



## **(In)glorious Defeat: Rethinking Humanity's Victories Against Nature in Literature\***

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### **Abstract**

The conflict between man and nature is a common literary motif. Our established ways of reading glorify human courage, resilience, dignity and fortitude even as our heroes meet their downfall and death in their fight against nature. Epic battles have been fought between man and sea, man and fierce animals until the hero's victory is achieved. With their death their heroism and valour increases manifold. Sometimes our mortal heroes undergo apotheoses into god-like beings. Those like castaway mariners, who are saved from death, fight against all things *savage* to survive until they are rewarded with a new opportunity to return to civilization.

In this paper I see this reading practice as a strategy through which the hierarchical relation between man and nature is established and perpetuated. Is this a legacy of the Western Enlightenment that has systematically promoted anthropocentric and patriarchal attitudes towards nature? Or does this practice go even further back? What strikes me is that this kind of glorification celebrates mostly abstract values like humanity, courage, dignity, and character but not those qualities that distinguish the humans as a species. These anthropocentric interpretations are so polarized, that they often leave no room for an alternate, ecologically oriented reading of a text. Nature is almost always backgrounded, subsumed by the glory of human achievement. As I explore the limitations of this form of reading practice, I wish to highlight parallel, ecologically informed ways of reading in which human heroes need not suffer from ignominy even as they go down in their battles against nature.

### **Keywords**

Frankfurt-school, environment, ecology, literature, nature

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“A few miles from here  
 a frost-stiffened wood waits and keeps watch  
 above a mere; the overhanging bank  
 is a maze of tree-roots mirrored in its surface.  
 At night there, something uncanny happens:  
 the water burns. And the mere bottom  
 has never been sounded by the sons of men.  
 On its bank, the heather-stepper halts:  
 the hart in flight from pursuing hounds  
 will turn to face them with firm-set horns  
 and die in the wood rather than dive  
 beneath its surface. That is no good place.” (lines 1361-1372)

The sombre, fearful fen is home to Grendel, the terrifying monster whom the eponymous hero slays in the Anglo Saxon poem *Beowulf*, and rescues Hrothgar’s kingdom from fear and danger. As this well known Scandinavian legend goes, the great prince meets his glorious end fighting a fire-breathing dragon. Even as he dies his feat is celebrated with fitting dignity and grandeur. The world of *Beowulf* appears to be clearly divided between good and evil, light and darkness, joy and fear, celebration and lament. Heorot, Hrothgar’s castle is described in sharp antithesis to Grendel’s lair. Heorot is magnificently built: it is the “hall of halls”, resounding with the “din of the loud banquet”, the music from the harp, and the poet sings gleefully of the creation of life by the Almighty. True, *Beowulf*’s battles are fought against supernatural monsters and dragons but, we must not forget, they are also inhabitants of the natural environment on which humans have not yet exerted their mastery and control. Despite several Old Testament parallels, and Christian interpolations, the world of *Beowulf* is distinctly recognizable as a mythical world capable of inspiring fear, awe, respect and even hateful vengeance. But it is free from the burdens of manipulation, measurement and precise control. It remains unknown, unpredictable and hostile, therefore suitable for its associations with the likes of Grendel and the fire-dragon. As human societies started moving farther away from the world of myths their cultural codes underwent significant changes. As awareness of knowledge and their own subjectivity grew, nature, which was once inseparable from gods, demons and humans in an organic mythical universe, became otherized, and eventually backgrounded and subsumed under the grand narratives of Enlightenment, colonialism and later, industrial capitalism<sup>1</sup>.

I wish to argue that this “hyper-separation”<sup>ii</sup> (Plumwood *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* 49) between the humans and the natural environment not only created a strong and unbridgeable binary between the two categories, it also changed the course of our reading practices to an altogether new direction. Literature, like science and philosophy, strengthened the conceptual framework in which humanity’s position as an invincible force was forged along with a simultaneous demonstration of nature’s vulnerability and susceptibility to human examination and assessment. Side by side I also find it necessary to point out that reading is a social as well as cultural practice and the generation of meaning is strongly influenced by the normative cultural politics of the age in which a text is read. Canonical texts are still read with decontextualized, formalist critical methods which leave little scope for multiple, alternate and concurrent interpretations<sup>iii</sup>.

As humans’ grip on nature was firmly established, it soon found its way into interpretive strategies as well. Colonialism and technological progress further added to the strategic domination of nature by humans until it became almost normative to read literary texts in such a way as may glorify human struggles even when they end up losing their unequal battles against nature. The nature/nurture dualism has remained a part of early modern English literature. Shakespeare’s late play *The Tempest* epitomizes the debate. A thin line separates this dualism from domination. The emphasis on the superiority of humans over nature, as I have argued throughout this essay, continued to be a major theme in English literature since the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Ecocriticism, radical ecologies and critical theory in the last few decades have persistently questioned anthropocentrism in literary studies with the effect that nature itself has been reinvented as a living sentient agent from ages of backgrounding and homogenization (Zimmerman; Bookchin *The Ecology of Freedom*; Plumwood *Environmental Culture*; Merchant *Radical Ecology*). But has it changed our reading practices? In the rest of the paper I will try to find out how far critical engagements with nature have shaped our interpretative strategies. I will try to illustrate this with a few examples and stress the need for a parallel, ecologically informed reading of literary texts apart from dominant, anthropocentric ones.

Literary fiction in English language produced in Britain and North America, is a storehouse of nature’s baleful fury against human figures. I am compelled to restrict my illustrations from these areas due the limitation of my own reading. Shipwrecks are common in Shakespeare’s plays. Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) in many ways typifies the contemporary attitude to *savage* nature as opposed to civilization. Crusoe’s harvest is

bountiful. He has a surfeit of grapes, berries and raisins. After rescuing the aborigine he teaches him his language: “I likewise taught him to say *Master* and let him know, that was to be my Name; I likewise taught him to say, YES, and NO, . . .” (Defoe 149). Crusoe’s case is a classic parable of justifying the Westerner’s attempt to represent a land as empty even when there were people living on it for ages. As Plumwood argues: “Instrumental culture makes of its objects of attention a terra nullius, a prior vacancy, the better to inscribe its own ends.” (Plumwood 18). Caliban’s indictment of Prospero for having usurped his island (*The Tempest* 1.2) also comes readily to mind. Nature was portrayed as the other, remote and terrifying unless yielding use-value for humans. Bacon’s “Of Garden” typifies the legacy of the Enlightenment’s perception of the contrast between built nature and “a natural wildness.” (Bacon 174-90).

So much so, that nature is often cast in the role of an antagonist, against whose wrath our human heroes’ strength and resilience are measured. Apart from those texts where nature plays allegorical roles, we have several memorable nature pieces in the last two centuries or so. How can we forget the sombre gloom of the desolate moor in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) where the stunted firs and thorns stretch their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Egdon Heath in Hardy’s *The Return Of The Native* (1878) is an unforgiving landscape, almost prehistoric and mythical in its character. Humans who dare to make changes on it are destroyed. In America, the novels of James Fennimore Cooper recreate before us the wide and apparently an impervious boundary of forests with secret rapids presenting before the Europeans hostile and insurmountable barriers. Perhaps the most iconic of all man-nature struggles that we can think of is the one between Captain Ahab and Moby Dick in Melville’s classic. The American wilderness which Roderick Nash, in his classic *Wilderness and the American Mind* has shown to be an intrinsic part of national cultural identity, is engraved in the unforgettable words of Huck Finn: “It was a monstrous big river here, with the tallest and thickest kind of timber on both banks; just a solid wall . . .” (Twain 93). Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* continues to fascinate us with its rich and sinister narrative descriptions of the Congo.

The question that these examples naturally raise is how did older (medieval and early modern) literatures deal with nature’s fury? Ancient epics tell us stories of what Murray Bookchin describes as “organic” communities in which humans, nature and the supernatural share a common universe (Bookchin *The Ecology of Freedom* 116). Gods worshipped, were closely associated with natural agencies. Natural phenomena like flood and pestilence were

common. The great deluge of the Bible is anticipated by the flood in the Babylonian epic *Gilgamesh*. Monsters that threaten Odysseus during his journey back to Ithaca are inhabitants of remote sea islands. When we read Shakespeare we see nature used at least in two major ways. Both are dramaturgically conceived. One, which is part of the great tragedies, shows the psychological condition of the characters while the other represents the setting either as an idyllic world away from the civil society of the great comedies or as a fitting atmosphere to human drama as in *Lear* and *Macbeth*. In the great storm scenes, *Lear* invokes the great “cataracts and hurricanoes” (*King Lear* 3.2.2) to “crack nature’s moulds” (3.2.8) and strike vengeance upon a world full of ingratitude and cruelty. On the night of Duncun’s murder “confus’d events” (2.3.59) are reported. Darkness “entomb(s)” the “living light” (2.3.9) of the day. But “unnatural” things happen “like the deed that’s done” (2.3.11). Nature’s disturbances are manifestations of the crime committed against order of things that include man, nature, animals and the cosmic world. In the comedies the spirit of festive revelry, escape and reconciliation are held together in the enchanting world of wilderness in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Ilyria* and the Forest of Arden. As Jonathan Bate rightly puts it: “The outlaw scenes (in TGV) introduce a movement out from “civil” society into a “wilderness” or green world, where surprising developments take place, anticipating the enchanted wood of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and the forest of Arden in *As You Like It*” (Bate 375). In other words nature was represented as a function of the condition, a force, often beyond human control and hence the pursuit of domination remained less of a motif<sup>iv</sup>. But, even if we imagine the early modern settlement and wilderness as part of a continuum, the difference between society and wilderness did exist and they remained culturally separate. The stern codes of the Medieval Christian church also strongly discouraged unnecessary human interactions with nature lest pleasures derived from such experiences could affect devotion in a negative way (Nash 13-22). But, it must be admitted that even though pleasures derived from natural excursions were shunned, there were several references to the conditions of wilderness in the Western religious and cultural texts and, as Roderick Nash has pointed out, particularly in the Judeo-Christian tradition (Nash 8-22). Like Lynn White before him, Nash argued that the difference between wilderness and settlement lay largely in the former’s unproductive and unfruitful character (White 25-35). Because regions outside the boundaries of settled towns and cities were less familiar and exact knowledge was insufficient, wilderness remained a fiction, an imaginary cultural construct that could be associated with all things outside the boundaries of populated cities. It could therefore be used as appropriate setting for the magical, the fearful and the enchanted. This could be true of other cultures as

well. Although Nash sees the Eastern perceptions of the wilderness as distinct from those of the West in their essentially non-hostile and non-inimical attitudes, it would be simplistic to suppose that the relation between man and nature was uniformly harmonious in the East. In ancient India, as historian Romila Thapar has pointed out there were clear demarcations between the *vana* and *ksetra* corresponding to the two categories of forest and settlement, even though they shared a relationship of both “dichotomy” as well as “complementarity” (Thapar 142). Her argument that historical change altered the dynamic nature of relationship between the *vana* and *ksetra* in India suggests that the duality of forest and settlement was not just a Western phenomenon; it was also present in the ancient Indian experience. “Where it was romanticized it became an imagined alternative, a fictive paradise, which expunged the inequities of civilized living. Alternatively, it was seen as a fearful habitat of demons” (Thapar 143). Whichever way nature was conceptualized it remained remote from civilized society both physically and culturally. Our reference to Beowulf in the beginning of this paper is a case in point. Even in the great Indian epic The Ramayana, the worlds of the demon king Ravana, as well as the Dandaka Forest where Rama, the hero is exiled, are conceived in opposition to civilization. The Pandavas in Mahabharata maintain their secret existence in the forests for fourteen years but they cross kingdoms during their exile. The episode where the Pandavas set fire to the Khandava forest is symptomatic of the desire to claim areas of wilderness for the flourish of settlement.<sup>v</sup> The changing perceptions of the forest in ancient India, for Thapar, were not free from the idea of domination; nor was it free from a gendered contrast. What I wish to argue at this point is that the cultural and geographical differences between the wilderness and settlement existed both in the east and the west until two radical changes in the west widened the gap further and produced polar constructs of the nature and the human, both entwined in a relationship of domination. One of these changes was obviously the Enlightenment and its ideological implications and the other was the rise of the industrial economy which played an instrumental role in the commodification of nature. Both enforced human authority and power over nature which was gradually and systematically homogenised, objectified and backgrounded. Philosophically the subject-object paradigm and the supreme prioritizing of the “cogito” or the individuality of the human subject proposed by Descartes inaugurated a tradition of idealization of the rational self. The mimetic world of magic was supplanted by the detached world of science and reason. As Adorno and Horkheimer have put it in their famous *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*: “The manifold affinities between existing things are supplanted by the single relationship between the subject who confers meaning and the meaningless object, between

rational significance and its accidental bearer” (Adorno and Horkheimer 7). This, combined with the belief in the perfectibility of humans through a relentless pursuit of empirical knowledge and reason helped nature to be further objectified as a world of phenomena whose existence was always contingent upon the subjective/knowing mind. Not only was nature relegated to the background as passive, compliant and tractable, it also became a deeply gendered category. Bruno Latour’s idea that political ecology, in order to make sense, must transcend the epistemological pretensions and imbroglios of nature and its representations that lie at the heart of the discourses of environmentalism.<sup>vi</sup>

Several critiques of the Enlightenment<sup>vii</sup> have already highlighted the ways in which patriarchy, science, technology, industry and even epistemological frameworks contributed to an ever-widening hiatus between human authority and the passivity of nature. Radical ecological positions like Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism and Social Ecology have extensively argued against the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment in their analyses of human domination of nature from their own conceptual frameworks. But interventions from Western Marxism have problematized nature both philosophically and socially. In his recent book *Against Nature*, Stephen Vogel makes a critical analysis of the representation of nature in the works of Lukacs, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Habermas. In critical thinking, as Vogel argues, nature is either reified, hypostasised or humanized: it is either socially mediated or alienated as a commodity. Philosophically too, nature has been trammelled by the subject-object duality or it is restricted to its phenomenal manifestations because its noumenal characteristics cannot be humanly known. Although *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* has been more often appropriated by radical ecologists including Murray Bookchin as a staunch critique of Enlightenment’s intellectual justification of domination and exploitation of nature, Stephen Vogel’s book identifies the ambiguities and paradoxes that underline the ideas of nature among critical thinkers of the Frankfurt school.

While it is true that both Marxist social theory and critical theory have tried to provide conceptual frameworks to include nature along with other categories of experience including social, economic, cultural and even epistemological ones, there has been a persistent lack of interface/engagement between theoretical exploration of nature and the ways in which it has been constructed in various modes of cultural representation. Even though I restrict my argument to literary culture alone for obvious limitation of the scope of this paper, I believe that similar observations could be made for other cultural exercise like films, theatre, opera and music as well. With the possible exception of Adorno, who extended his philosophical

inquiries towards an aesthetic theory, much of the works of the early and later writers of the Frankfurt school fail to engage in a participatory discourse with more ecologically oriented explications of nature. As Andrew Biro puts it in his book *Critical Ecologies*: “the tradition of Frankfurt School critical theory has become increasingly disengaged from ecological issues, notwithstanding the emphasis that Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse placed on the ‘domination of nature’ as key to understanding human psychological and sociocultural development” (Biro 7). How does one then build a theoretical position that could redeem the post-Enlightenment, post-industrialization impasse, in which nature became trapped within a paradoxical dynamic of subject and object, irredeemably mired within a teleological view of human history that ignored both nature as an independent category and an idea that antedates humankind’s arrival on earth. For all its speculative and rhetorical arguments, it is undeniable that Adorno and Horkheimer’s famous statement that enlightenment is myth and myth enlightenment remains a strong launch pad upon which several perceptions of Enlightenment’s failure as an emancipatory intellectual project are grounded. The authors’ reading of the Sirens episode in the *Odyssey* in itself is a classic example of how literary cultures even dating several centuries farther back from the European Enlightenment contained seeds of the idea of human control of nature. But at this point we have to be mindful of the fact that it is easy to get carried away by the sweeping and passionate rhetoric of Adorno and Horkheimer and lose sight of the fact that “they bring abstractions and simplifications into the bargain and make the plausibility of their cause problematic” (Habermas 110). Habermas’s critique is also a reminder that such readings as Adorno and Horkheimer perform with regard to *Odyssey* are fraught with tenuous philosophical claims about the validity and universality of human reason and subject.

What I am eager to propose at this point is that while one can never undermine the importance of Critical Theory’s attempts to resolve the problem of the perceptions of nature as either socially mediated or as a category existing in itself, it is also fundamentally important to see the problem in relation to the ever growing discourses centered round the Anthropocene. Since the time of Great Acceleration in particular, academic pursuits both in the fields of social as well natural sciences have registered strong linkages between the roles played by anthropogenic forces in shaping large-scale environmental changes. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has pointed out: “The crisis of climate change calls on academics to rise above their disciplinary prejudices, for it is a crisis of many dimensions” (Chakrabarty 221). As he invites fundamental changes in history, philosophy, sociology and social theory to negotiate

with human-induced environmental changes, he also warns us against a paradox which Critical Theory in general and Adorno and Horkheimer in particular have examined. It is the question of how to posit the subjectivity of the construct “we” in the discourses of the human species as a collective entity: “The idea of species . . . may introduce a powerful degree of essentialism in our understanding of humans” (Chakrabarty 214). Further, drawing on the difference between species history and human history, he contests the very notion of the self-understanding of the humans as species.

Philosophically, the paradox in Chakrabarty’s thesis is not too far from the one that lies at the heart of human perceptions of nature as explored by critical theorists. Just as humans can never step out of the circle of experience of which they are an intrinsic part similarly they cannot conceive nature as a sentient agency outside their consciousness, endowed with intentionality, antedating humans. Is it possible, then, to establish a cultural practice which, among other things, may allow an inter-species discourse free from instrumentalism and reductionism of established hierarchies? My claim is that a conceptual change is possible only if it is integrated with parallel revisions in our notions of development, globalization and technological progress. For values of inter-species equity cannot be inculcated in a world fraught with social inequity and economic injustice. But I am also aware of the difficulties of arguing for a system which acknowledges differences but denies hierarchies. Established codes of hierarchy and domination inform human cultures so heavily that even our perceptions of ecology and nature are not free from them. As Murray Bookchin strongly argues that “ecosystems cannot be meaningfully described in hierarchical terms” . . . “to rank species within an ecosystem is anthropomorphism at its crudest” (Bookchin 26). That the last three centuries leading up to the Anthropocene is replete with such examples of anthropomorphism is now evident. Our reading practices too have not been free from such anthropocentric tendencies. With “semantic autonomy of language” and “hermeneutical skepticism” (Hirsch 23) being firmly established as standard critical principles by the 1960s, our interpretations during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were increasingly appropriated to uphold liberal humanist values. The tradition still continues even though critical tendencies have reoriented towards corrective principles. But these changes have to be effected at early stages of higher education too. Examinees are still asked to comment on “universal” human values, reflect upon the man-nature conflict and so on. I will illustrate this argument with one example: in Synge’s play *Riders to the Sea* (1904)<sup>viii</sup> an old destitute mother who has lost all her sons (who are poor fishermen) to the sea, finally resigns

herself to her condition and regains the power to bless. Maurya's immediate threat is indeed the sea, but she and her sons are also brave fighters against poverty and economic insecurity. Moreover, if she has attained such exceptional strength of mind at the end of the play, it is the achievement of a poor, uneducated, un-empowered woman. To equate her victory with the victory of humanity at large is to dissipate her individuality amidst the vagueness of an abstraction called humanity. For, her humanity and the humanity of a more privileged individual can never be the same. Established habits of reading often tend to gloss over such differences and glorify a defeat like hers for altogether wrong reasons. It is not the sea that has victimized her; she is already a victim of scarcity, economic and social deprivation of the Aran Islands. Such a reading not only fails to ennoble homo sapiens as a species it also obfuscates the real nature of the sea, demonizes it and renders it as opaque, fixed and distorted. It is further important for readers to be aware of the strong influence of biological determinism of Charles Darwin and economic determinism of Marx on Synge (Levitas 77-91). Critics like Ben Levitas note that Synge was deeply influenced by Marx's ideas and in his portrayal of the Aran Islanders the economic condition of his characters is specifically emphasized by the representation of their poverty.

Alternately, I propose, our critical tools need to be equipped with a reorientation towards a more eco-sensitive approach that can benefit from a variety of intellectual positions across disciplines like environmental history, geography, ecology and life sciences. For these and many other disciplines of research have shown a turn towards a revisionist pedagogy and praxis to reconsider the role of nature and environment in human discourses. Even eco-criticism, which is often seen as a counter-culture corollary of the 1960s in North America, is being radically restructured to slough off its human-nature dualism and primitivism. The insights gained by environmental history's questioning of systematic economic exploitation of nature in the colonies by the West leading to a promotion of seemingly impervious logic of industrial capitalism, the prioritization of spatiality over temporality by critical geography, the emergence of deep history, the transformation of ecology itself from a descriptive to a more analytic field of study, the rise of climate change as a global concern, and above all, the role of biological sciences in making the human species as a major object of study – all these now have to be integrated into our reading practices. This is not to claim, though, all these fields are free from paradoxes of human-centeredness, but even as products of human knowledge they seek to establish a paradigm of equity and connectedness as opposed to one of dominance and instrumentality between the human and the non-human. Prominent

interventions have also been registered in attempts to build a discourse of ecology that excludes nature. I find Timothy Morton's argument valuable and suggestive when he proclaims that not only "close reading" strategies but "Ecocriticism" also is "enmeshed in the ideology that churns out stereotypical ideas of nature (Morton 13).

That such a multifarious change in approach needs to be translated into the critical vocabulary of literary (and cultural) studies is not too hard to establish. Val Plumwood rightly argues that "segregated and polarized vocabularies" have "rob(bed) the non-human world of agency". "A decentering program", she says, "could not only give us a more modest sense of our human role, . . . but also lead to a widening of our sensibilities beyond the conventional boundaries of the human-like, towards inhuman elements of the world" (Plumwood 24). Science research too has tilted the balance more towards an ecology of dynamics, continuity and complementarity challenging the earlier notion of ecological balance and hierarchy of species. Terms like *balance of nature*, "give the impression that there is a single natural balance. Yet, several different populations could exist at their own unique balance in different geographic locations. Hence, the idea that life on earth is in a single balance of nature is a popular but unfortunate misconception" (Schmitz 49). What this and other biological studies have proposed in recent times is that human lives as well as ecological systems are governed by indeterminacy, stochasticity and involuntary agencies of control rather than stability, autonomy and stasis. Critical approaches have widened considerably to accept difference within human communities. It is now common to talk about an individual's affiliations as multiple and diverse. The need to accept religious and political differences within groups is felt across the globe. Cultural, ethnic and linguistic identities, despite being poles apart are acknowledged in the process of identity formation. But the tendency to define identity through differences should not lose sight of the fact that despite all difference humans are one biological species evolved through different adaptation strategies in diverse habitats. When we still talk of the glory of humanity in our readings of texts, we are continuing with the vague generalization called humanity – it is neither talked about as a biological species nor in terms of spacio-temporal, cultural and political differences. But if texts are read without the tendency to universalize human individuals as an abstraction called humanity, then, I believe, we may escape the fixity of the binary epitomized through human-nature conflicts.

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**Endnotes**

<sup>i</sup>A variety of studies from a wide range of disciplines substantiate my point (Bookchin; Merchant; Crosby; Jensen; Worster; Plumwood).

<sup>ii</sup>Plumwood talks about the extreme separation between humans and nature as she argues how nature has been a consistent victim of “radical exclusionism” (Plumwood *Feminism and the Mastery of Universe* 49).

<sup>iii</sup>Writers of mainstream literary fiction too, as Amitav Ghosh has argued, have not considered writing directly about climate catastrophes even though cautionary narratives of the climate change and its impact are virtually everywhere. See Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2016). As fiction is written with a readership in mind, I wish to argue that the same can be said of reading strategies too. There is a denial of the inevitable impact of the global climate concern among readers of fiction too.

<sup>iv</sup>Innogen’s reflection from *Cymbeline* comes to mind; “Our courtiers say all’s savage but at court” (4.2.17).

<sup>v</sup>The idea has been explored in some detail in Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *The Fissured Land: An Ecological History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 78-9. 12 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), 7

<sup>vi</sup>“Nature is not in question in ecology: on the contrary, ecology dissolves nature’s contours and redistributes its agents”. See Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How To Bring Sciences Into Democracy* trans. Catherine Porter (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>vii</sup>See Note <sup>1</sup>

<sup>viii</sup>The play has been a major text in the Calcutta University English Honours Course for over 25 years now.

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