ecohorror Studies in the Anthropocene*, edited by Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles, could be conceived as smudging that gap by juxtaposing at least two genres of literary theories: ecocritical studies and horror studies. It asks the question of what happens when we mix, grind and boil the two genres in the same pot. The editors argue that ‘ecohorror is both genre and mode’ (03). It is interesting to note that when they deal with ecohorror as a mode, they insinuate that it is transpatial and has a capacity to move across disciplines, which unfolds its scope even more extensively. The editors also argue that ecohorror is a ‘nature-strikes-back narratives’ (03). Then, what does the mixture of ecocritical and horror studies aim to offer the reader, not just in eco-catastrophic revelation but also in terms of psycho-spiritual upliftment from the centrality of the Anthropocene, often creating a definitive marker of dichotomous engagement between the human and the nonhuman? The defining aspect of ecohorror studies, as propounded by Stephen A. Rust and Carter Soles, in ‘Ecohorror Special Cluster’, seems to solve the dichotomy as this field of critical thinking can ‘promote ecological awareness, represent ecological crises, or blur human/non-human distinctions more broadly’ (Rust & Soles, 2014, 509-510). This further culminates in an understanding of Stacy Alaimo’s new materialist concept of ‘trans-corporeality’. In the *Posthuman Glossary*, she argues ‘all creatures, as embodied beings, are intermeshed with the dynamic material world, which crosses through them, transforms them, and is transformed by them’ (Alaimo, 2018, 435). In terms of syntactical pattern of this book, it consists of four parts; and each part includes three essays. While the book’s primary motive is to focus on the basic definitive aspect of ecohorror, it goes beyond that, as important terms such as ecogothic and ecophobia have been extended with reference to ecohorrific background.

In the first part, titled ‘Expanding Ecohorror’, different essays aim to explore the expansion of the term, ecohorror, by keeping the vegetation at the focal point of horror and minimalising

<sup>1</sup> Tohidur Rahaman, State Aided College Teacher at Sripat Singh College, Murshidabad, West Bengal, India.

E-mail: [rahamantohidur20@gmail.com](mailto:rahamantohidur20@gmail.com)



animal presence. For example, Dawn Keetley points out that the traditional horror story relates the ecohorror of vegetation ‘only to the extent that it hides dangerous predators’ (24). She proposes a different kind of ecohorror that is ‘tentacular ecohorror’. This type of ecohorror does not conceal any predator; rather, it ‘reaches out to grab and entangle the human’ (25) by means of unknown life-forms and ‘uncannily alive woods’ (25) where characters become ensnared with that. Christy Tidwell’s essay is more concerned with the ‘blurring distinctions between human and nonhuman’ (42). She associates ecohorror with ‘body horror’ and ‘cosmic horror’. She supports her work with reference to Junji Ito’s work, *Uzumaki*, which deals with ‘spirals’ that can be further extended to reflect ‘real-world natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, typhoons, and earthquakes)’ (45). Ashley Kniss’s article reflects on the fearful and interesting aspect of rotting corpses and dead bodies. She elaborates that the rotting of corpse is an essential act of ecosystem, yet it causes horror to human beings. Dealing with Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Colloquy of Monos and Una”, she says ‘the dead body is both a site and source of ecohorror’ (69).

The second part, ‘Haunted and Unhaunted Landscapes’, traverses across animal and vegetative kingdoms to impart animation to nonhuman landscapes like sea, wilderness and lake. Keri Stevenson’s essay asserts that British poet, A.C. Swinburne evokes a concept similar to disanthropic condition where human beings have been totally eliminated from Nature. Chelsea Davis’s ‘An Unhaunted Landscape’ evokes horror beyond gothic landscapes. Bringing together American civil war narrative, she argues that the natural Environment is more horrific because it can eliminate human agency, and terms this condition ‘Nature’s amnesiac temporality’ (116). Bridgette Barclay’s essay, ‘The Extinction-Haunted Salton Sea’, focuses on the failure of the irrigation canal which results in the formation of the Salton Sea. This event, coming from the unknowability of the subterranean spaces of this earth, accelerates the growth of several animals lying dormant in eggs for centuries and causes threat for human beings. This abysmal event poses unusual and terrific interferences with human corporeal selves, which Barclay considers to be ‘trans-corporeal toxicity’ (138).

The third part, ‘The Ecohorror of Intimacy’, seeks to explore the private and intimate spaces of human beings where they can comfortably expose and unfold themselves. These varied tangible and intangible spaces include ‘bathroom’, ‘human-pet relationship’ and ‘inter-species love’. Marisol Cortez argues that various functions of the body are usually ‘stigmatized as contaminating, impure, primitive and improper’ (157). Thus, the association with bathroom becomes ‘an index of civilization and modernity’ (155). However, the real fear arises from the ‘deroutinization’ of the human scatological processes where bathroom-space itself becomes a ‘postverbal communication network’ (168) for the invasive non-human species. Brittany R. Roberts discusses the horror arising from the intimate relationship of the human beings with a very unusual sort of pet, cormorant. She observes that this ‘multispecies companionship is often marked by competition and violence’ (184). Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumam’s essay on the film, *The Shape of Water*, works on the depiction of the human hybrid, ‘Amphibian man’, which brings together the notion of love across species. They argue that the film combines the ecology of the post-pastoral with the horror of exploitation.

The fourth part, ‘Being Prey, Being Food’, digs into dismantling the human concept of food where human beings have always excluded themselves from the food chain. Kristen Angierski’s essay is based on the child and animal kinship narrative. It also draws on the ‘rhetorics surrounding vegans and animal rights activists’ (219). This chapter takes a reversion



to an idyllic version of agri-business. When the agri-business is put in negation, it invariably puts the human food culture in jeopardy. Sharon Sharp's essay, 'Television Ecohorror', based on the web series, *Zoo*, exhibits the notion of animals' 'fight-back', whereby 'it is the dangerous and transgressive animal that elicits suspense and fear in animal horror cinema' (239). This transgression culminates in a threat where human beings turn out to be 'foods' for animals. Carter Soles elicits how the supremacy of white is naturalized in different spheres of life. Citing from the movie, *The Shallows*, he provides us with a binary division between 'extreme whiteness' and 'plain whiteness'. While the animal subject like the white shark represents extreme whiteness and is an agent of ecohorror, the central human character, Nancy symbolises plain whiteness. Here, Soles problematises the notion of 'plain whiteness' holding the status of intellectual superiority to 'extreme whiteness' and non-white subjects. Thus, he includes a post-humanistic approach, showing the local Mexican people to be a site of ecohorror where as vagabonds they become the object of exploitation at the hands of white tourists.

Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles argue that there have emerged four full length critical books in the field of ecohorror but most of them deal primarily with animal horror. Thus, *Fear and Nature* not only talks about 'animal-strikes-back narrative', but also offers us reasons for animals' transgressions. The book contributes to the larger domain of the ecohorror studies with the deconstruction and elaboration of the terms: pastoral, pet, food. Moreover, it digs into an analysis of the horrors of animal husbandry where animals are persistently used to meet various needs (foods, clothes and etc.) of human beings. In that scenario, the animals' right to sexual choice is also violated as they often have to go through the enforced breeding processes. Likewise, these circumstances make us sceptical of how we perceive the softer and romantic side of the pastoral. The book also pays attention to the condition of Indigenous people in terms of how they are reduced to the status of minorities in an age of rapid transformations of geological and cultural spaces owing to global capitalism. Terry Gifford relates the degradation of the environment to the 'exploitation of human minorities' (Gifford, 2012, 59). In Carter Soles's essay, the local Mexicans, being an Indigenous community, serve as 'human minorities' as their exploitation is invariably parallel to the dilapidation of nature. Along with ecohorror, the editors of this book have pointed out other terms like 'ecophobia' and 'ecogothic' although the scopes of these terms are not so dynamic and reflective. Thus, ecogothic and ecophobia may be present in an ecohorrific text, but they cannot alternatively signify the stylistics of ecohorror. This representative and symbolic book is highly recommended to readers as it can offer them the ethics and responsibilities towards nature. In fact, Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles argue that 'ecohorror has the potential to help create relationships of care between the human and the nonhuman' (7-8). In that connection, we can also relate this idea to ecohumanist ideology which emphasises that human beings form an integral and non-separable part of diverse ecologies. These issues of ecology add to 'the concepts of citizenship, civil justice, sustainability, resilience, urban ecologies, etc. in both theory and praxis' (Karpouzou & Zampaki, 2022, 1). While there are plenty of discussions in *Fear and Nature* on horrific human entwinement with Nature, these observations on the entanglement are largely set in the ferine background with the only exception being there in Marisol Cortez's essay where Cortez reflects on 'urban ecologies' as sites of ecohorror. I think this aspect, possibly as a separate part, could have been elaborated by Christy Tidwell and Carter Soles, with the inclusion of more essays. If extended, I reckon, the book would competently accentuate more to the blurring of the 'Nature- culture' binary.

## References

- Alaimo, S. (2018). Trans-corporeality. In R. Braidotti & M. Hlavajova (Eds.), *Posthuman Glossary* (pp. 435-38). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ferrando, F. (2019). *Philosophical Posthumanism*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Gifford, T. (2012). Pastoral, Antipastoral and Postpastoral as Reading Strategies. In S. Slovic (Ed.), *Critical Insights: Nature and Environment* (pp. 42-61). Salem Press.
- Karpouzou, P., & Zampaki, N. (2022). Editors' Note. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 1(1), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.33182/joe.v1i1.2113>
- Rust, S. A., & Soles, C. (2014). Ecohorror Special Cluster: Living in Fear, Living in Dread, Pretty Soon We'll All Be Dead. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 21(3), 509-12.
- Tidwell, C., & Soles, C. (Eds.). (2021). *Fear and Nature: Ecohorror Studies in the Anthropocene*. Penn State University Press.

