"The corpse you planted last year in your garden / has it begun to sprout?" : Environmental regeneration and recuperation after the apocalypse

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**“THE CORPSE YOU PLANTED LAST YEAR IN YOUR
GARDEN / HAS IT BEGUN TO SPROUT?”:
ENVIRONMENTAL REGENERATION AND
RECUPERATION AFTER THE APOCALYPSE**

**WONG WEN PU
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
2017**

**“The Corpse You Planted Last Year in Your Garden/
Has It Begun to Sprout? Environmental Regeneration
And Recuperation After the Apocalypse**

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Summary

Our contemporary environmental crisis is a result of global modernisation, industrialisation, and urbanisation, beginning first in Europe and America in the late 19th century to early 20th century, and somewhat later in the East. Often, modernist writers of both East and West, in noting the environmental costs of modernity, incorporate what we might today call deep ecological philosophy into their works. This thesis investigates such philosophy as we find in three modernist texts: Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927).

In studying the deep ecological philosophy of these three texts, this thesis hopes to show shared anxieties the three different modernisms have towards modernisation's impact on the natural environment, as well as the hope these modernist works express for an ecological balance in a post-apocalyptic world ravaged by modernity. This deep ecological read of the three texts would thus help us revise the traditional understanding of modernism as an exclusively European high-art movement of the early 20th century. After all, despite the very different contexts of their modernisation, a common theme of environmental ethics suggests the non-exceptionalism of Western modernism. Building on Susan Stanford Friedman's idea that modernism is the art of modernisation and modernity, this thesis hopes to demonstrate that modernism is an international art movement with multiple temporalities and spatiality, not the insular art movement it has traditionally (and is still popularly) been viewed as.

Introduction: Modernism and Deep Ecology

A Narrative of Modernist Scholarship

What is modernism? In their seminal 1976 study, *Modernism 1890-1930*, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane grapple with the many formulations of modernism that have been floated over the years. In their introductory essay, “The Name and Nature of Modernism”, they attempt to set out a series of characteristics they perceive as central tenets of modernism. According to Bradbury and McFarlane, modernism was, amongst many other definitions: i) “the coming of a new era of high aesthetic self-consciousness and non-representationalism, in which art turns from realism and humanistic representation towards style, technique, and spatial form in pursuit of a deeper penetration of life” (Bradbury and McFarlane 25); (ii) “the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos. It is the art consequent on Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, of the destruction of civilisation and reason in the First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration... it is the art of technology... the art of modernization” (Bradbury and McFarlane 27) (iii) “an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolic, the romantic and the classical. It was the celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it; an excited acceptance of the belief that the old regimes of culture were over, and a deep despairing in the face of that fear; a mixture of convictions that the new forms were escape from historicism and the pressure of the time with convictions that they were precisely the living expressions of these things. And in most of these countries the fermenting decade was the eighteen nineties” (Bradbury and McFarlane 46) (iv) “a historical evolution coupled with a notion of crisis and a notion of a point of culmination. ... [T]hey have in common an emphasis on the Anglo-American achievement following on from the

innovations of French symbolism, behind which again stand two prime initiators, Flaubert and Baudelaire” (Bradbury and McFarlane 36)

I set out these diverse, often overlapping, and sometimes incompatible positions, to demonstrate the wide breadth and heterogeneity of meanings captured when scholars use the term “modernism”, especially in the earlier days of modernist scholarship. But despite the many different characteristics of modernism, these definitions, for Bradbury and McFarlane, and the many critics that followed in their scholarship, converge upon one point. They conceived of modernism primarily as a 20th century European aesthetic movement, focused on representing the modern sense of displacement in a world transformed at a dizzying pace by imperial conquest in Asia and Africa, by feminism and female suffrage, and by the rapid urbanisation and industrialisation of European cities and capitals. It was the art of Nietzschean philosophy, Darwinian science and Freudian psychology. It drew its impetus from the productive energies harnessed by the Second Industrial Revolution and European war machine. Modernism was, in other words, an eminently Western achievement, inextricably tied to European modernity. For these critics, modernist art was the “inevitable art” (Bradbury and McFarlane 23) that followed the quakes and aftershocks of Western modernity—an art that responded to the scenario of chaos wrought by modernisation. Given the perception of the close dependence modernism had on Europe’s modernisation, it is therefore perhaps unsurprising that “the field of modernist studies itself began [...] as a study of Western modernities and modernisms” (Friedman Planetarity 477).

This view of modernism as an almost exclusively European movement is not the result of canon-making from critical theorising in the wake of the modernist movement. We are able to trace this Eurocentric, largely post-war conceptualisation of modernism to the Euro-American critics who were themselves producing modernist art in that period, and who had theorised extensively on the geographies of their art. Writing in 1912, T. E. Hulme

“regard[ed] Romantic [sensibilities] as an awful disease” incapable of accurately representing British modernity, and had demanded that his English contemporaries break from the lyric tradition of the 19th century in favour of a modern, “dry, hard, classical [British] verse” (1999, 2002). Virginia Woolf, writing on the impact of Roger Fry's London exhibition "Manet and the Post-Impressionists" had on London's learned society, declared that “[o]n or about December 1910, human character changed” (“Mr Bennett” 2). By that, she meant that Post-Impressionism, and more generally, European modernist art, had, in their rejection of naturalism, had probed so deeply into human psychologies that people's fundamental understanding of what it meant to be human had changed, and that people no longer saw themselves in the same way as they did before. Wyndham Lewis described the goal of his Vorticist journal, *Blast*, as an attempt to “blow away ... dead ideas and worn out notions” (Greenblatt 2010) of earlier English milieus. Even T. S. Eliot, who argues in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” that good art must break cleanly from pre-established literary forms and traditional modes of expressions, nonetheless insists in the very same essay that every artist of consequence must write with “the mind of Europe [and of] his own country” (2320, 2321). In each analysis, modernist artist-critics saw their art as a repudiation of earlier European tradition and culture. However, just as importantly, modernism was a radically new, more formally appropriate, European technique, developed as a way to write about the Western world turned on its head by modernisation. As such, even as 19th and 20th century advancement in techniques of cartography permitted the mapping of large areas of lands hitherto unknown to Europe, many modernist artist-critics, like Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, deployed their experimental techniques as an introspective gaze, an inwards examination of Europe. As Joshua Kavaloski has pointed out, when we think of modernism and modernist texts, we have in mind works that “first acquired artistic legitimacy through the writing of contemporaneous critics who conceived and perpetuated an ideal image of art”

(4). Our contemporary narrative of modernism is largely informed by what these artists-critics would have us think of their art—an art that was particularly, if not exclusively, informed by Occidental literary traditions and Western geohistorical situations.

However, modernism was never an insular Western movement. Growing out of a period in which the world was becoming increasingly interconnected by global trade, international migration and imperialism, Western modernist works, Anglophonic or otherwise, often incorporated cultural elements imported from various parts of the world. A brief survey of the art and culture produced in America and Europe in the so-called “high modernist” period quickly reveals extensive global influences on Western modernism. Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, published in Germany in the same year as *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*, is a story about a young Indian Brahmin working his way towards spiritual enlightenment. Hesse was intimately familiar with Indian cultures and religions—his parents were missionaries to India, and his grandfather was a famous scholar on Indian linguistics. Indeed, Johannes Malthe tells us that “Indian songs and books, frequent discussion about India with visiting missionaries and scholars, a large library of Indian and Chinese writing, and many objects of Eastern art created great interest and left a deep impression on Hesse ever since his childhood” (104), an abiding interest that sustained into Hesse’s adulthood. Therefore, while *Siddhartha* is undoubtedly a work of German modernism, it drew heavily on Hesse’s experience with, and careful study of, Buddhist and Taoist philosophies. In another instance, the excavation of King Tutankhamen’s tomb in 1922 by British Egyptologist Howard Carter generated immense scientific, aesthetic and commercial interest in Europe and America. The discovery inspired an art style, based on the careful study and appropriation of the motifs found on the walls of the tomb, that we today call Egyptian Art Deco. The discovery also spawned an entire popular industry, from Egyptian sandals and blouses, to

interior decor, to films such as William P.S. Earle's *The Dancer of the Nile*¹ (North Reading 1922 23). Indeed, interest and expertise in Egyptian culture reached such heights that artists were able to produce European cultural artefacts based on the discovery, such as the Egyptian handbag, which was "valuable primarily as a reference, an allusion" (North Reading 1922 24). As a cultural commodity, it "marked its user as one who knew" (North Reading 1922 24). Thus, modernism always had an international character, and most modernist artists who incorporated non-Western elements into their work were intensely knowledgeable in the culture they drew on. Indeed, we have this view of modernism as an insular Western affair largely because academic scholarship often does not treat these elements as proper subjects of interest in themselves². Rather, much of the earlier work that has shaped today's critical narrative of modernism has approached the foreign elements of modernist texts with Western lens of interpretation, and designated the foreign themes or styles "as subordinate to narrative structure or symbolic structure" in the pursuit of "Western possibilities" (Brown 191).

Even critics cognisant of modernism's international character tend to return to talking about modernism primarily as a Western aesthetic movement. Malcolm Bradbury asserts in the "The Cities of Modernism" that "Modernism is an international movement" (97), but the cities he analyses for the development of the modernist aesthetic—London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Moscow, Zurich (96)—inevitably returns to a post-war European centre. Hugh Kenner, in "The Making of the Modernist Canon", likewise acknowledges the international character of modernism, but insists in the final analysis that "International Modernism was the work of Irishmen and Americans" (55, 53). For many of these critics, internationalism largely referred to trans-atlanticism. They did not consider the aesthetic expressions of other

¹ *The Dancer of the Nile* was originally named *Tutankhamen*. The film was reworked and renamed after interest in the discovery of the tomb quickly faded in 1923 (North Reading 1922 23).

² An interesting point in support of approaching modernist texts from a close reading perspective, even texts as allusive as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, is made by Ezra Pound. Pound argues that the entirety of "The Waste Land" could be read without fully appreciating the many references in the text, writing: "I did not see [Eliot's] notes till 6 or 8 months afterwards; and they have not increased my enjoyment of the poem one atom. The poem seems to me an emotional unit... I have not read Miss Weston's *Ritual to Romance*, and do not at present intend to" (qtd in Kenner *The Invisible Poet* 151-52) This assertion is contradicted by Eliot, however, in a number of places. Prominently, Eliot helpfully points out the sources of some of his allusions, both Western and Asiatic, in the published "Notes on the Waste Land" that accompanies the poem's text, and encourages his readers to look them up (Eliot "The Waste Land" 72-76).

modernising societies as “modernist”. Indeed, it would appear that many early critics of the field were unwilling or ill-equipped to deal with the international character of modernist writing. Writing on the extensive influence of Eastern philosophy in T. S. Eliot’s poetry, Harold McCarthy points out that the majority of scholars who have attempted to critique Eliot’s poetry were largely dismissive of the influence of Eastern philosophy in his work, and the few who did attempt to elucidate his Asiatic themes were unfortunately “not too familiar with Indian philosophy in general, or Buddhist philosophy in particular” (33). Modernist scholarship finds itself quagmired in Western discourse as most modernist scholars themselves have cut their teeth arguing that “[t]he Modernist tendency has its roots deep in the culture-capital of Europe” (Bradbury and McFarlane 97), and have found themselves unable to extricate their work from the hegemonic cultural discourse of the West.

Recent modernist scholarship, however, has begun to seriously investigate modernism as an international, rather than primarily European movement. There is now a marked scholarly effort to point out the stylistic influence of “the so called ‘primitive’ art of Africa, the archaic-looking masks and sculptures of the South Sea, and in Iberian sculpture” (Krausse 92) on Picasso’s paintings, or the ironic Chinese provenance of Ezra Pound’s resonant modernist maxim, “Make It New” (North, *Novelty* 162-63), or in T. S. Eliot’s pointed intertextual engagement with the Indian texts *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads* in *The Waste Land*. Indeed, David Craven points out that even the very term that we today use to describe the modernist movement had its roots in Latin American literary criticism: “[M]odernism (or modernismo) was in fact invented in the 1880s by Ruben Dario of Nicaragua ... to refer to novel attributes in the writings of Mexican author Ricardo Contreras”, and that “it was only after the Latin American term ‘modernism’ crossed the Atlantic to discover Europe in the 1880s ... that it began to designate certain formal strategies and thematic concerns in the visual arts... which are now associated with the European avant-

garde and various tendencies of modernism in the more widely acknowledged sense” (31, 34). With the increasing scholarly scrutiny, and recognition, of global culture’s influence on European modernism in what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the project of “provincializing Europe” (x), there has been a shift in the perception of the non-western world as peripheral to European modernism/ modernity, to one where the non-Western takes on greater prominence in shaping modern Occidental history and culture. This critical process of excavating “the archive of mobility, calling for the act of seeing linkages, networks, conjectures, creolization, intertextuality, travels and transplants connecting modernisms from different parts of the planet” (Friedman Planetarity 493) has increasingly shed light on European modernism as an international, rather than the insular Euro-American movement it has for the past decades been perceived to be.

But it is not as if cultures migrate exclusively towards a European centre. The techniques and themes of European modernism are constantly appropriated and transformed in each new locale of modernity—new modernisms with European character appear globally as a result of the memetic travel in aesthetic themes and techniques from the West to other parts of the world. In response to the 20th century global art market’s demand for Western avant-garde paintings, Chinese artists such as Lin Fengmian, for instance, appropriated and adapted “modernist and anti-academic styles and ‘isms’ favoured by the contemporary Parisian art market” in the creation of his art. Lin’s art bears the stylistic features of “Post-impressionism, Fauvism, and Primitivism ... Matisse and Modigliani” (Clunas 2006). This memetic travel has influence on Chinese culture that reaches far beyond its scholarly (high) art. It has contributed to “a vibrant plurality of styles in advertising ... [,] in book and periodical illustration” produced for Chinese mass consumption, and in everyday Chinese expression (Clunas 2006). Likewise, the Indian photographer Raghubir Singh points out that Indian artists, prior to British colonisation, did not create art in black and white. It was British

colonisation that brought monochromatism into Indian art: “Colonial artists, many of whom travelled with the camera obscura, brought with them a tradition of depicting ... light and shade [and] chiaroscuro” (12). These are instances where local sensibilities have been, and continue to be, shaped by the techniques and motifs of European modernism. Modernist expression thus draws on, feeds into, and grows out of global connections and cultural circulations. If our understanding of modernism was, as Kavaloski argues, an image perpetuated by modernist artists and modernist critics,

recent criticism continues to chip away at [this manufactured] myth of the modern ... it seems clear that modernism is no monolith but a loosely organizing term that encompasses a wide variety of aesthetic and political positions, private and public preoccupations, and uneven developments (Freedman 115)

emerging in different parts of the world, at different times. Modernism seems to be the expression of what Virginia Woolf calls in *Orlando* “the spirit of the age” (225) in different sites of modernity. Such a view of modernism displaces Europe as the cultural capital of the world, and instead adopts an understanding of modernism as one with multiple nodal points around the world, each flaring up at different times. Recognising the complex polycentric nature of modernism helps us move away from an understanding of it as an insular 20th century European aesthetic movement, and enables us to challenge the cultural hegemony of the West in modernist scholarship.

With this growing acknowledgment of earlier modernist studies’ Eurocentrism, contemporary modernist scholars have then attempted to broaden the scope of modernist scholarship and of the modernist canon, in the effort to incorporate into the canon what Bradbury and McFarlane have identified as modernisms of “different chronological

profile[s], with ... different set[s] of representative figures and influential precursors, with [...] very different group of origins” (36). In a meta-critical survey of recent modernist scholarship, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz influentially argue in “The New Modernist Studies” that modernist scholarship of the last two decades has been expanding in three directions: a) a growing scholarly interest in modernisms that fall outside of the so-called “high modernist” period between 1890 to 1930 b) a growing consensus amongst modernist scholars that modernisms extend beyond the traditional geography of Europe c) that the boundary between traditional ideas of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art has been dissolved, such that art which was previously considered ‘low’ is receiving greater critical attention for the ways in which they produce culture and discourses, and for the ways in which ‘low’ art influences ‘high’ art, and vice versa (737-38). The essays collected in Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel’s *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* investigate the emergence of plural, site-specific, non-European modernisms from local engagement with global economies, discourses, and politics. Susan Stanford Friedman, in arguing for a transformational modernist scholarship (as opposed to Mao and Walkowitz’s idea of an expansionist modernist scholarship), invites critics to pay closer attention to modernisms as both consequent and participant of modernisations/modernity (“Planetarity” 474)³. Common to all of these approaches is the recognition that the traditional focuses of modernist criticism on the *fin de siècle*, or as a Western aesthetic movement, no longer adequately meet what an

³While Mao and Walkowitz’s expansionary strategy allows for a diversification of the modernist canon, it nevertheless situates Europe in the centre of the critical discourse out of which other modernisms grow. It projects a self-other relationship where European modernism is unquestionably and absolutely modernist, and other modernisms as ‘alternative’ modernisms. This strategy risks “normaliz[ing] and *make* normative the idea of Europe as “the scene of the birth of the modern” ... [where] cultural objects from non-Western societies can be grasped only with reference to the categories of European cultural history” (Mufti 474). It is, in a sense, deeply nostalgic, as the European achievement remains at the heart of the expansionary project.

In contrast, Friedman’s definition of modernism is contingent and avoids the trap of essentialism. In Friedman’s transformational view of modernism, modernism is no longer dependent on a certain aesthetic or chronotope inextricably linked to the Europe art. Rather, her approach to modernism deconstructs our contemporary view of Western modernism. By framing modernism as the art consequent of modernisation as well as a factor of modernisation, European modernism is no longer the standard bearer of value from which other modernisms derive value and legitimacy. As such, Friedman’s transformational understanding of modernism is a non-essentialist one. Friedman’s approach to modernism is particularly relevant for this thesis, which is interested, in part, in investigating the non-European/colonial elements and motifs embedded in works of European modernism.

emerging notion of modernist art has to offer; and that a more critical understanding of modernism and modernist studies is the way forward for critical inquiry in the field.

Building then on Friedman's argument that modernism is the art of modernity, this thesis will explore the ways in which modernisations in non-Western parts of the world engender modernisms that are specific to their geohistorical situation. Such an approach allows us to comprehensively broaden the temporal and spatial scope of modernism, as this more inclusive definition of modernism would pull texts from around the world that are traditionally not considered modernist into the canon. Indeed, it would permit us to read T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), an allegory of Britain as a post-war wasteland, and Virginia Woolf's poignant *To the Lighthouse* (1927), about a family's summer holidays in the Scottish Hebrides, alongside Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000), a postcolonial Indian text exploring the effects of British colonisation in the British East Indies, despite the different historical situations in which the three texts were produced. These three texts are works of modernisms not simply because of their place or time of production, but because they are works that express or reflect their modern sociohistorical situation—*The Glass Palace* grapples with British colonial legacy as an aspect of its modernisation, while *The Waste Land* and *To the Lighthouse* are testimonies of the Great War⁴. By conceptualising of modernism as

⁴ Even as this particular understanding of modernism gains currency in modernist studies, there is some concern in the field that such a definition is too broadly conceived to meaningfully designate a movement that has, for the larger part of the discipline's history, been (over)represented by the Western achievement. Friedman acknowledges this concern in "Planetarity": "We wonder, have the field's boundaries become so boundless as to incorporate everything and thus lose all definitional cogency or analytic utility?" (473). Yet, expansionary exercises have demonstrated the futility in attempting to draw definitional parameters to the concept of modernism, as the modernist canon grows to incorporate works from different places and times, and with different aesthetic. We consider the fiction of James Joyce, Ralph Ellison and Lu Xun modernist not because of a shared aesthetic, or geography, or temporality (and indeed even the works we traditionally consider modernist are often vastly different in aesthetic, geography, or temporality), but because they are works of art that responded to their respective modernities and modernisations. The aesthetic experiments happen *as a result* of artists attempt to find the most appropriate form in representing modernity (an example being the fragmentary voice of *The Waste Land* corresponding to the fragmented mind of 20th century Europe). Modernism is the spirit of the modern represented in art, and finds different expressions and literary form in different modernities; each modernism is contingent on the modernity it seeks to represent. The ever-increasing plurality of modernities promise that any fidelity to an absolute, rather than relational, notion of modernism, will be short-lived. One reason why a strategy of looking at modernism from the outside-in is important is because it would allow us to loosen the grip of Europe in discourse formation. In "Definitional Excursions": The Meanings of Modern/ Modernity/ Modernism", Friedman reminds us that definitions are fictional constructions that attempt, often, to bring together diverse, potentially contradictory, set of meanings. She writes that "[d]efinitions spawn plurality in the very act of attempting to herd meanings inside consensual boundaries. Definitions are meant to fence in, to fix, and to stabilize. But they often end up being fluid, in a destabilised state of ongoing formation, deformation and reformation that serves the changing need of the moment. They reflect the standpoint of their makers. They emerge out of the spatio/ temporal contexts of their production. They serve different needs and interests. They accomplish different kinds of cultural work. They change dramatically over space and through time. ... [t]hey are always subject to diachronic histories and spatial geographies of continuity, change, and difference" (497). The present Eurocentric definition of modernism Western aesthetic movement of the early 20th century is one such fictional

the art of modernity, we are able to “change the exceptionalist, diffusionist, and hierarchical ordinary myths of modernity that have dominated the field” (Friedman “Planetarity” 481).

The Themes of Modernism

In line with these efforts to rehabilitate modernist scholarship, I propose in this thesis an expansion in the scope of modernist themes. This involves recognising that traditional modernist scholarship has largely privileged the themes we find in the works of the so-called “high modernists”, and marginalised the works with themes that do not fall neatly into the dominant discourse of high modernism. Indeed, one reason why *Siddhartha* is rarely discussed as a ‘high modernist’ text, despite being published in Europe in the modernist *annus mirabilis* of 1922, is because its esoteric Oriental themes of successfully attaining spiritual wholesomeness and linear narrative style belonged to “a central or mainstream phase [of writing] that largely renounced the caustic and destructive spirit of the avant-garde” (Kavaloski 1), and did not fit neatly into the mould of “things fall apart/ the centre cannot hold” (Yeats 2036) modernism. However, such a traditionalist approach to modernism is increasingly untenable as we come to recognise that the privileged themes of high modernism have come hand in hand with Europe's geohistory. These are themes built on Europe's history of ideas from Descartes to Bergson, from the horrors of the Great War, to the ruptures and fractures caused in Western societies by technological advancement, by Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, and Darwin. They relate specifically and narrowly to the historical and ideological development of Western modernity and modernisation⁵. But in what Friedman calls the “*longue duree* of modernism” (“Planetarity” 479), in its many iterations and deployments,

construction—it gave early scholars a contingent working model to theorise about the field, but it is a model that urgently requires updating and rehabilitation.

⁵ And this is discounting the heterogeneity and pluralities we find in Western modernism itself.

across different temporalities and spatialities, many other modernist themes falling outside of the modernist mainstream of the 1920s remain unexplored.

My strategy in this thesis, then, is to look at modernism from the outside-in. This strategy aims to scrutinise European modernism from other non-Western sites of modernity—particularly modernities that draw on, and develop out of, Western modernism and imperialism. This builds partially on Joshua Kavaloski's idea that “‘we can work against the idea of an old high modernism of the centre and some new alternative modernisms at the periphery’ ... by remapping the centre” of modernism (7). By comparing and cross-examining texts of Western modernism against non-Western modernist texts, we are able to elucidate concerns common to different modernisms/ modernities arising from European imperialism. A number of recent, postcolonial modernist texts have opened up new ways for us to think about general, cross-cultural similarities between Western modernisms and the modernisms of postcolonial societies. Through the foregrounding of themes central to their own modernity, non-Western modernisms surface similar, but previously submerged, themes within the traditional canon of Anglo-American modernism. Looking from outside-in, from a postcolonial perspective, we learn to see the art of Western modernism with fresh eyes. By temporarily embracing the centricism of another modernity, we might profit from reading from “the Ganges side of modernism, rather than the Seine or East River side of it” (Singh 14).

One such theme that has recently come into prominence is the environmental philosophy of modernist artists and writers. As is often the case, in Europe and elsewhere, modernity is often characterised by an anxiety over the environmental destruction that accompanies modernisation, and this anxiety is regularly borne out in modernist art. One instance in which can be seen is in the progression of subject matters in Wassily Kandinsky's paintings. One representative early work, *Blue Rider*, depicts a horseman galloping across an

expansive plain of pristine wilderness, suggesting a late Romantic affection the natural landscape. In contrast, a later painting by Kandinsky, *Landscape with Factory Chimney*, reprises through wavy lines and pastel colours the gentle, almost dreamy pastoral landscape of *Blue Rider*. However, the pristine landscape has been compromised as the field in the painting was encroached upon by an uncompromisingly stolid, straight-lined, brick-red chimney, one of the most ubiquitous symbol of Western modernity and industrialisation. The art of Kandinsky and his contemporaries registers a growing concern, and passes an implicit moral condemnation, on the ways modernisation was transforming the pastoral landscape into industrial spaces.

Unsurprisingly then for an age in which industrial modernity has desacralized the natural world, modernist art is frequently characterised by a nostalgia for organic and spiritual wholeness. Nature is frequently a symbol for holism in modernist art. In *The Dream*, the French artist Henri Rousseau depicts a human character resting in a jungle, comfortably surrounded by flora and fauna, recalling Jean Jacques Rousseau argument for humans to re-establish “a romantic[c] lyrical communion with nature” (Wokler 15). Likewise, Langston Hughes’ “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” draws on nature imagery in order establishes a deep spiritual connection between humans and environment:

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans,

and I’ve seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset. (4-8)

The four rivers in the poem, saturated with black meaning and history, celebrates the intergenerational resilience of the black soul. For Hughes, black folks have endured the rise and fall of civilisations, as symbolised by the rivers, and will “survive even this America” (Jemie 103) of Jim Crow laws. However, his rivers also trace the fallopian origins of humankind along the Tigris and Euphrates, to the human eventual civilisation along the Congo, Nile and Mississippi. In doing so, Hughes’ poem points not exclusively to black history, but speaks also of a more universal human history. His use of rivers in the poem enables “a sonorous evocation of transcendent essences so ancient as to appear timeless, predating human existence, longer than human memory” (Jemie 103). Embedded in the art of modernism, thus, is a suggestion that human’s long relationship with nature harkens to something older, more spiritual and holistic. Indeed, much of the kinship the modernists felt towards nature has come to resemble what we might today call deep ecological philosophy. As such, I am interested in thinking about how such deep ecological perspectives are embedded in the more canonical works of Western modernism, and how such concerns are also found in contemporary, non-European modernist writing.

This deep ecological approach to modernism that I am proposing is particularly pertinent as scholarship on modernist environmentalism and modernist environmental ethics is regularly overlooked in modernist criticism, despite the prominence of green elements in the art. A case in point is the body of scholarly work surrounding Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*. Critics have recursively circled around Woolf’s technique of free indirect discourse, her treatment of time, her portrayal of life in cosmopolitan London, her representation of gender, androgyny and homosexuality, etc. But very little has been made of her rich representation of nature either in *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, and in her other writings until recently, with the notable publication of Bonnie Kime Scott’s monograph *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature*. Again, the

conspicuous absence of a discourse on nature in modernist literature is no mere critical oversight. As Scott correctly points out, nature and environmental discourse have often been carefully and deliberately culled from modernist art, with one such effort in pushing nature to the periphery of modernism coming from Wyndham Lewis. Lewis, drawing on Hulme's idea of a "dry, hard, classical verse", had "assign[ed] masculinity and art to dry surfaces articulation and the feminine, as nature, to damp and chaotic depths of being ... "[C]haotic depths" [that] may imply common origins in primordial ooze where the feminine is contained... [A]rt and culture must rise above this" (Scott 16). It is only with the recent ecocritical interest in literary criticism that has prompted ecocritical readings into *Mrs Dalloway* as part of the larger ecocritical movement. But while significant headway has been made in ecocritical scholarship on Virginia Woolf's writing, the environmental aesthetic and ethics of many modernist artists remain uncharted territory. This thesis, by reading for the deep ecological philosophy of three modernist texts, Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, is an excavation of modernism, a filling in of the blank spaces on the map, as we attempt to rehabilitate the narrative of modernism.

Deep Ecology and Modernism

A long philosophical tradition of analytic philosophy has positioned humans in starkly oppositional and superior terms to the environment—a position that prescribes humans with intrinsic worth and nature as subordinate to human purposes. However, the works of many modernist artists such as Eliot, Woolf, and Ghosh, suggest a fundamental rethinking of nature's value, not in its relation to humans needs and wants, but in its own right. As I suggested earlier, many of their views towards the environment are aligned with what we

might today call deep ecological philosophy. Because I intend to engage with the deep ecological philosophy in we find in works of modernist literature, I think that it is worthwhile laying out the philosophical tradition and thinking that I shall subsequently be working with.

Contemporary environmental thought can be broadly divided into two philosophical streams. In the first group are people who ascribe to the natural world instrumental value. In this view, the environment has value insofar as it can be mined for resources, and efforts of environmental conservation and preservation are directed towards ensuring sustainability for future exploitation. The overarching question they ask relates to efficient resource management – questions such as “how might we produce the most amount of energy to power a city with the least amount of environmental pollution?” or, “what limits on fishing should be placed in this spot of sea to ensure that fish stocks are sustainably replenished in the long term?” In this view, the primary justification for environmental protection lies in anticipating and meeting human needs. As Tony Lynch points out, those who hold this view towards environmental conservation/ preservation “conceive of nature and its importance from within a broadly *anthropocentric* framework” (147). This instrumentalist view is the dominant social paradigm in which society views the environment today. We call this approach towards the environment “shallow ecology” – because the solutions stemming from this approach attempt to solve environmental problems by rectifying the problem’s immediate causes within the same resource orientated framework. It is what Bill Devall, following Arne Naess, calls a short-range solution (“The Deep Ecology Movement” 300) to our environmental problem, because such an approach does not interrogate the fundamental assumptions we hold towards the environment as the cause of our present environmental crisis. Shallow ecology is thus an environmental ethic that works to protect the environment within our present capitalistic and anthropocentric paradigms.

In the second group are people who ascribe intrinsic value to the environment. They argue that the nature is inherently valuable independent of its exploitable value to human beings. The questions they ask challenge the fundamental anthropocentric view towards the environment and natural world—questions such as “how does our present societal structure result in the “logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals? (Haraway 177) and “how does the present capitalistic system enables environmental destruction?”. The changes they seek are not the tweaks to environmental policies advocated for by instrumentalists, but an overhaul of the present ideological frameworks governing human-nature relation. Proponents of this second view adopt an ecocentric view of the natural world, whereby human beings are no longer the arbiter of the environment’s worth, and seek to accord an objective value to the “environment in itself, without relying on the anthropocentric framework” (Lynch 17). It is “deep” in the sense that it sees “the need for a radical reconceptualisation of humanity’s place on the planet” (Marland 850), and demands a paradigm shift in the way society presently regards the environment. A long-range solution, deep ecology strikes at the fundamental assumptions of the dominant instrumentalist paradigm, and challenges long-held assumptions of the relationship we have with the environment.

Because the deep ecological movement diverges radically from most contemporary instrumental approaches to environmental conservation and preservation (perhaps excepting some overlap with ecofeminism), I think that it is worthwhile setting out and elucidating a number of deep ecological principles here. In his essay “The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects”, Arne Naess, the environmental philosopher behind the movement, outlines eight tenets of deep ecology. The key tenants are:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonym: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purpose.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realisation of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.

[...]
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present. (49-50)

What we have here is an ecocentric vision where our political, institutional, and philosophical systems are geared towards transforming humans from dominators, into what Aldo Leopold calls biotic citizens, of the natural environment (408).

There is a vision of human apocalypse embedded in Naess' formulation of deep ecology. In this paradigm, the hierarchy between man and the natural world is demolished, and humans no longer have the right to endlessly leech off the natural world. With the survival needs, and indeed, intrinsic value, of humankind no longer held above that of other life forms', "a substantial decrease of the human population [... for] the flourishing of non-human life" becomes an ethical obligation. As such, Naess' non-anthropocentric philosophy, in the present day, amounts to a call for ecological anti-natalism. This view of a human

apocalypse, we shall see in the following chapters, is deeply rooted in the modernist zeitgeist of both East and West.

At the same time, the deep ecological platform shares a fundamental struggle with the three other fields of liberation theory: gender, race and class theory. The ideological structure that enables domination of the natural environment is often the same that leads to other forms of social oppression. Thus, as Valerie Plumwood points out, it is only “when [the] four tectonic plates of liberation theory—those concerned with the oppression of gender, race, class and nature—finally come together [could] the resulting tremors ... shake the conceptual structures of oppression to their foundations” (1). Deep ecology, with its goal of overhauling the fundamental ideological structures of our contemporary society, provides a crucial link between environmental discourses and other fields of liberatory politics.

The deep ecological approach is particularly relevant in reading modernism for a couple of reasons. The first reason is to challenge the perception that the contemporary anthropocentric paradigm seems deeply rooted in the Western modernist ethos. The line of distinction between the human and the non-human has been clearly drawn perhaps since Descartes portrayed humans as “the masters and possessors” of the natural world (84), and consigned all things non-human as subordinate to people. However, anthropocentrism, by some accounts, appears to have been borne out and nurtured most keenly in the 20th century’s antagonism towards the environment, enabled by the technology of the day which had finally provided the means to large scale exploitation of the natural world in fulfilling human ends. The literature of the period is likewise perceived to have been swept up by the wave of technological and economic progress of the age, with its gushing excitement over various 20th century inventions such as the First Transcontinental Railroad in the United States, or its penchant for celebrating the excesses of conspicuous material consumption, and appear therefore to disregard the natural world. However, if the environmental ethic of the period

seems non-existent, it is because we are distracted by the sound and the fury that come with the technocratic innovations and industrial upheavals of modernisation. Many modernist works, such as Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Manet's many paintings of water lilies, retain and express deep respect for the natural world, the technological explosions of the age notwithstanding⁶. A deep ecological approach to modernist literature will therefore enable us to set the record right on modernist environmental ethic, and contest the dominant anthropocentric paradigm that modernist works appear to have engendered.

The second reason derives from a point I would like to contest, made by Amitav Ghosh in *The Great Derangement*. It is a matter that concerns the abstractionist technique we often find in modernist writing. Ghosh contends in his book that with European modernisms, which emphasised the subjective and the personal, "the abstract and the formal [in literary expression] gained ascendancy over the figurative and the iconographic[. It meant also that many traditions, including those that accorded the non-human special salience, were jettisoned" (*Derangement* 120). The egocentricity of modernism's form, in Ghosh's view, is what led to the present indifference, if not aggression, towards the environment. As such, Ghosh suggests that for an art considering itself as the *avant garde* of culture, the modernist turn towards abstractionism is a remarkable and ironic failure of foresight, as it reveals the inability of modernist artists to see that their writing would enable the present environment crisis (*Derangement* 121-25). *The Great Derangement* is a careful treatise on how empire and capitalism have come to dominate the natural world, and I shall draw extensively on its postcolonial analysis in the final chapter of this thesis, but I find Ghosh's claim regarding modernist abstractionism rather unconvincing: many modernist writers and artists, such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez's dreamy magical realist portrayal of nature in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Max Ernst's use of grattage in the creation of *Forest and Dove*, have

⁶ This reverence is perhaps most clearly stated in the opening line of Baudelaire's poem, "Correspondences", where his speaker declares that "La Nature est un temple ou de vivants piliers" (55).

used abstract forms and images to express an environmental, if not deep ecological, ethic. It seems rather odd to me, therefore, for Ghosh to claim that abstractionism is an essentially egocentric form. A deep ecological approach is particularly appropriate for contending Ghosh's claim, as deep ecology looks beyond the direct representationalism Ghosh expects from environmental literature, and instead seeks to examine the attitude a literary work holds towards the natural world. Such an approach will enable us to examine how the abstract form, employed in both Anglo-American and non-Western modernist text, reveals the environmental ethic of the moderns.

Perhaps most pertinently, a deep ecological read of modernism is especially relevant because of the nostalgia many modernist writers, Western and non-Western alike, nursed towards the earlier age of metaphysical and epistemological unity. As the speaker of *The Waste Land* elegiacally laments in the poem's closing lines, "[t]hese fragments [of European civilisation] I have shored against my ruins" (Eliot "The Waste Land" 71)—modernisms are expressions of societies in crisis. Even as they celebrate the new and the modern, modernisms paradoxically also express the impossible desire to recoup the old, unbroken ethos of the earlier age, amidst the "roaring and discontinuous world" (Wharton 9) of modernity and modernisation. Environmental holism, as we shall see, is one way in which original unity is still embedded in modernist writing across different modernities when traditional epistemological and metaphysical centres of those modernising societies no longer hold.

I go out of my way to defending my methodology and green approach in this thesis because I have encountered significant resistance to my work on pushing the boundaries of modernism beyond its traditional boundaries as an exclusively 20th century European 'high' art movement. Some of the scholars I have spoken to have expressed discomfort with my pushing against at the perimeters of the field's temporal and spatial scope; many object to the green approach on the grounds that such readings stray too far away from the authors'

intentions. This is hardly a problem that I alone face. Friedman has pointed out that most modernist critics still prefer “a retreat into the comfort zone of a modernist studies based on late nineteenth-early twentieth century “high modernist” experimentation in Europe and the U.S” (“Planetarity” 474), and are distressed by non-temporal, non-European, non-technical approaches to the literature. Yet this ecocritical approach is in my view entirely appropriate because texts across the different ages, certainly during the so-called period of high modernism, offer answers to questions such as “how have human instincts, desires, and aspiration fed historically into larger ideological constructions of nature, be they providential, instrumental, or sustainable” (Wood 10). A fuller appreciation of these texts requires that we, as modernist critics and/or ecocritics, start examining the environmental philosophy embedded in these texts—an endeavour that is largely absent in modernist studies.

The quote in the title of this thesis, “The corpse you planted last year in your garden, / has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?” (Eliot “The Waste Land” 71-72), comes from the first section of *The Waste Land*, subtitled “The Burial of the Dead”. One of the many post-apocalyptic gardens we shall encounter in this thesis, the corpses following in the poem refer to the many anonymous men who had died and were buried in the trenches of the First World War; men who have now become food for plants growing along the Western Front. The suggestion of a human apocalypse, with the image of lilacs nourished on the corpses of the fallen (Eliot “The Waste Land” 1-2) seems caustic, almost nihilistic. However, from a deep ecological, ecocentric perspective—with the de-emphasis of the significance of the human dead, coupled with the related flourishing of plants—the natural imagery in *The Waste Land* brims with suggested potential for non-human life. As one *The Times* writer, drawing on Rupert Brooke, points out, “[s]omewhere in France there is a white garden graveyard of British warriors which stands complete as it will stand for centuries to come. Its wealth of flowers and wreaths will change and be renewed... this garden which is forever

England” (qtd in Ricks and McCue 618). The notion of humans returning to the earth—a rejuvenating/ rejuvenated garden replacing humans with vegetal life and re-colonising the earth, suggests a vision of a self-sustaining, holistic, and ecologically balanced natural world. This, as we shall see, is one sentiment embedded in modernist literature, across a wide temporal and geographical spectrum of modernities. Like the open-ended but hopeful question posed at the end of the Eliot’s quote, modernist texts are alive with ecological possibilities. Deep ecological approaches to these texts open up fruitful new ways for us to access these possibilities.

Postcolonialism and Ecological Modernism: Reading Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*

Ecological modernism did not, of course, originate from the art and literature of the non-Western world. It does, however, find one of its clearest and most urgent articulation in the writing of many postcolonial authors, where colonial exploitation, in hand with European modernisation, has visited apocalypse on colonised peoples and the environment.

In *The Great Derangement*, Amitav Ghosh traces the historical roots of our contemporary ecological crisis to Western colonisation of Asia. In his study on the rise of oil as one of two primary fuel in the West from the late 19th century to the present, Ghosh presents the British annexation of Burma for oil as one example of the historical relation between colonial oppression and contemporary environmental destruction. Ghosh points out that in the early 19th century, before any significant oil industry had developed in the West, the Burmese had been using oil as an energy source for generations. Indeed, according to Marilyn Longmuir, “the early oil industry of Burma was [at the time] the largest in the world” (qtd in Ghosh *Derangement* 100), with the oil fields of Yenangyaung alone producing forty-six thousand barrels of oil in 1854. However, after the West turned towards oil as a major source of fuel in the late 1850s,

Burma’s attempt to control its oil came to an abrupt end in 1885 ... when the British invaded... After that, the oil fields of Yenangyaung passed into British control, and, in time, they became the nucleus of the megacorporation that was known until the 1960s as Burmah-Shell (*Derangement* 102)

and is today a part of the oil giant British Petroleum. By Ghosh’s account, almost all the oil produced in Burma after 1885 was shipped back to Britain to power the technological revolutions, the rapid industrialisation, and perhaps the Great War, in the West. In this sense, “colonialism and conquest [was] the very condition of possibility for modernity and for

aesthetic modernisation” (Huyssen 7) in Europe. The very ruptures and explosions—the technological advances, the newfound wealth, the expanding cosmopolitan spaces—that we tend to ascribe to Western modernity was enabled by colonial exploitation of the global south.

The advances of 20th century Western modernity undergird the infrastructure of today’s global fossil-fuel based economy. The carbon-intensive economic and technological infrastructure developed during the age of Western modernisation remains the dominant model of energy production in the West (Ghosh *Derangement* 93). It is also an infrastructure that has been extensively replicated all over the world in the last century: non-Western countries such as China, India and Japan have largely adopted the carbon-based economic model developed in the West. As such, the way we generate and consume power today, in method and in scale, is largely a historical legacy of colonial exploitation. Ghosh is quite right to suggest that “the [contemporary] climate crisis was brought on by the way in which the [carbon] economy evolved in the West” (*Derangement* 114).

Indeed, the exploitation of colonised subjects and natural environments continue today, albeit in a different form. Environmental discrimination arising from neo-colonial practices of wealthy countries outsourcing pollution to parts of the developing world continues to devastate the natural environment and disproportionately burdens people in those parts of the world with the costs of Western consumption (Adamson et al. 137). Green colonialism, as Naomi Klein notes in her 2016 Edward W. Said London Lecture, has justified Israeli’s occupation of Palestinian land, and saw Israeli’s planting over of Palestinian olive and pistachio plantations with pine and eucalyptus orchards. This has led to the destruction of large areas of carefully husbanded Palestinian orchards, and made a permanent peace settlement in the region more difficult. The carbon-intensive industrial and technological infrastructure developed during Western modernisation remains located in the West and out

of reach to the colonies which had financed them. Indeed, Ghosh points out that “the emerging fossil fuel economies [of the 20th century in] the West required that people elsewhere be prevented from developing [similar] systems of their own” (*Derangement* 107). This has resulted in the inequitable use of energy across different parts of the world—today, industrial infrastructure located in the West enables developed countries like the United States to consume the most energy per capita while small islands countries such as Tuvalu and the Maldives bear the environmental costs of rising sea levels. Neo-colonial practices in the 21st century continue to perpetuate environmental racism and environmental injustice, and inflict damage onto the natural landscape, in many parts of the developing world. These new forms of environmental colonisation constitute a part of the modernities of postcolonial countries like India.

It is therefore unsurprising for us to find the intertwined themes of exploitative colonialism/neo-colonialism and environmental apocalypse extensively and centrally expressed in many postcolonial modernist texts. From a brief survey of contemporary Indian writing alone we find many literary works reflecting on the relationship between imperialism and environmental degradation. *Animal's People* (2007) by Indra Sinha deals with the loss of lives and damage to the natural environment following the industrial chemical accident in Bhopal. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (2008) suggests that British methods of intensive farming for cash crops in India were environmentally unsustainable, and led to the degradation of Indian lands and the economic exploitation of the natives. Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) explores how Western-funded tiger conservation projects in the Indian Sundarbans “has resulted in the displacement of communities such as the displacement of the Chenchus in the southern state of Andhara as space is set aside for tiger reserves, and the imprisonment of Indians that have been caught hunting, trading, injuring, or killing tigers” (James 2)—green colonialism has led to the cost of conservation being disproportionately

borne by impoverished and socially invisible people living in the Indian Sundarbans. Much of the environmental literature we find in postcolonial societies views their present state of environmental degradation as one outcome of imperial domination.

I note these instances of tension between India's contemporary development and colonial/neo-colonial domination because these factors are what make texts like *Animal's People* and *The Hungry Tide* modernist texts, despite their very recent publication, and their geographical remoteness from the traditional centres of modernism. To reiterate Susan Stanford Friedman's argument in "Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies", a modernist text is one which expresses and simultaneously engages with the modernity and modernisation of one particular temporality and geographical location. Modernism is a local aesthetic expression, even if that involves, as it frequently does, engagement with the global; it is unique to the modernising environment it represents. We would then be mistaken to align Indian modernity with Western temporal and spatial models of modernism because India, as a colonial subject, was by British design emphatically pre-modern and largely pre-industrial at the time when European high modernism was in full swing (Ghosh *Derangement* 106-08). Its pre-Independence economy was frequently sabotaged by imperial efforts (Ghosh *Derangement* 106); it presently remains a recipient of development aid from Britain (McVeigh *The Guardian*). India's ongoing modernisation—partly a matter of economic catch-up with the developed world—is therefore inextricably linked to its past status as a colonial subject. Where the narrative of Western modernity can be characterised as that of the coloniser, the narrative of Indian modernity can be characterised by its role as the colonised. Indeed, as Friedman correctly points out, "[m]odernity is Indian Independence, born of British rule, bathed in the blood of Partition, and growing as the world's largest democracy and a technological powerhouse" ("Planetarity" 472). Indian modernity can only be

understood as a post-colonial event, and the literature of the present age is where we must look to find works of Indian modernism.

This approach to reading postcolonial literature as modernist literature is not particularly new. Certainly, colonialism and the postcolonial experience has engendered experimental and radical (and perhaps inevitable) ways of writing that we consider modernist. Here, it is helpful to remember that James Joyce's *Ulysses* is uncontroversially read as a text denouncing the damage British colonialism wrought on Gaelic language and culture, even as it smugly demonstrates Joyce's mastery of the coloniser's culture and literary/linguistic tradition. Indeed, *Ulysses*' radical departure from English novelistic conventions of and innovative language use unyokes the novel from the English tradition (Duffy 1), and serve to speak back against the canon of the empire. In another instance, we see modernist technique grow out of writers engaging with postcoloniality. One important novelty of modernist writing comes from Conrad's portrayal of Marlow's unconscious racism in *Heart of Darkness*. Pericles Lewis points out that the narrative of *Heart of Darkness* is told primarily from Marlow's extremely limited point of view, and usually as a series of impressions. This renders a narrative where Marlow's belated interpretation of an event in the novel is almost always preceded by his immediate impression of said event. In doing so, Marlow's many immediate racist observations are first registered by the impressionistic narration, before a contentious 'correct' interpretation of his observation is furnished. Conrad's narrative strategy is thus used to demonstrate Marlow's unconscious racism. However, through the development of a modernist "technique [that] forc[es] the reader to share the [blinkered] impressions of the characters" (Lewis 61), Conrad's narrative strategy in *Heart of Darkness* lays the groundwork for the narrative subjectivity we find in later modernist techniques. In this way, new techniques of representation are often created to

address the experience of postcolonial modernity, and we such shall encounter such technical innovation in Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*.

Deep Ecology in *The Glass Palace*

It is with this crucial understanding of postcolonial India as modern India, and Indian modernism as contemporary Indian art, that I turn to Amitav Ghosh's 2000 novel *The Glass Palace*. Set between the final weeks of monarchical rule by the deposed Burmese king Thebaw Min and the military coup of Aung San Suu Kyi's government, *The Glass Palace* is a work of historical fiction that charts a long, intergenerational history of exploitative cash crops cultivation and husbandry in the British East Indies. Following the fortunes of one Rajkumar's teak and rubber businesses, *The Glass Palace* explores the web of relations between colonial "appropriation of nature as resource for the production of [Western] culture" (Haraway 292), and the ways in which Western colonial domination shaped not merely the history, but also the landscapes and human geographies of Burma, India and Malaya.

To approach *The Glass Palace* as a postcolonial environmental text, I want to begin with a perspective that prior to the European enterprise of cash crops cultivation in their East Indies colonies, local communities presented in the novel typically appear to hold an attitude of reverence towards the natural world. In the novel, sites of religious worship are built and incorporated into natural spaces wherever we find them. One of the most pertinent recurring religious spaces mentioned in *The Glass Palace* is the monastic Burmese city of Sagaing, noted by pilgrims and visitors for its "tranquil and beautiful [forested hills], dotted with thousands of white pagodas" (457). Thousands of miles away in British-ruled Malaya, Rajkumar's son, Dinu comes across a number of small "Hindu or Buddhist shrines" (199) built by local communities, nested in a jungle's undergrowth; a site of wilderness so carefully

preserved that, when Dinu returns many years later, would find as pristine as before despite the establishment of a rubber plantation nearby (292). In both instance, the image of the religious being intimately set into the landscape is important as it suggests a local view that the natural world does not merely superficially garland the religious architecture, but are organic extensions of the spiritual spaces of the novel. Despite the great geographical divide between Burma and Malaya, Ghosh suggests that disparate indigenous communities of the East Indies share the belief that the natural world is hallowed ground, with something of the sacredness of the spiritual.

However, Ghosh goes on to suggest that a reverence for nature approximates, but not quite pins down, the view of the environment held by the local communities. As an interloper to the Malayan jungle, Dinu's attempts to capture an essential photograph of nature ironically makes him lose sight of the nature world. According to Roland Barthes, photography is a technique of violence and death (15). To imprint a subject into a photographic image is to risk reducing it to infinity, as the organic and the existential is transformed into timelessness and mechanical reproductability. Indeed, in the hands of Dinu, the camera is transformed into an instrument of reductive violence. Several times, Dinu, "awed by the serene beauty of the place" (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 291) would lose himself in the solipsism of imagining nature. In his attempt to create an idealised image of nature, he reduces the richness of the jungle around him to lines and dashes—abstract form and style:

the jungle, the mountains, the ruins, the thrusting vertical lines of the tree trunks juxtaposed against the sweeping horizontals of the distant sea—he laboured to cram all these elements into his frames. But the more time he spent on the mountain, the less the background seemed to matter. Soon he could no longer see either the mountains or the forest or the sea. (303)

Seduced by what Raghubir Singh describes as “illusion of documentary realism” (11) afforded by photography, Dinu insists on portraying an image of the natural world that is more imagined than real, essentialist rather than organic. The photographs he ends up with, then, depict an idolatrous landscape, heavily aestheticized and lacking in depth. For Ghosh, an overtly romantic or fetishized view of nature would reduce it into an ossified simulacrum of the original.

However, as Dinu spends more time in the jungle, learning the ways of the jungle, his relationship with the natural world changes from that of an awed visitor to member of the natural landscape. Like many of the Malayan natives who had demonstrated careful, sustainable husbandry of their lands (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 300), Dinu’s increased familiarity and sense of belonging in the jungle transforms his role from outsider to being part of the larger ecological system in a way that calls to mind Aldo Leopold’s idea of a land ethic. According to Leopold, the land ethic “cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of [natural resources], but it does affirm [nature’s] right to continued existence” (408). It is an ethic that integrates human beings into the ecosystem, transforming them into members of the ecological community, rather than one where humans have mastery over the system. In Dinu’s case, as his initial awe and reverence rub off, he begins to integrate into the environment, with “his body ... adapting to new temporal rhythms... with each day ... he spent on the mountain” (303). He learns to see the ecosystem through “the pinprick eyes of the lizards that sunned themselves” in the jungle (303). This change in perspective suggests that even as he was learning the jungle through the lens of his camera, the jungle was absorbing him, making him into a member of its own ecosystem. As Leopold would point out, “a land ethic changes the role of *Homo Sapiens* from conqueror of the [natural world] to a plain member and citizen of it” (408). Ghosh’s sense of humans’ place in the environment

is one of interconnectedness and interdependence. This marks a shift in attitude from reverence to respect, an attitude that is ultimately shared by many of the locals of the land.

However, *The Glass Palace* suggests that the respect locals had for the environment was supplanted with a mercenary and instrumental view of nature following the European colonisation of Indochina. Saya John, a man who had made a fortune out of the teak and rubber industry in the East Indies, inducts a young Rajkumar into the teak business by pointing out to him that the easiest way to making a fortune in the British colonies is to play ball with their colonial masters. All it took, according to Saya John, was a willingness “to bend the work of nature to [one’s] will; to make the trees of the earth useful to human beings” (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 65). It would therefore be through Saya John’s persuasion that Rajkumar goes on to build his teak-logging and trading empire with the British East India Company. The indigenous communities, seduced by the promise of material wealth, come to adopt the Lockean view of nature as “a commodity to be owned and used ... [Nature] represented great potential for serving human ends” (DesJardins 155). The adoption of this view of nature ushered into the European Eastern colonies the domination of the natural world.

Indeed, Ghosh lays the blame of environmental degradation in Indochina squarely on the import of Western ideology into the region, despite the eventual complicity of the locals in helping grow the cash crop industries of teak and rubber, and late in the novel, palm. Again, it is Saya John, the consummate spokesperson for the Empire, who blithely points out that the methods of teak logging employed in Burma were devised by the Europeans. He reminds us, lest anyone should forget, that “until the Europeans came none of the Burmese had ever thought of using elephants for the purpose of logging. Their elephants were only used in pagodas and palaces, for wars and ceremonies. It was the Europeans who saw that tame elephants could be made to work for human profit” (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 65). And

indeed, it was Europe, in its drive for modernisation, that provided a market for the sale of lumber—that required the cooperation of native workers to plunder their own jungles to meet Europe’s demand for lumber. The subsequent importation of the Lockean view of the environment “as real estate” (DesJardins 155) into the colonies is therefore the ideological apparatus installed in the minds of local communities in order for the Europeans to achieve their ends. Thus, while the indigenous communities were enlisted into the production of teak for the empire, Ghosh suggests that the fundamental cause of environmental degradation in the East Indies was the European (and in this case, British) modernising hunger for the natural resources of her colonies, and the colonisation of the mind of the indigenous communities was the method by which they went about satiating this hunger.

With this view of nature’s telos as the gratification of (largely Western) human ends, it is perhaps unsurprising then that little regard is paid to the idea that nature might have an intrinsic value independent of its relation to human beings. It matters very little to owners of rubber plantations that the jungle, according to a visitor visiting one site of pristine wilderness earmarked for rubber cultivation, “was beautiful beyond imagining ... [a] dense, towering, tangled, impassable jungle” (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 172). The rupture of life and the subliminal beauty of the natural landscape have little instrumental value to rubber plantation owners, who would go on to employ slash-and-burn techniques as they reduce the rainforest to arable land. As the same visitor would reflect on a later trip to the now workable land, that “[t]he hillside looked as though it had been racked by a series of disasters: huge stretches of land were covered with ashes and blackened stumps ... she had felt as though she were entering a plague site” (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 172, 73). The brutal treatment of the natural world—the destruction of jungle and the planting of cash crops—is driven entirely by commercial consideration, with no thought for the value of the environment in itself.

Ghosh would condemn this casual disregard the colonial enterprise had, then, for the natural world. In a detailed description of the way in which teak was harvested, Ghosh compares the act of deforestation to murder:

In the dry season, when the earth crack and the forest wilted ... the timbermen would comb the forest for teak. The trees, once picked, had to be killed and left to dry. ... The killing was achieved with a gridle of incision, thin silts carved deep into the wood at a height of four feet and six inches off the ground.

The assassinated trees were left to die where they stood, sometimes for three years or more. It was only after they had bleed judged dry... that they were marked for felling. This was when the axemen came, shouldering their weapons, squinting along the blades to judge their victims' angles of descent.

Dead though they were, the trees would sound great tocsins of protest as they fell, unloosening thunderclap explosions that could be heard miles away, bringing down everything in their path, rafts of sapling, looped nets of rattan. Thick stands of bamboo were flattened in moments, thousands of jointed limbs exploding simultaneously in deadly splinter blasts, throwing up mushroom clouds of debris.

Then the team of elephants would go to work, guided by their handlers ... butting, prodding, levering with their trunk. (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 60)

It is at this point that Ghosh's deep ecological sensibilities become apparent. The personified language of embodied violence suggests that the carefully planned deforestation was no mere falling of trees, but a massacre of the natural world. Indeed, the language of personification used by Ghosh in comparing the harvesting of teak as acts of murder draws an equivalency

between human value and non-human ones—for Ghosh, the killing of the non-human is akin to the killing of people. In doing so, Ghosh brushes aside the Lockean perspective that the large-scale logging of teak can be justified by its fulfilment of human ends. Ghosh's view towards the indiscriminate destruction of the natural world is unequivocal and reprehensive—that the harvesting of teak was a cruel genocide of non-human life.

The destruction of nature, however, takes on greater significance in *The Glass Palace* as Ghosh ascribes an intrinsic value to the natural world by suggesting that the natural world is endowed with sentience. An awakened nature is, of course, hardly a new trope in Western literature, and we find various representations of it, perhaps most prominently in the Romantic tradition of Keats and Wordsworth. As Ghosh readily admits, arts practitioners have always been alive to the possibility “that humans were never alone, that we have been surrounded by beings of all sort who share elements of that which we had thought most distinctively our own: the capacity for will, thought, and consciousness” (Ghosh *Derangement* 31), even if the idea of Gaia seems mawkish or shamanistic to contemporary post-Romantic sensibilities. However, while nature has been, with few exceptions, portrayed as benign if not nurturing, in the Western literary canon, Ghosh's nature is red in tooth and claw. Indeed, Ghosh's natural world has ways of mounting resistance against its oppressors. In a passage describing the difficulty early land owners had clearing Malaya's dense primary rainforest for cultivating rubber plantations, one character said of the task: “[i]t was dangerous, like a battlefield, with the jungle fighting back every inch of the way” (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 172). The jungle's fierce struggle against the Baconian edict of “enlarging the bounds of human empire” (52) suggests that the resistance was the work of an ecosystem endowed with agency and self-interest. If Cartesian philosophy of mind has enshrined consciousness as the fundamental trait that makes humans intrinsically more valuable than nature and animals (DesJardins 99), Ghosh's ascribing of sentience to nature gives nature

moral standing. He saw that nature was deserving of moral consideration to its welfare, independent of human needs and wants.

Yet nature does not merely stage a hold-out against humans' destructive actions in *The Glass Palace*. Ghosh's representation of nature does not stop with nature's passive resistance against environmental destruction. Instead, Ghosh seems to relish in the damage an embodied, vehement nature gleefully inflicts upon human life. In the face of overwhelming destruction, the natural world in *The Glass Palace* nevertheless fights back against human encroachment by employing guerrilla strategies. *The Glass Palace* is strewn with the corpses of men quietly but carefully done in by nature. In one instance, the sea deliberately pulls a condescending colonial administrator into its depths (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 151); in another, a forest Assistant who fails to heed local superstitions of the jungle is meticulously targeted and killed by an elephant (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 85-88). Indeed, "death stalked the lives of the oo-sis; the Russell's viper, the maverick log, the charge of the wild buffalo" (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 79) would strike when their antagonists were least suspecting. Near the end of the novel, Rajkumar's daughter-in-law drowns while crossing a river because she felt the water "pulling at her, urging her to come in" (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 408). Going by the wide spread of page numbers of my in-text references, one has a sense that Ghosh's representation of nature's autonomous acts of vengeance is carefully sustained throughout the novel. In every single one of these cases, Ghosh's language suggests that the sentience of nature is not merely one of awareness—rather, nature rears up to assert its own values against its oppressors. Nature's retaliation seems based on an independent retributive logic that is usually denied by the West's conceptualisation of nature. The forces of nature are no longer forces that lash out indiscriminately in the way a hurricane or an earthquake might, but one that is terrifyingly targeted and "particularly vengeful" (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 79). This is a view of nature with independent agency and directed actions, and as Valerie Plumwood

points out, “[o]nce nature is reconceived as capable of agency and intentionality, ... the great gulf which Cartesian thought established between the conscious, mindful human sphere and the mindless, clockwork natural one disappears” (5). Nature in *The Glass Palace* operates with a logic based on a value system that sees human lives as equal to nature—and where the loss of human life to nature comes across as poetic justice, an act of retribution and justified self-defence, rather than tragedy.

Ghosh ascribing of aggressive intentionality in *The Glass Palace* provides a way for us to rethink about our ethical duty to the natural world. In his discussion of what gives moral standing to a subject, Tom Regan has argued that we must give moral consideration to subjects that

want and prefer things, believe and feel things, recall and
expect things... [subjects that are able to experience] pleasure and pain...
enjoyment and suffering... satisfaction and frustration.

(qtd in Gruen *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*)

For Regan, subjects with these qualities have “inherent value of their own” and must not be reduced solely to means towards fulfilling human ends. Nature in *The Glass Palace* does appear to meet these criteria, and therefore has moral standing. Our actions towards the natural world must take this moral standing into account. As Naess has suggested, “[t]he well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purpose” (“Some Philosophical Aspects” 49). *The Glass Palace* thus seeks to change our understanding of the *raison d'être* of nature from a perspective of exploitability to an understanding that nature has intrinsic value demanding our moral consideration when we make any decision that might affect it.

From the shift from a sense of respect to an exploitative attitude, the relation between the imperial imperative and ecological destruction seems direct, and where the deep ecological solution appears to target only environmental problems. However, the novel suggests that a larger matrix of oppression undergirds ecological destruction. In *The Glass Palace*, ecological destruction always comes hand in hand with other forms of domination. The war motive that necessitates the logging of teak and cultivation of rubber in the East Indies, is the same war that enables Britain “to declare war on Germany ... on behalf of her empire” (Ghosh 265) in both World War I and World War II, that would send Indians sepoy into a fight that is not theirs, and whose sacrifices would not be acknowledged in British history books⁷ (Ghosh 351). Less than humans, the racial other who would fight for the Empire’s interests is viewed as part of nature, and “[t]o be defined as ‘nature’ in this context is to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the ‘environment’ or invisible background conditions against which the ‘foreground’ achievements [of Western culture] take place. It is to be defined as *terra nullus*, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed” (Plumwood 4) or appropriated to fulfil ends not of their own. Their role in the war is a deployment of natural resources, not a movement of people. Ghosh suggests that the racial other, like the environment, are both victims of Western imperialism.

Likewise, environmental degradation is frequently a direct outcome of capitalistic practices. Writing of destructive commercial forestry practices in the Himalaya, Sunderlal Bahaguna has pointed out that “the ecological crisis in the Himalaya is not an isolated event [but] has its roots in the [modern] materialistic civilization [that] makes man the butcher of Earth” (qtd in Guha 179). The same is true here of the environmentally exploitative practices

⁷ Indeed, as I was writing this thesis, Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* was released. There is swirling criticism of how the film has failed to portray the not insignificant role of Indian troops in the battle (BBC Online). This is a particularly glaring omission as the contributions of Indians in both World Wars were neither insignificant nor obscure. T. S. Eliot testifies to Indian war contribution in as early as 1943, in a poem titled “To the Indians who Died in Africa” (Ricks and McCue 216).

taking place in British East Indies, and indeed true for many other sites of European imperialism. *The Glass Palace* suggests then that the roots of environmental destruction lie in empire and capitalism—those very conditions that enabled Western modernity and set up the foundations of today’s neoliberal economics.

Moreover, in *The Glass Palace*, nature is co-opted into the oppression of people. The two primary cash crops portrayed in the novel—rubber and teak—both become crucial raw material for human conflicts. “Rubber”, Ghosh tells us, “would be a vital strategic material in [World War I]; that in Germany the discarding of articles made of rubber would become an offense punishable by the law; that submarines would be sent overseas to smuggle rubber” (*The Glass Palace* 173), while the teak would cause generations of grief to people, from being the principal cause for the Anglo-Burmese war (*The Glass Palace* 13), or later, as a means of destruction as it is drafted into the military industrial complex in preparation for both World Wars (*The Glass Palace* 274). Indeed, Saya John would blithely go on to call his rubber plantation “[his] little empire... [taken] from the jungle” with impoverished workers trafficked against their will from around the Indochinese region (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 200, 202), unaware of the many types of oppression his enterprise engendered.

In the backdrop of all the environmental destruction and social oppression, of course, looms the spectre of European modernisation. While the novel's geographical range is resolutely Asiatic, and the narrative sweep never strays west of the British Raj, perpetually lingering in the ambient spaces of the novel is a keen awareness that all the environmental destruction taking place in the colonies serves the purpose of European modernisation. Just as the oil of Burma was shipped backed to Europe to aid its industrialisation, so would the teak and rubber be sent back to England, leaving only uncompensated environmental damage behind. As Queen Supayalat, the wife of Thebaw Min, points out, much of the social and

environmental injustice perpetuated in the Indochina has been done “in the name of [European] progress” (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 76).

Lessons from A Postcolonial Novel: On Reading Against the Grain

In a slightly dated but still highly relevant article that argues for greater interdisciplinary engagement between literary studies and other fields of the humanities, Rob Nixon points out that the relationship between environmental writing and postcolonial studies “continues to be one of reciprocal indifference or mistrust. A broad silence characterizes most environmentalists’ stance towards postcolonial literature and theory, while postcolonial critics typically remain no less silent on the subject of environmental literature” (196). Today, with works such as Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* now commonly read by postcolonial critics as a work dealing with environmental injustice perpetuated in Asia by the West (Buell 100), Nixon’s conclusion, drawn in 2005, seems no longer strictly true. However, his point remains highly pertinent with respect to the lack of cross-pollination between the two fields of study. Despite covering many overlapping areas of concerns, neither postcolonial theory nor the present environmental writing/ecocriticism have been particularly interested in providing “an adequate account of the [relation between the] domination of nature [and] other forms of oppression” (Plumwood 1).

If we acknowledge, however, that the various historical forms of dominations are not independent but interconnected at a deeper ideological level, it seems self-evident to me that any liberation theory cannot remain apathetic to other forms of social oppression. Present critical theory must engage and work towards “integrating nature as a forth category of analysis into the framework of an extended [critical] theory which employs a race, class and gender analysis. ... [They must recognise that the domination of] nature [was] a missing piece in this framework, and its [inclusion would] contribut[e] to a more complete

understanding of domination and colonialization” (Plumwood 2). Reconceptualising the natural world would therefore also require the dismantling of the matrix of oppression of race, class and gender—a deep approach that rejects today’s neoliberal ideology, patriarchal and imperial systems, and class distinction.

One of the ways we might be able to achieve ideological change towards the environment, according to Ghosh, is then to change the way we write and read fiction. Returning to *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh points out that the Western literary canon enables environmental destruction in two ways. The first way is the political paralysis produced by a very conspicuous silence of contemporary literary works on the present day climate change and ecological crisis (Ghosh 11). For Ghosh, societal culture is partly produced by the art a society consumes—and literary artists’ silence on the subject of environmental destruction and climate change creates a culture of complacency towards our present-day problems. As such, Ghosh argues that writers’ unwillingness to address climate change reduces the visibility of the environmental crisis we face today. The failure of artists to represent our current environmental problem, to work the problem into social consciousness through art, is a failure to utilise one of art’s fundamental capabilities. Contemplating the dearth of environmental literature being produced today, Ghosh wonders if “it [is] possible that the arts and literature [of today] ... will one day be remembered ... [as moribund and irrelevant] because of their complicity in” climate change denial (*Derangement* 121). To avoid such ignominy, Ghosh suggests that artists, with their ability to produce and influence cultures, are responsible for bringing news of the problems we face, as well as solutions, into mainstream discourse.

Second, Ghosh points out that environmental destruction is writ into the heart of contemporary culture by literary texts—texts that have historically set up hierarchical systems of social oppression. For Ghosh, much of the Western canon has celebrated reckless

consumerism, which has translated into cultural desire and capitalist ideology—think only of the material extravagance exhorted in F. S. Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, or the innumerable environmentally-polluting car rides across America that Jack Kerouac’s *On The Road* has inspired. In our contemporary context, the production and fulfilment of such cultural expectations perpetuate domination of race, class, gender and nature. Contemporary culture is a culmination of entitlement and historical desire—an ideology perpetuated by a canon that reinforces a culture of consumerism and expectation.

To remedy these faults in our literature, Ghosh suggests that writers such as himself must therefore write from a deep ecological perspective. By changing the stories they tell about the world, writers are able to re-orientate people’s relation to the world, the natural environment, and to other people. As Tom Regan has pointed out, “[p]eople must change their beliefs before they change their habits” (180). Writing with a view to instigate a paradigm shift in the way we view the natural world, for Ghosh, would be a sustainable, long-term solution to our environmental problems, as doing so would fundamentally restructure society for the greener. Indeed, Dinu, the representative artist figure in *The Glass Palace*, eventually adopts a mantra about the power of art to affect ideological changes. He tells a visitor to his photography studio “that new and revolutionary art forms may awaken a people or disturb their complacency or challenge old ideals with constructive prophecies of change” (493)—but this is also a moment of self-reflexivity for Ghosh as he acknowledges this project of inciting societal change through his art.

The Glass Palace demonstrates this principle of writing back against the empire by subverting the portrayal of colonial spaces and peoples in another canonical European modernist text—Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. *Heart of Darkness*, as Chinua Achebe has pointed out, is a text that perpetuates racist attitudes and celebrates racist writing because it “projects the image of Africa as “the other world”, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of

civilisation, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (1614). It is a text that obliterates the heterogeneity of cultures and the richness of natural landscape in European colonies by painting them with a broad brush of darkness and unknowability, and by seeing them as part of a savage, untamed nature. Indeed, F. R Leavis observed that *Heart of Darkness* displayed an "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery" (196) of the Belgian Congo's people and natural environment. If Conrad had imagined colonised parts of the world as dark parts of the map too primitive and uncultured to coherently portray, Ghosh writes against Conrad's text by doing precisely that which Conrad had declined to do—colouring in the lives and cultures and natural landscape of the colonies. In nearly 500 pages of detailed and colourful prose about the landscape, culture, and people of British Indochina, *The Glass Palace* vivifies the colonial other. In doing so Ghosh challenges Conrad's portrayal of European colonies as inscrutable, and its natural landscape as menacing and exploitable. As a work of historical fiction, *The Glass Palace* is "committed to reimagining the colonial dynamics portrayed" (Marx 4) in *Heart of Darkness*, as well as writes back against a canon European literature that has traditionally portrayed the non-Western as the lesser other.

Just as importantly, and perhaps with greater relevance to the subsequent chapters of this thesis, it is my view that writers must teach readers how to read ecologically. Literature must train the reading eye onto the pressing environmental issues of our day. This would at times translate into a practice of reading against the grain of present scholarship. After all, if the consumerism that enables environmental destruction is written so resolutely, if at times unconsciously, into the Western canon, we must learn to read against the critical canon, to find green new ways of reading historical literature. Through comparing the contexts and histories behind the literature of Western high modernism and the literature of the 'Orient', an intertextual approach will surface "defects in the western story of reason and nature"

(Plumwood 6), and provide a key to this new mode of reading ecologically. From the lessons we draw out of *The Glass Palace*, we are able to move from what Hasan Nazia calls the “strong green streaks” characteristic of many modernist postcolonial novels (182) to subtler environmental ethics we might find in canonical modernist texts. Indeed, how might our reading of *All Quiet on The Western Front* be coloured by our appreciation of the role Burmese teak and other natural resources imported from European colonies played in the Great War? And how might the hortatory verse in Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “Opening of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition by the Queen”,

In our ancient island State,

And wherever her flag fly,

Glorying between sea and sky,

Make the might of Britain known;

Britons, hold your own!

(16-20)

be reinterpreted in the light of Ghosh’s reminder that British dominions and interests were defended in both Europe and elsewhere by rather unwilling Indian sepoy⁸? Clearly, our hermeneutics must change as we gain greater historical and contextual insight into the Western texts we read. This then is one way to read modernist writing from the side of Ganges and the Irrawaddy, and indeed the Congo and Niger—a new aesthetic sensibility that situates its environmental problem as a direct outcome of its colonial masters’ modernity, and which recognises its kinship with other forms of social oppression.

⁸ In the trenches of the Western Front... the Indian army in great numbers (about 1.5 million) fought alongside Jamaicans, Australians, Canadians, Nigerians and the British ...the colonial troops had come to safeguard” (Boehmer and Matthews 293).

A Rite of Spring: Post-human Rejuvenation in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*

On Reading “Against the Grain”: A History of Reinterpretation

The practice of reading texts against the grain of received scholarship is historied in both literary creation and criticism, and many literary theorists have argued for a practice of reading texts that unsurprisingly conforms to their personal theoretical biases. For instance, the psychoanalyst Harold Bloom has argued in *A Map of Misreading* that all great literary works are able to trace a patrilineal line of influence from the writing of earlier poets. In his view, each generation of poets deliberately misread their predecessors in their own acts of creation. Bloom's psychoanalytic reading is of course preceded by Freud, who famously (mis)reads *Hamlet* against the critical tradition of a revenge play or one concerned with restoring social order in the state of Denmark, but rather as a play dealing with unresolved oedipal complexes of Prince Hamlet and William Shakespeare. And Achebe's lecture on Conrad's racism in *Heart of Darkness* deliberately reads in 1975 a novel published in 1899—a novel that was in its time uniquely progressive for its sympathy towards the natives in the African colonies—from a postcolonial standpoint⁹.

As critics, we read texts against the grain of historical interpretation and criticism, despite their clear detraction from the original authorial intention, because changing times demand changing readership practices. With each new age, readers approach ‘canonical’ texts with different sensibilities and philosophies; they demand different things of their texts. These new sensibilities give modern readers insights into old texts from fresh perspectives, and through their acts of interpretation, make texts from another time immediately relevant to their lives. Indeed, the ability to read against the grain, according to T. S. Eliot, is the mark of a good critic. He points out that, “comparison and analysis need only the cadavers on the

⁹ “[Conrad] is, for many things, the antithesis of Empire... his characters are the denial of Empire, of Nation, of Race almost, they are fearfully alone with the Wilderness” (Eliot “Kipling Ridivivus” 298)

table; but interpretation is always producing parts of the body from its pockets, and fixing them in place” (“Criticism” 21). Eliot was most keenly aware that literary language is alive to changing times, and must remain open to interpretation and re-interpretation from modern perspective. As such, in the same way it is no longer possible for us to read *Heart of Darkness* without both recognising Conrad's harsh attack on colonial brutality in the Belgian Congo as well as the strong streak of unconscious racism in the text, it is impossible to read Eliot's *The Waste Land* without being consciously aware of the colonial enterprise that has created the social and cultural context of *The Waste Land*.

This thesis, like Achebe, Freud, and Bloom's theoretical approach to reading, has its ideological bias; it wants to suggest one particular method of reading against the established grain of modernist criticism. As an ecocritic, my agenda is to point out the submerged eco-narrative in *The Waste Land*—a narrative arising from what the modernists perceived as their urbanising/urbanised society's alienation towards the environment. Our contemporary environmental crisis gives us reason to approach *The Waste Land* with an ecocritical lens, as the poem's many representations of aridity, of lifeless waterscapes and seascapes, and of what Hugh Kenner describes as “the great City dissolved into a desert” (“The Urban Apocalypse” 46), have close parallels to today's anxiety towards the threat of an environmental apocalypse looming in the not-too-distant future. This is an idea that Susan Stanford Friedman has brought up in passing before, but has left open for other scholars to pursue. She wonders: “[c]an we ... revision Eliot's waste land in the context of ecological disaster and ... the landscape scarred by war?” (Friedman “Planetary” 494). As Eliot's poetic vision of environmental apocalypse and today's very real threat of one converge, it appears to me that such a reading is both viable and inevitable.

At this time of my writing, there is no sustained ecocritical reading of *The Waste Land*. The current critical tradition on *The Waste Land* is one that Eliot himself has baited

scholars with, arguing in “Ulysses, Order, and Myth” that the poem’s fragmentary form is unique because it is the only verse structure appropriate for the milieu. Just as “no one else [other than James Joyce] has built a novel upon such a foundation before: it has never before been necessary”¹⁰, Eliot envisioned the form of his poem as specifically and necessarily dependent on the modernisation/modernity of the European 20th century. Indeed, Terry Eagleton suggests that the “mighty collage of quotations, allusions, fractured phrases, spectral figures and listless snatches of memory ... seems no more than a heap of fragments from a collapsed civilisation, of the kind that some archaeologist from the distant future might stumble across”. They expressed “an imposingly panoramic vision of decay and futility” (95)¹¹ that was the early 20th century. Eliot’s suggestion relating his poem’s form to the milieu has proved influential, and has informed several generations of criticism on *The Waste Land*. Today, Eliot’s most lengthy poetic work is primarily read as a poem about the decline of Western civilisation in the aftermath the First World War. Based loosely on the Grail legend of the Fisher King, Eliot compares what he viewed as European cultural decay to the cursed, infertile lands of the Fisher King. In these readings, despite the polyglotism of the speaker, and the wide geographical range mapped by the place-names of the poem, and the many representations of nature, *The Waste Land* is primarily interpreted as a poem about the disintegration of the mind of Europe and an elegy for the collapse of the post-Roman civilisation.

I am quite uninterested in following after traditional readings of *The Waste Land* as one about the unfolding crisis of European culture in the early 20th century, because that line of interpretation has already been done to the death. Modernist scholarship does not need another analysis on the many ways in which the broken voices of *The Waste Land* is an ideal

¹⁰ While the essay is purportedly about James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, there is general critical agreement that Eliot’s essay is really about *The Waste Land*.

¹¹ Eliot used very similar words in describing the formal ambition of *The Waste Land* as being the poem of the age. The poem’s form is “simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (“Ulysses, Order and Myth” 177-78).

expression of post-war cynicism and disillusionment, or the shocked psychological state of the modern man/society. Eliot's ambivalent nostalgia for the Roman civilisation, however, is of interest to us in this thesis because his Roman Empire, in its many renaissances, has always been an empire sustained by exploitation of colonial lands and people, exploitation not unlike the kind we encountered in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*¹². By cross-reading *The Waste Land* with *The Glass Palace*, the "fragments [of European culture that the speaker] has shored against [his] ruins" ("The Waste Land" 430) not only point to a futile attempt at recouping an atrophying European culture, but also hint at a fear of geographical disintegration and the collapse of British imperial ambition. In this vein, Eleanor Cook's paper "T. S Eliot and the Carthaginian Peace" deserves a closer consideration for its extensive treatment of the relation between Western modernity and its vision of empire in *The Waste Land*.

According to Cook, *The Waste Land* is a poem about the British's attempt at maintaining and expanding British imperial power after the Great War. Tracing the place-names mentioned in the poem, Cook convincingly argues that charting the geographies of *The Waste Land* required three maps which, when taken together, suggests Eliot's vision of the British being the inheritors of the Roman Empire. According to Cook, the first map we are able to put together from the place-names of the poem is one of London and the Greater London area, where excursions to other cities and other parts of the world mentioned in the poem always return. This first map suggests that the British Empire sits at the heart of the poem. The second map we huddle together from the cities of "Jerusalem, Athens, Alexandria/Vienna London" (Eliot "The Waste Land" 374-75). When marked on an atlas, they "ring the Mediterranean ... [forming a] map that roughly coincides roughly with the Roman empire at its most expansive". The third map, composed of the place-names of Ganga and the

¹² Indeed, the word colony comes from the Latin "colonia", which meant a Roman outpost on captured territory. Colony: "Late Middle English (denoting a settlement formed mainly of retiring soldiers, acting as a garrison in newly conquered territory in the Roman Empire): from Latin colonia 'settlement, farm', from colonus 'settler, farmer', from colore, 'cultivate'" (*OED Online*)

Himavant, is the map of Dante's inhabited world (Cook 341). When put together, these three maps, for Cook, represent Eliot's vision of the modern world as one in which the British Empire's territory and sphere of political/cultural/trade influence is asserted—a vision that was wounded tightly around nation, empire and informal empire.

Cook points out that this vision of empire in *The Waste Land* sets out the relation between the British Empire's envisioning of its dominions and its political/ cultural reach, and its globally interspersed commercial interests. As many historians have noted, John Maynard Keynes amongst them, World War I was not merely a political war, but one intricately linked to international trade and a perceived right to own colonies¹³. Cook notes that *The Waste Land* draws parallels between the many trade wars fought by the Roman empire and the Great War. Mentions of Roman war victories are abound in the poem: references to Phlebas the drowned Phoenician, the trader from Smyrna, and indeed the First Punic War fought at Mylae, all point towards the historical event of Roman war victory over a major trade rival, Carthage, in 146 BC. Indeed, quoting Cleanth Brooks, Cook points out that the "Punic war was a trade war— [it] might be considered a rather close parallel to [the] late war" (349) because a commercial root lies at the hearts of these conflicts. If World War I had begun as a political crisis over the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the nature of the war had morphed into one of commercial and imperial interest by November 1918. The punishment that was meted out by the Allies on the Central Powers at the Treaty of Versailles made clear, quite belatedly, that the stakes of the Great War was fundamentally that of the maintenance of imperial power and imperial economy. On top of transferring Imperial Germany's colonies into Allied-controlled territory ("Treaty of Versailles", Article 22), the Allies had imposed war reparations so punishing that Cook's words in describing the victory of Rome over Carthage as Carthaginian peace could well

¹³ Keynes's *The Economic Consequence of Peace* was a scathing critique of the Treaty of Versailles, which Keynes correctly saw as cruel and crippling to the German economy.

apply to the outcome of the Great War. The Treaty of Versailles was “a peace settlement so punitive as to destroy the enemy entirely and even to make sterile on which he lives” (Cook 348). Like the Roman establishment of colonies around the Mediterranean Sea after the sacking of Carthage, the war which led to the planned disintegration of the Austrian-Hungarian, German, and Ottoman empires and their satellite colonies paved the way for the continued occupation and expansion of Allied empires and colonies in Africa and Asia. The first modern war in the history of the world is one closely linked to global trade and imperial ambition/exploitation.

Yet at the same time, Cook observes that *The Waste Land* expresses a fear of imperial apocalypse after the war victory over a major trade rival. There is, after all, historical precedence to this premonition of imperial collapse in the fall of the Roman Republic. The Roman victory over Carthage was, according to Cook, what led to the decline of the Roman Empire of the day. The trade monopolies established after the Punic Wars, and the looted wealth of the colonies, led to Roman extravagance, but the ease and comforts they afforded also led to the moral and cultural decay of Roman society. As St. Augustine points out in *The City of God*,

after the destruction of Carthage there came the highest pitch of discord, greed, ambition, and all the evils which generally spring up in time of prosperity” (qtd in Cook 350).

The very vision of empire building, *The Waste Land* suggests, is self-destructive. The acquisition and maintenance of colonies that led to imperial wealth would contribute to the eventual implosion of the British Empire. In Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*, this prediction was borne out with the Indian struggle for independence. One member of Rajkumar’s family, Arjun, would become a member off the Japanese-allied Indian National

Army, fighting against the British in World War II (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 388), while Rajkumar's close friend Uma Dey joins Ghandi's non-violent Indian Independence movement (Ghosh *The Glass Palace* 222), two movements that would eventually lead to the bloody Partition and the secession of the Raj from the British Empire. In *The Waste Land*, this vision finds parallel in the nightmarish images portraying the fall of ancient empires, with the "[f]alling Towers [of]/ Jerusalem, Athens Alexandria/ Vienna" (Eliot "The Waste Land" 373-74) symbolising their decline. A fear of "imperial apocalypse in *The Waste Land*, working from a hypothesis that a vision of Rome and the Roman Empire[,] lies behind Eliot's vision of London and the British Empire" (Cook 342).

Eleanor Cook's paper is important to this thesis for several reasons. First, Cook's reading of *The Waste Land* shifts the focus of modernism away from a European centre towards the periphery of modernism. By pointing out that the project of envisioning empire requires the very real maintenance of colonies in political, economic, and military terms, Cook draws the invisible, conquered other from the borders into the modernist picture. She reminds us of the close master-slave relation between Europe and her colonies, and shows the side of modernity that is frequently not discussed in relation to European modernism. It highlights the tension between European progress and imperial domination, and how imperial domains shape modernist culture and art.

Cook's analysis is also important because it draws out one important aspect of modernity—an abiding anxiety regarding the destruction wrought on the natural environment in the pursuit of economic gains. In referring to the resolution of the Punic Wars and the First World War as a Carthaginian peace, she points out that environmental desecration happens as a cost of modern trade. After all, she notes of the fall of Carthage, represented so prominently in *The Waste Land*, that "when the city had been taken, her citizens were slaughtered, the city [was] levelled and [the land was] sown with salt in order to make the soil sterile" (348). In

this view, colonial lands, such as Burma, India, Malaya, and the Congo are unsustainably exploited when they serve the colonial master's purpose, and causally destroyed when it might be put to work against them. As with Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, Eliot's poem suggests an instrumental view of the natural world (particularly the natural space of a colony), which justifies its domination and causal destruction. The war over trade and empire is also the war that transforms fertile land into "stony rubbish... a heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / and the dead tree give no shelter, the cricket no relief, and the dry stone no sound of water" (Eliot "The Waste Land" 20, 22-24). The price of building a trade empire, Roman or British, then, is often literally scorched earth.

Critics such as Geoffrey Berry have noted the representation of environmental destruction in *The Waste Land*, but have opted to read the images as a metaphor of the poem's speaker's "thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season" (Eliot "Gerontion" 75), a theme recurrent in Eliot's oeuvre. Indeed, Berry suggests that the representation of environmental apocalypse in *The Waste Land* points at "the alienation of the modern west from the non-human world, alongside a desperate but convoluted longing to re-commune with organic elements and forces" (1). For scholars of Berry's mold, the representation of arid lifelessness in *The Waste Land* is primarily symbolic of psychological jaundice caused by the process of technological and industrial modernisation. The many images of environmental destruction serve as objective correlative of that psychological distress. They do not extend their interpretation of the imagery to independent images of nature in distress. I am interested in pushing Berry's argument further—that the imagery of barrenness and lifelessness he has observed in the poem is not merely a metaphor for a psychological alienation from nature, but a literal representation of environmental destruction.

Building on Cook and Berry's papers, this chapter will investigate *The Waste Land's* suggestion that the cultural effects of colonisation in the West lead to environmental and

human apocalypse. This chapter will further suggest that in a post-apocalyptic, post-human world, nature will recolonise the land, and that any human place in such a rejuvenated world will be one that co-exist harmoniously with, rather than aggressively towards, nature.

The Material and the Mythical in *The Waste Land*

The Waste Land sets out the debt European—and more specifically, British—modernisation owes to her colonies. In the poem, there is a close relationship between British industrialisation and the transformation of London into the largest metropolis of the 19th and 20th century, and colonial conquest. While Eliot's reference to colonial exploitation and domination seems made almost in passing, the appearance of Conrad's red-sailed barges on the Thames (Eliot 673) is significant in situating the influence of colonisation in Britain. It is on these red-sailed barges of the Thames that *The Glass Palace*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *The Waste Land* meet. Seemingly innocuous in *The Waste Land* as they sail leisurely up and down Eliot's River Thames, we learn of their sinister side in *Heart of Darkness* as the trade vessels that traverse the Thames estuary, carrying not only resources looted from colonies, but also “the dream of [European] men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empire” (Conrad 1893) in their holds. If it is true, as Sara Haslam asserts, that “London owes her history, her existence to this waterway [the River Thames]” (159), then the red-sailed barges that sail along its meandering passage represent the last cog in the long supply chain of the British East India Company, dropping off the wealth plundered from the colonies at towns and cities along the Thames' course. With this intertextual nod to Conrad's symbol of imperialism, Eliot acknowledges the colonial underpinnings to British modernisation and indeed, *Pax Britannica*.

The Waste Land goes on to suggest that the wealth reaped off imperial domains enabled environmental destruction. From the earlier chapter, we encountered the desecration of the natural environment in the East Indies as a consequent of British modernisation and imperialism. Now that we are on the beneficiary side of colonisation, on the Thames side of modernity, we see that the plunder discharged by the Conradian barges into English cities enabled materialism and decadence in Great Britain. Eliot's caricature of a modern Cleopatra, enriched by the colonial exploitation of her dynastic colonies, is surrounded by riches and luxuries from King Solomon's mines in the poem:

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne

Glowed on the marble, where the glass

Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines

From which a golden Cupidon peeped out

...

Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra

Reflecting light upon the table as

The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it

From satin cases poured in rich profusion¹⁴

("The Waste Land" 77-85)

Like the soulless socialites who flit through the furnished rooms on their trivial pursuits in

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", the woman finds herself "drowning [in] the senses"

("The Waste Land" 89) as she is overwhelmed by the grandeur of material excess. While this

¹⁴ Cf. "Une Martyre" from Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs Du Mal*: Au milieu des flacons, des étoffes lasses/ Et des meubles voluptueux,/ Des marbres, des tableaux, des robes parfumées/ Qui traînent à plis somptueux,/ dans une chambre tiède ou, comme en une serre,/ L'air est dangereux et fatal,/ Ou des bouquets mourants des leurs cercueils de verre/ Exhalent leur soupir final (166)

caricature of Cleopatra hyperbolises the materialist culture of the early 20th century, Eliot expresses unease in what he saw as a growing middle-class culture of indulgence in an age of crass consumption. If a growing middle class seeking easy comfort and cheap stimulation is a sign of modernity, as Britain grows comfortable with its newfound plundered wealth, the entitlement and the stupor induced from overconsumption is Eliot's diagnosis of moral decay, as well as suggest a uniquely modern phenomena of commodity fetishisation and insatiable demands. According to Berry, this reflects the state of the "urbanized soul as well as its desacralized environment" (1), as the focus of such a culture is geared towards material production and towards the fulfilment of human wants and desires.

The drive towards a materialist, consumerist culture, leads to environmental destruction in *The Waste Land*. Despite initial difficulties in approaching the poem, any reader, past or present, of *The Waste Land* will quickly realise that the London portrayed in the poem is not quite like the London they are familiar with. It is not the stylish London of Georgian rule we find portrayed in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*; neither is it the cosmopolitan London of the present Elizabeth II. Rather, the scene Eliot sets in the 1922 publication predates the poem. The London of *The Waste Land* is the same one we find in "Prufrock", where late Victorian industrialisation and the burning of coal have created an oppressive and all-pervading miasma that envelops the city:

The yellow fog that rubs its back against the window panes,

The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window panes,

Licked its tongue into the corner of the evening,

Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,

Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys...

(Eliot "Prufrock" 15-19)

The London of *The Waste Land* is a nightmarish, "[u]nreal city" where industrialisation has cast a perpetual "brown fog" (Eliot "The Waste Land" 60, 61) over the crowds of miserable Londoners as they trudge listlessly across London Bridge and about the city. On top of the air pollution plaguing the city, many ancient Londinium springs and rivers, such as the Effra and the sacred well of Walbrook, became modern sites of sewage canals as residences were built along their course (Ackroyd 40-43). In this backwards look at Victorian pollution, Eliot reminds us of the environmental damage that was ushered in with the population explosion of London in the late nineteenth century, spurred on by its increasing wealth, and with its growing consumption for materials goods and of energy.

On top of the pollution in the city, the entire matter of environmental desecration was exacerbated by the opening of the London Underground in 1883. The new ease of access across the city led to an outwards expansion of urban spaces into London's countryside, and the green countryside surrounding London was turned into suburbs or industrial districts. Indeed, an article in *The Guardian*, citing research from UCL's Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, demonstrates the extent of urbanisation of the London area by pointing out that that "Greater London [in 2014] covers 600 square miles, however up to the 17th century the capital was largely crammed into a single square mile". English moorlands became housing districts, and occasionally manor houses like Burnt Norton, houses often ironically adorned with a meticulously manicured lawn and garden¹⁵. The transformation of the natural

¹⁵ Burnt Norton, the title of the first poem in Eliot's "Four Quartets", is taken from the name of an abandoned English manor house "near Campden in Gloucestershire". Eliot visited Burnt Norton, and its abandoned and richly overgrown garden, on a holiday in Campden in 1934 (Hayward qtd in Ricks and McCue 903).

The richness of the garden moved Eliot to write "Burnt Norton", which juxtaposed the beauty of the overgrown garden, with its "unheard music in the shrubbery, / [and] roses / [that] had had the look of flowers that are looked at" (27-29) against the dreariness of the London Underground, which is a "world not world... [but one of] internal darkness, deprivation / And destitution of all property, / Desiccation of the world of sense, / Evacuation of the world of fancy" (27-31).

Despite his frequent commute on the London Underground (Hayward qtd in Ricks and McCue 917), Eliot had a dim view of this ubiquitous symbol of British modernity. Urbanisation, enabled by the Tube, led to what Eliot called in "East Coker" a "mental emptiness [and] the growing terror of nothing to think about /... [U]nder ether, the mind is conscious but conscious of nothing" (20-22). In "Burnt Norton", he

landscape into cultured spaces was a direct consequence of the subsequent industrial revolutions Britain was to undergo in the next two centuries (“The Evolution of London” *The Guardian*). Eliot’s cynical portrayal of the London Underground then suggests that nature was under siege, as urbanisation and population growth encroached unceremoniously into the countryside, and pollution plagued the city. While environmental destruction in *The Waste Land* lacks the sound and the fury we find in *The Glass Palace*, environmental destruction in the poem is a more meticulous strangling act, as nature draws back in the face of human expansion.

Eliot mourns the destruction of green spaces, as he saw nature as the last sacred space of original innocence and epistemic unity in a despoiled world. This respect Eliot has for nature is one that we find not just in *The Waste Land*, but across his entire creative and critical oeuvre. In “Ash-Wednesday”, Eliot’s first long poem after his conversion to Anglicanism, Eliot compares the world we live in to both the fertile Promised Land and the Garden of Eden. Drawing from Ezekiel, Eliot points out that this world “is the land... [of] our inheritance”¹⁶ (54). Being stewards of the land, Eliot suggests that “[a] wrongful attitude towards nature implies, somewhere, a wrong attitude towards God, and the consequence is inevitable doom (Eliot *Christian Society* 62). The metaphor of “fear in a handful of dust” (Eliot “The Waste Land” 30) thus takes on literal meaning as it reflects Eliot’s dismay not merely at the crumbling edifice of Western civilisation, but also a fear that industrialisation would turn the English landscape into a desert. For Eliot, maintaining a holistic relationship with nature points at the last possibility of epistemic wholeness in the profane world falling apart from modernity, urbanisation, and indeed, the decay of *imperium romanum*. As Didac

compares the interior of an Underground train to a grey waste land, as men with pinched faces sat amongst “bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind/ that blows before and after time” (Eliot 15-16). In “Choruses from ‘The Rock’”, his speaker says that “the desert is squeezed into the tube-train next to you” (Eliot 72). The Underground symbolised for Eliot the barren mental and environmental landscape of British modernity.

¹⁶ Ezekiel 48: 29: “This is the land which ye shall divide by lot unto the tribes of Israel for inheritance” (NKJV).

Cubedo correctly points out, “[n]ature... reminds people in the Waste Land of past happier times... accentuating the loss of an idealised paradise, gone forever” (60). Eliot’s appeal to an unsullied unity of nature, whether pristine wilderness or pastoral peace, is therefore for the modern man the last “way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (Eliot “Ulysses, Order and Myth” 177-78) when all other options to regain a coherent world are exhausted.

In the attempt at imagining the possibility of environmental regeneration, Eliot invokes the character of the Fisher King, one of two principal mythological speakers in *The Waste Land* (the other being Tiresias). While there are many versions of the medieval Arthurian legend, most tellings of the tale present the Fisher King as a wounded guardian of the Holy Grail. Like Oedipus, the Fisher King rules over a blighted land, and it is only with the healing of his wound can the land be restored to fertility. The search for the Grail and the healing of the Fisher King with the achievement of the Grail, usually by Percival or Galahad, is thus regarded by most scholars of medieval literature as symbolic of ancient vegetation rituals (Weston 75)¹⁷. The appearance of the Fisher King in *The Waste Land* points at Eliot’s hope for “the restoration to fruitfulness of a Waste Land” (Weston 21) that was Britain.

In *The Waste Land*, the Fisher King is found musing by the bank of the Thames, waiting for the arrival of the seekers of the Sangreal to heal him:

¹⁷Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, which Jessie L. Weston drew extensively on in *From Ritual to Romance*, discusses of the ubiquity and function of vegetation rituals in ancient societies and communities: They were “a conception which readily present itself to men in every stage of savagery and civilisation: and the vastness of the scale on which this ever-recurring decay and regeneration take place, together with man’s most intimate dependence on it for subsistence, combine to render it the most impressive annual occurrence in nature... It is no wonder that a phenomenon so important, so striking, and so universal should, by similar ideas, have given rise to similar rites in many lands” (302a). Such vegetation rites in ancient societies, including Greek and Celtic societies, were thus pseudo-magical rites where the ancients hoped indirectly to influence both human fertility and seasonal renewal of the earth (Frazer 290b). In the Grail Legend (and *The Waste Land*), this rite is represented by the pilgrimage for the Sangreal, as well as the subsequent healing of the Fisher King by Percival or Galahad.

I sat upon the shore

Fishing, with the arid plain behind me

Shall I set my lands in order?

(Eliot 423-25)

The Fisher King's question is rhetorical, however, as there are, like Sodom and Gomorrah, no virtuous men to be found in London. Hollow men of the British Empire would swarm soullessly about the capital, consumed by their trivial pursuits (Eliot "The Waste Land" 62-63), but there was no one who could achieve the Grail, heal the King, and lift the curse from the land. Instead, we are treated in the next lines of the poem to the crowning image of imperial ruin, as the Fisher King then sinisterly notes from his perch by the river that "the bridge which stood for five and a half centuries until the 1820s and [which] was one of the wonders of Europe" (Ricks and McCue 615), was "falling down falling down falling down" (Eliot "The Waste Land" 426). The non-fulfilment of fertility rituals suggests "an inability to invoke symbolic powers of regeneration" (Berry 4). The material corruption and urban ennui have alienated the West from the natural world, and the way to environmental regeneration, Eliot seems to suggest, is not to be found in the cultural legacy of the West.

The Turn to the East: "The Fire Sermon" and the End of Desire

The failure of vegetation rituals, despite their deep roots in esoteric and shamanistic European tradition, leads Eliot to turn to Eastern religion in seeking a way towards holistic regeneration and reconciliation between the human and non-human world. Mired as they are in its culture of consumption, Geoffrey Berry points out, European traditions lack the vitalising force for a rejuvenation of the natural world. "The way modernist[s] turned beyond

contemporary conditions of urban existence—either to exotic cultures or ancient rites—indicate the symbolic and ecological bankruptcy of its own mechanized vision of regenerative powers” (Berry 6). Noting the impotency of Western culture, even in its ancient rites, to heal its alienation between the human and the natural world, Ezra Pound, Eliot’s mentor and editor, had likewise “attempted to incorporate wisdom from a multitude of cultures, who sought, long before the notion became fashionable, to break with the tradition of Occidental ethnocentrism” in searching for solution to European epistemic problems (Bernstein 145). And Eliot himself has pointed out the importance of delving into Buddhist thought for healing in *The Waste Land*. In the “Notes on The Waste Land”, Eliot pointedly provides the key to reading *The Waste Land* as a poem of hope rather than a poem that bleakly imagines this world snuffed out in a suffocated whimper: he points out in the notes that he had prepared for book publication with the poem that “[t]he complete text of Buddha’s Fire Sermon... [is a text that] corresponds in importance to the Sermon on the Mount”¹⁸ (Eliot “Notes on the Waste land” 75).

It is then to the words of the Buddha’s Fire Sermon that we must now turn, in order to decode Eliot’s solution on how humans might realise a relation of interconnection and interdependency with the natural world. The Fire Sermon, known more formally as the *Adittapariyaya Sutta*, is a discourse the Buddha delivers to his followers in the months following his enlightenment. It concerns the cause of human suffering and the Buddha’s teaching on the method that would aid one to achieve liberation from suffering.

In this particular sutta, the Buddha teaches that suffering is caused by humans’ egocentric desire for living vicariously, an innate Thoreauvian drive to “live deep and suck out all the marrows of life” (69). The suffering man is a man who is burning with a lusty

¹⁸ The poem, originally published in *The Dial*, a literary magazine, did not carry the notes to the poem. The notes were added to the poem partly because Eliot wanted to give his readers a key to access its immense difficulty, partly so that the total number of pages would come up to 32 in print, which was then long enough to be published in book form (Eliot’s qtd in Rainey 97).

desire for life, which is unfortunately the cause of his entrapment in samsara. The Buddha tells us that human beings suffer because we

Bur[n] with the fire of lust, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion. I say
it is burning with birth, ageing and death, with sorrows, with lamentations,
with pain, with grief, with despairs. (Ricks and McCue 640)

Our access to these egocentric emotions is what makes us who we are as people; they might be universal human experiences, but we also define ourselves according to our experience of samsara. We are who we are as the sum of our experiences of lust, hate, pain and other lived experience. As such, according to the Fire Sermon, selfhood manifests where one defines himself in relation to his deep desire for the experiences of living. This egocentricism is the cause of humanly suffering.

Now, this sutta that Eliot has referenced in *The Waste Land* is noted for its emphasis on the sensational, suggesting that our primary access to our egocentric conceptualisation of our identity derives from our senses. These sensational means by which we access the world is the primary cause of human suffering:

The ear is burning, the sounds are burning...

The nose is burning, odours are burning...

The tongue is burning, flavours are burning...

The body is burning, tangibles are burning...

(Ricks and McCue 640)

The cause of human suffering, then, according to Buddhist thought, is rooted in sensational fervour; a passionate greed for sensational gratification or fulfilment. Only by the extinguishing of desire can there be the cessation of suffering.

For Eliot, this greed, reflected in the modern desire for material consumption, was the malaise affecting his Londoners and the Western civilisation. To escape from the “[b]urning burning burning” (“The Waste Land” 308) experienced by the speaker of “The Fire Sermon”, Eliot draws on the Fire Sermon’s theme of quenching sensational egocentric desires, and suggests that people must jettison their modern lifestyle of consumption and sense of entitlement towards consumption if they are to gain release from the suffering from the materialism of modernity.

If we are, as the Fire Sermon suggests, defined by our sensational wants, this giving up of egocentric modern desire that Eliot calls for in *The Waste Land* amounts to a radical depersonalisation of the self. This is a matter that the poem seeks to enact in its very narrative construction, where the bricolage of disparate and polyglot voices in the poem resist any single attributable source of articulation¹⁹. Indeed, this depersonalisation the poem advocates is very much in line with what Arne Naess has argued for in his sense of what it means to commit oneself to a deep ecological lifestyle. For Naess, deep ecology is both a political strategy and a personal system of belief. On the political level, as we saw in the earlier chapter, Naess suggests that a fundamental change in our ideological system must take place if we are to achieve deep ecological goals. However, any change in societal systems must first reflect a change in the beliefs of individuals, as we come to realise our place as members of the world, and act according to the implications of this realisation. This is what Charles A. Reich means when he notes that in *The Greening of America* that ecological change must

¹⁹ Reading *The Waste Land* for the first time, John Peale Bishop found himself unnerved by the ghostly, disparate voices of the poem, writing that they “ma[d]e [his] flesh creep”. Lawrence Rainy argues that the reason why *The Waste Land* is uncannily creepy is because the poem “is uttered by a voice that lacks any clear or obvious origin; it violates our acquired habit of assigning sound to an identifiable source, or voice to an identifiable speaker” (107). In other words, the disembodied speaker(s) of *The Waste Land* makes readers uncomfortable because the poem’s narration bucks egocentric literary conventions.

“originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure as its final act” (2). For Naess, our place in the world has a remarkable ring of Buddhist philosophy to it. He points out that “[s]elf-realization in its absolute maximum is ... the mature experience of oneself in diversity” (“Ecosophy T” 224). This statement might seem paradoxical, but it points at the necessity of surrendering our contemporary anthropocentric and egocentric worldview, a relinquishment of personal wants and desires, and a recognition of one’s place in a larger frame of things. Put another way, in the words of Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha* as he describes the Atman and the Brahman, we must come to see ourselves like the stone which “will, after a certain time, perhaps turn into soil, and will turn from soil into a plant or animal or human being. ... It might be able to become a human being and a spirit in the cycle of transformation... [Therefore, while] this stone is a stone, it is also god, it is also Buddha” (131). Such a view of oneness with the world breaks down the Cartesian mind/matter dualism, and conveys an interconnectedness to, and belonging in, nature. It de-emphasizes the place of humans as the absolute masters of the natural world, and instead re-situates humans as equal members of the ecosystem.

The practical implication of this cessation of desire Eliot envisioned in “The Fire Sermon” is a reduction of human consumption, and an injunction to live within our ecological means. In contemporary terms, this would mean, according to the deep ecologist Bill Devall, that “people [must be] called upon to reduce their rate of reproduction ... or by killing humans” (“Overpopulation and Deep Ecology”). It is a vision of human apocalypse, as it calls for us to turn away from what Walt Whitman has diagnosed as “the procreant urge of the world” (2), turn against our instinct for species survival. In doing so, natural populations, which are presently supporting an unsustainable human population, will be able to recover from human-caused destruction (Devall “Overpopulation and Deep Ecology”). Such a point of view might seem misanthropic from an anthropocentric position, but is

perhaps merely the population management of another species out of many if we adopt the view of human non-exceptionalism. This philosophy does not mean that humans are struck out of the equation of life, but rather, we integrated into part of the ecosystem—we inherit the world equally, and share with other organisms equal, not more, rights to seek our own ends.

In this way, *The Waste Land* aligns with *The Glass Palace*'s (and Arne Naess') sentiments that the natural world will thrive with the removal of the human from the land. Indeed, the poem expresses a causal indifference, if not cheerful optimism, towards the expelling of humans from the natural world. This vision of human apocalypse is of course already partially *fait accompli* in the years Eliot was composing *The Waste Land*, as Western society comes to terms with the unprecedented human and environmental costs of Great War, where millions had died and the natural landscape had been deeply scarred by trench warfare along the Western Front (Mueller 44). This dark vision of human apocalypse is reflected in the poem when the broken narrative strands of the poem rallies, through his speaker Tiresias, in prophesying that a day will eventually come when "[t]he river [Thames] bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends/ Or other testimony of summer nights... [when] the loitering heirs of City directors [have] departed, leav[ing] no address" (Eliot "The Waste Land" 177-79, 180)²⁰. In these images of a world where "death had undone so many" (Eliot "The Waste Land" 63), where there is no longer any trace of human presence in the environment, and where humans no longer blight or pollute the land, the natural world will begin to recolonise the earth. Rats will again crawl through the long grass beside the Thames (Eliot "The Waste Land" 187-88). Indeed, by invoking the celebratory rite of spring in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* amidst the disappearance of the human population, *The Waste Land* points to the optimistic

²⁰ Tiresias was a Theban prophet who had the gift of foresight. While he speaks in cryptic maxims, his pronouncements were invariably correct. Eliot's allusion to Tiresias is significant as the prophet is a character who embodies the truth in classical texts such as *Oedipus Rex* and *The Odyssey*, and we expect the same truthfulness from him in *The Waste Land*. While the verse structure and narrative content of the poem, which parallels Tiresias's gnomic predictions, seem to suggest obfuscation by the speaker, the allusion to Tiresias and his manner of speaking actually gives credibility to the claim of a future where humans have been removed from the landscape.

possibility of the rejuvenation of the natural world. April might be the cruellest of months as it “breed[s]/ [L]ilacs out of the dead land” (Eliot “The Waste Land” 1-2, 4), but the only cruelty is the one dealt to humans and our civilisation. For Eliot, this is a vision of nature recovering in a post-apocalyptic post-human world. He imagines that the end of European civilisation would lead to a world where humans have a diminished role, but setting aside egocentric human concerns, not necessarily an unhappy one.

Eliot was of course no Buddhist (although there are reports of him being an ascetic), and did not strictly eschew sensational pleasures²¹. However, his turn to *Adittapariyaya Sutta* as succour for the modern condition suggests his belief in the need for a reining-in of passions. For Eliot, the discontent of modern civilisation stems from its insatiable demand for the gratification of material pleasure. By providing the key to the relieving of modern suffering as a cessation of materialistic desire that the West has come to expect as an entitlement from its colonisation of the East and its industrialisation, *The Waste Land* is what David Gilcrest calls “a prototype of the remedial or therapeutic poem” (9), a poem of rejuvenation for the environment after the apocalypse.

Indeed, Eliot remains hopeful that if “the aridity that marks *The Waste Land* throughout represents the failure of ... [Western] rites of regeneration” (Berry 2), then succour eventually comes in the form of “a flash of lightning ... [and] a damp gust/ bringing rain” (Eliot “The Waste Land” 393-94). Towards the close of the poem, the waste lands of the poem, radically altered by the removal of humans from the landscape, are restored to fertility in a rain of Buddhist benediction. If the poem’s form in parts of the poem follows after European literary tradition of the epic and the lyric, the resonant words at the close of the *The Waste Land*,

²¹ “Friends said that he looked “10 years younger” (“hard, spry, a glorified boy scout,” Virginia Woolf observed) upon his return to England in June 1933, but in private Eliot was committing himself to an ascetic, prolonged solitude (Woolf: 178) ... At St. Stephen’s Church, where he attended daily prayer services, he met and befriended Eric Cheetham, an Anglican priest who offered him a place to stay in his presbytery. The austere living conditions at 9 Grenville Place conformed to Eliot’s increasingly ascetic tastes and his desire for a chastened daily routine of reflection, prayer, and atonement” (Cuda 10).

Shantih Shantih Shantih (Eliot 433)

which Eliot describes as “a formal ending to an Upanishad” (“Notes on *The Waste Land*” 77), unifies the fragmentary voices of the poem into a coherent invocation for a “[p]eace that passeth [the] understanding” (“Notes on *The Waste Land*” 77) of humans. The poem, by drawing on the form of a Buddhist religious text, is transformed into a prayer for peace that is larger than us, that is universal and diverse, humanistic and ecological, like Siddhartha’s Atman or the Buddha’s Om.

The Waste Land is a poem envisioning apocalypse, but it is not a fatalistic poem. In ending the poem on a note of invocation for Buddhist peace, Eliot was keen to suggest a way forward for people in a post-apocalyptic world. “The apocalyptic mode”, Eleanor Cook points out, “is useful, but not for long. It provides ... no working pattern for living in this world” (354). Eliot is interested in providing a working pattern for living in this world, and the final words of the poem transform *The Waste Land* from an elegy for a wasted natural world into a prayer in supplication for the regeneration of the nature in a post-human world. If humans are to be part of this world, they can no longer be dominators of the natural world, but must integrate holistically into the ecosystem. “The Fire Sermon” section of *The Waste Land* provides precisely one such way in which we might do so.

When we think about modernism and/or high modernism, one text that almost invariably comes to the forefront of our thoughts, is probably *The Waste Land*. Rivalled perhaps only by James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, many critics consider the two texts published in the annus mirabilis of 1922 the acme of Western literary modernism. Emphatically European in their form and outlook, *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* articulate what Gilbert Seldes calls “a complete expression of the spirit which will be ‘modern’ for the next generation” (qtd in North *Reading 1922* 3) of Western readers. Set primarily in Europe and exploring 20th

century European lived experiences, they are viewed as European modernist texts *par excellence*.

However, by reading *The Waste Land* with *The Glass Palace* as a point of departure, by drawing the historical connections and thematic similarities of apocalypse and deep ecology between the two works, we dispel any notion that Western modernism is an insular event privy only to Europe and North America. Not only do we find the roots of Western modernity, its wealth, its urbanity, its decay, its consumerism, and its environmental woes, inextricably tied to its imperial project, the texts of Western modernism like *Siddhartha* and *The Waste Land* find their very compositional inspirations and philosophies from non-Western provenances. A deep ecological read of *The Waste Land* as a poem of apocalypse reveals the relation between Western modernity and its many global connections. This ecological international character of *The Waste Land* thus challenges the long-held view of modernism as a 20th century Western aesthetic movement.

**And the Grass Shall Inherit the Earth: The Indifference of Nature in Virginia Woolf's
*To the Lighthouse***

“An English Novelist of Manners”? Virginia Woolf's and the Garden as Cultured Space

In the previous chapters on *The Glass Palace* and *The Waste Land*, we explored the ways in which Amitav Ghosh and T. S. Eliot set out the clear connection between modernism/ modernity and European colonialism. For both writers, colonialism had a direct influence, detrimental or beneficent, on their societies' modernisation, and their works stand as testimony to that influence. But not all modernist works signpost the absolute centrality of their modernisation to the Western imperial enterprise. If T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is a 'high modernist' text that displays a remarkable degree of awareness of the way colonialism has shaped European modernism/ modernity and the modern environment, it is perhaps worthwhile considering how, when the colonial other is deliberately and carefully removed from the discourse of modernism and modernity, the repressed colonial subject nevertheless returns in quiet ways in the literature. In this vein, I want to turn briefly to Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* as a study of how an ongoing dialectic between modernism/ modernity and colonialism is sustained in Woolf's writing, despite her ostensible silence on the latter topic.

Woolf's writings, unlike that of Eliot or Ezra Pound, are not typically seen as exhibiting international character. As Bonnie Kime Scott has noted, "Woolf [herself had] never voyaged out into the geography of the ... British Empire" in her lifetime (136), and in line with her intimate attachment to London, Woolf's settings are almost always recognisably, insularly, British: Clarissa Dalloway's Westminster, the Ramsays' summer house in the Isle of Skye, Jacob Flanders's Cornwall and Cambridge, are all familiar English settings. When her characters travel, they are tourists; never quite comfortable overseas, and always pining for their inevitable return to the heart of the Empire. Orlando, for instance,

travels to Constantinople as an ambassador representing King Charles II to the Turkish court. Despite her subsequent adventures around Asia Minor, and her acceptance and appreciation of many foreign customs and habits, Orlando is unable to find peace anywhere but in her manor houses in London or Kent. In this sense, Woolf's characters, like herself, have a Socratic attachment to the intimate polis of London, to which their identities are inseparably linked. Woolf's affinity for London has led to Hugh Kenner, in his essay "The Making of the Modernist Canon", cutting her out from his modernist canon, precisely because he saw her as "an English novelist of manners, writing village gossip from a village called Bloomsbury for her English readers" (57). In other words, Kenner found Woolf's voice too provincial, too English, to be truly modernist; she lacked the international vision of a Mann, or Eliot, or Pound.

Indeed, *To the Lighthouse* seems representative of Woolf's work as an "English novelist of manners". Set between 1910 and 1920, *To the Lighthouse* is a *kunstlerroman* of Lily Briscoe, a guest at the Ramsay family's summer house in the Hebrides. As Lily struggles to develop her art in the pastoral peace of the Ramsays' garden, things are afoot in the world. The British imperial project was in full swing, and "[b]y the beginning of World War I, nearly a quarter of the earth's surface and more than a quarter of the world's population were under British domination" (Greenblatt et al 1830). The Anglo-Boer War had just concluded, and a new trade war was brewing in Europe²². At the same time, Irish nationalism in this period had reached breaking point, with the Easter Rising erupting in 1916, followed by the Partition of Ireland in 1921. Gandhi had started the Non-Cooperation Movement in India in 1920, after successfully leading the South African Indian nationalist movement against the

²² The Anglo-Boer war was a war fought between Great Britain and the Boer republics of South Africa. Lasting two years and seven months, the war ended in 1902 with the British successfully "establish[ing] political and economic control over the Boer republics" (Greenblatt et al 1830). The Orange Free State and Transvaal of Africa were incorporated into the British empire as colonies. Rather tellingly, the somewhat neutrally named Anglo-Boer War is today called by the Boers as the 'Second Freedom War'. (Robinson 11)

Many late Victorian and early modernist intellectuals, including Woolf's Bloomsbury Set, were sufficiently clear-sighted on the horrors of European imperialism. They saw the Anglo-Boer war as an act of colonial aggression and protested vigorously against it. (Greenblatt et al 1830)

British in 1914. Egypt gained its independence from Britain in 1922. Maps of the British Empire were constantly being redrawn in the timeframe in which *To the Lighthouse* is set. This backdrop of colonial expansion and contraction is defining of Woolf's modernity, yet the dominant concerns of *To the Lighthouse* seem to reflect none of these tumultuous international affairs, even as the amount of sunset the British Empire experienced waxed and waned. Rather, the novel's main interest appeared to be art and creativity, love and loss, Bergsonian time, with a healthy amount of critique of patriarchal domination thrown into the mix. Mentions of colonial domination and exploitation are peripheral (as a passing thought, Mrs Ramsay briefly acknowledged that men "negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance" (*To the Lighthouse* 6), before returning to her reflection on the rightfulness of patriarchal order), never direct, and never as a matter that seemed to fully capture the narrator's attention. In an age where "a decisive shift in the rationale behind the British Empire and a new need to enunciate its reasons for being" were being sought (North *Reading* 1922 7), Woolf's seeming reticence in addressing the issues of the wider world, particularly of British imperialism, might lead us into the temptation of reading her as a provincial writer who had little to say about the affairs of the world.

What Kenner fails to consider in his paper, however, is the careful engineering of this seeming provincialism in Woolf's writing. Woolf's construction of her local voice depends precisely on the intentional and careful exorcising of the colonial other in her writing. Unlike the red flag Eliot prominently raises with his reference to Conrad's barges, Woolf is meticulous in not representing imperialism directly. In *To the Lighthouse*, we find Woolf carefully steering her narration away from topics on British imperial conquest through her presentation of the Ramsays' garden, nested in the picturesque Hebrides, as an inviolable and insular English space where the foreign cannot intrude. In this scene, Mr Ramsay is stalking about his garden, thundering out praise of British might from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's silly

propagandistic (and to some, patriotic) poem, “The Charge of the Light Brigade”. The charge described in the poem refers to the massacre of six hundred members of the British Light Cavalry during the Crimean War, a war the British fought against the Russian Empire to defend her territorial interests on the Continent and in Asia Minor²³. Yet despite the tragedy that befell the Light Brigade being directly caused by the incompetence of British war commanders in the Battle of Balaclava, both Tennyson and Mr Ramsay’s chief takeaway from the charge was British valour. As Tennyson writes, and Mr Ramsay repeats:

When can their glory fade?

O the wild charge they made!

All the world wondered.

Honour the charge they made!

Honour the Light Brigade,

Noble six hundred!

(50-55)

The charge ought to bring to Mr Ramsay’s mind, amongst other things, the imperial motive associated with British involvement in the Crimean War, if not the utter foolishness of the charge itself. Yet both Tennyson and Mr Ramsay deliberately overlook the historical context of imperial ambition in their insistent assertion of English glory in the war—a stubborn refusal to acknowledge the imperial foundations of the conflict. The garden, where Mr

²³ The Crimean War was a war fought between the Russian Empire against an alliance of the Ottomans, the French, the British, and the Sardinians. Beginning as a disagreement between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, the British Empire joined the war against the Russians to repel Russian expansionary aggression.

Six hundred members of the Light Brigade were slaughtered in the Battle of Balaclava due to a miscommunication in the British chain of command. The Brigade was mistakenly deployed against a vastly superior Russian force, and was annihilated.

The losses at the Battle of Balaclava was such a disaster, and so turned the British public against the Crimean War, that Prime Minister George Hamilton-Gordon was forced to resign. In this light, Mr Ramsay’s reading of Tennyson’s poem as an assertion of British might and valour can only be regarded as ironic.

Ramsay, assured and sovereign, boldly professes these views, is then a self-contained space where “all his vanity, all his self-satisfaction in his own splendour” (Woolf *To the Lighthouse* 34) is encapsulated. The same could be said of the British Empire. The summer holiday home with its manicured garden, like the poem Mr Ramsay shouts, epitomises British imperial complacency, even as Woolf skirts around the topic of imperialism. As Rob Nixon points out, “[t]he idea of the nation as a garden idyll into which neither labour nor violence intrudes” is encapsulated by the British summer house and its garden. “To stand as a self-contained national heritage landscape, English pastoral has depended on the screening out of colonial spaces and histories” (196), and Woolf’s gardens are typical of such gardens. The garden as a cultured space is carefully curated, artfully pruned, to keep the British imperial enterprise out of sight, if not out of mind. The omission of British colonialism is an epistemic strategy in which Woolf curtails direct discourse on the topic, and not out of the insularity that Kenner charges against her.

Indeed, gardens are so symbolic of the English that, like in *To the Lighthouse*, they appear in both *The Waste Land* and *The Glass Palace* to mark out English spaces. All three texts suggest that gardens are not merely benign symbols of Britain, but symbolic of aggressive British imperialism. In *The Waste Land*, the English garden appears in Eliot’s oblique reference to Rupert Brooke’s “The Soldier”, with the spring tubers that probe deep into the earth of the Western Front a reminder that “there’s some corner of a foreign field/ That is forever England” (Brooke 2-3). Such gardens serve to reinforce what Homi Bhabha calls the sense of a “‘deep’ nation[,] crafted in chalk and limestone” (319). The gardens of *The Waste Land* take over a land that did not belong to them, making it their own, so that English “hearts [can rest in] peace... under an English heaven” (Brooke 14). On the other hand, In *The Glass Palace*, Arjun’s battalion accidentally stumbles upon an English bungalow with a carefully manicured English garden:

It was a squat, two-storied bungalow with a tiled roof. It stood in the centre of a clearing that was almost perfectly square. The clearing was surrounded on all sides by straight, orderly stands of rubber trees. A gravelled driveway snaked across a well mowed lawn... The garden was dotted with burst of colours: the flowers were mostly English varieties—hollyhocks, snapdragons, hydrangeas. At the back there was a tall jacaranda tree with a wooden swing suspended from a branch... There were beds planted with vegetables—tomatoes, carrots, cauliflowers. (Ghosh 356)

Even in the midst of the colony, the garden sets the master apart from the colonial subject as it demarcates a cultured space beyond the barbarism and uncivility of the subaltern. Eliot and Ghosh, like Woolf, acknowledge that gardens and the houses they garland, are privileged enclaves, with cultural boundaries carefully set up to exclude the other. In *The Waste Land*, gardens carve out a private space of Englishness in a foreign land, whether that land was in Germany or Africa. And in *The Glass Palace*, we learn that just behind the enclosure set up by the rubber trees are the teeming masses of plantation workers, kept out of sight by the garden and its perimeter fencing. Garden spaces are not merely self-contained symbols of Britishness in all three texts, but intertextually, they symbolise British imperialism by functioning as a screen to exclude colonial other.

Virginia Woolf's use of the cultured garden in *To the Lighthouse* signals her engagement with British imperialist ambition as part of her modernist ethos. The destruction of the garden as cultured space then represents Woolf's quiet way of acknowledging and condemning the colonial enterprise that is so defining of British modernity. As such, while it is not incorrect "to read *To the Lighthouse* [simply] as a ... mediation on time and art, morality and creativity", as many critics do, reading it simply as such "is to overlook the peculiarities of history... that plays an important part in the novel" (Briggs xi). Our

subsequent study of the deep ecological philosophy we find in the garden of the Ramsays' Hebridean summer house shall show Woolf's quiet but unequivocal critique of the clear link between European conquest and its modernism.

Deaths in Parentheses: Nature's indifference to human's lives

The writing of Virginia Woolf has always been rich in natural imagery. This richness has not, until recently, received much critical attention. However, unlike the present drought of ecocritical studies on Eliot's work, there is a nascent but slowly growing body of studies on nature in Virginia Woolf's writing. Bonnie Kim Scott's *In the Hollow of the Wave: Virginia Woolf and Modernist Uses of Nature* is a feminist approach to Virginia Woolf's deployment of natural imagery. Christina Alt's *Virginia Woolf and the Study of Nature*, on the other hand, explores the modernist fascination with new scientific methods, and how Woolf appropriates the methods of the natural sciences in her literary experiments. These studies, however, do not approach nature as an entity in-itself—nature is deployed to explore Woolf's politics and philosophy, not Woolf's view on nature itself. In this light, the word choice of “use” in Scott's subtitle of her book is telling. It points again to an instrumental view of nature, where nature is used as a rhetorical motif, “contribut[ing] to or complicat[ing] feminist, modernist, and environmentalist understandings and agendas” (194). In Scott's estimation, Woolf's representations of nature have inevitable political associations to liberation theory.

In *To the Lighthouse*, however, the well-being of nature is set out in clear juxtaposition to the needs of humankind and of the British civilisation. As with *The Glass Palace* and *The Waste Land*, nature in *To the Lighthouse* has agency and moral standing independent of humans' demand on it; it has its own interests that it aggressively pursues.

Indeed, in the “Time Passes” chapter of *To the Lighthouse*, nature is remarkably sentient, and sometimes behaves almost anthropomorphically in the assertion of its agency. After the Ramsays abandon their summer house during the Great War, wildlife aggressively stages a takeover of the cultured space of the Ramsays’ house and garden. Employing a language of intentionality, Woolf’s imbues her personified nature with agency, suggesting that the aggressive re-colonisation is no mere accident but deliberate acts of rebellion:

The house was left; the house was deserted. It was left like a shell on a sandhill to fill with dry salt grains now that the [human] life had left it. ... Toads had nosed their way in. ... A thistle thrust itself between the tiles in the larder. The swallows nested in the drawing-room; rats carried off this and that ... Tortoise-shelled butterflies burst from chrysalis and pattered their life out on the window-pane. Poppies sowed themselves among the dahlias; the lawn waved with long grass; giant artichokes towered among roses; a fringed carnation flowered among the cabbages; while the gentle tapping of a weed at the window had become, on winters’ nights, a drumming from sturdy trees and thorned briars which made the whole room green in summer.

(Woolf *To the Lighthouse* 157)

Freed from human curatorial tyranny, nature boldly asserts its right to exist. Indeed, the passage recalls Arne Naess’s argument that “the flourishing of non-human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease” (“Some Philosophical Aspects” 49). It is only with the removal of the Ramsays and their guests from the landscape does nature explodes in vitality and diversity. Wildlife conquers not merely the house, but purposefully invades the cultured, instrumental space of the vegetable patch and the manicured English garden. The produce

grown by the Ramsays for eating, and the potted plants that the Ramsays take pleasure in, are overrun with the riot of nature breaking out, defiant and no longer restrained by human curtailment. As John Elder and Robert Finch point out, Woolf “was alert ... to the terrifying and redemptive independence of nature from human rationales and needs” (372). The removal of cultural barriers gives nature the autonomy to rejuvenate from the oppression of humans.

Indeed, in *To the Lighthouse*, there is again the dark vision that it is human apocalypse that allows nature to inherit the earth. In the novel, humans are no longer the centre of things, post-apocalypse. If novelistic narrative conventions typically emphasise human actions and achievements, Woolf subverts this convention by de-focusing her narration on people. In the “Time Passes” section of the novel, the overwhelming part of the narration turns towards describing nature’s actions and behaviours. If Woolf’s use of free indirect discourse in earlier works such as *Mrs Dalloway* serves to explore the meandering operations of the human mind and human consciousness, the use of free indirect discourse and parentheses in *To the Lighthouse* and “Time Passes” relegates humans to the narrative margins, as the narrative point of view of the section attends to the what we might describe as the mind of nature. Julia Briggs has points out that Woolf parentheses are “a device used throughout the novel to convey different levels of awareness” (xix), and the use of parentheses in “Time Passes” not only suggests nature possessing consciousness and awareness, but that this awareness is remarkably blasé towards human loss of life as it pursues its own end. Indeed, in this section of the novel, characters both major and minor die, with each death sandwiched between a flurry of growth by nature. These deaths are told to us only as a narrative necessity, and only in parentheses and brackets to signal their marginality in the larger frame of things, for narrative continuity in the intervening time between the first and third section of the novel:

[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with child, which was indeed a tragedy, people said. They said nobody deserved happiness more.] (Woolf 151)

Indeed, we learn of Mrs Ramsay's, one of the principal characters of *To the Lighthouse*, death belatedly and only as an accident, when Mr Ramsay's somnambulistic stroll in his empty house ends in an empty hug:

[Mr. Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his hands out one dark morning, but, Mrs Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.] (Woolf 147)

And then, in the midst of all these deaths, Woolf makes a quiet gesture at the cause of the human apocalypse of the 20th century. As an aside, Woolf unobtrusively signals at the modern condition of colonisation by pointing at war for empire that removed humans from the landscape:

[A shell exploded. Twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay, whose death, mercifully, was instantaneous.] (Woolf 152)

By presenting tragic and catastrophic loss of human life as mere parenthetical distractions only worthy of an aside, the narrative conduct suggests that all the human tragedies mean nothing to nature, which goes about its business of flourishing as usual. Indeed, in the following spring, "the garden urns, causally filled with wind-blown plants, were gay as ever. Violets came and daffodils" (Woolf *To the Lighthouse* 154). A return of the repressed, as nature, so carefully pruned to in an age of British self-imagination and colonisation, overruns cultural limitations. Here, then, we have an image of the utter ruin of the English garden and the human culture it represents. "[T]he tree [is still] standing there, the flowers [is still]

standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing [of human tragedy], eyeless, and thus terrible” (Woolf *To the Lighthouse* 154). Quite indifferently, almost cheerfully, personified nature carries on about its own end in the midst of human apocalypse. As the nature writer Robert Michael Pyle points out, “Nature doesn’t care. We are but a drip of spittle on the whisker of a beast in a constellation we can’t even see. Nature has a right to care, and a sagging sack of grievances against our tenancy, but she doesn’t. Nature gets along” (876). Woolf suggests through her use of an ecocentric narrative that in a holistic, post-apocalyptic world, humans become merely a footnote in the larger workings of things.

On Writing Apocalypse: Modernist Ecostylistic and Modernist Econarrative

One perpetual crisis of any modernity is the threat of apocalypse, be it environmental apocalypse caused by modernisation or war, or the large-scale loss of human life that must inevitably follow. Our present environmental crisis, an outcome of global industrialisation and modernisation, suggests as much. However, while apocalypse and its aftermath, as we saw in previous chapters, commanded a strong hold on the imagination of earlier (particularly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, post-war) modernist artists such as Woolf and Eliot, it is oddly under-represented in contemporary modernist writing, especially when we consider its relevance to our present situation. Amitav Ghosh complains in *The Great Derangement* that the reason for the dearth of apocalyptic writing in contemporary literary fiction is because of the lack of a technique to talk about the subject. He argues that fiction that wants to be believable, wants to be taken seriously, cannot stretch readers' suspension of disbelief too far. Effective writing, for Ghosh, renders plausible settings and situations for slightly, but only slightly, unusual events to unfold. It involves a "calculus of probability" where writers tread a careful line sequencing a series of somewhat unlikely but entirely possible events into a believable tale. Yet environmental apocalypse, Ghosh points out, is inherently an event that is wildly out of the ordinary: "the weather events of this time have a very high degree of improbability... these are not ordinary times [and] the events that mark them are not easily accommodated in the deliberate prosaic world of serious prose fiction" (Ghosh *Derangement* 26). To work in the apocalyptic mode today is to run the risk of not being taken seriously, of being pushed into supposedly less serious genres of fantasy or science fiction.

Yet it appears to me that the modernists' technique of what Justyna Kostkowska calls "narrative ecology" (17) provides one such way of writing about modern environmental apocalypse without diminishing the seriousness of the work as literary fiction. In this mode,

the narration shifts from an egocentric focus to an ecocentric one. We saw in “Time Passes” how such a shift might be accomplished. Woolf positions nature’s activity as the main subject of the narrative, while her deployment of brackets and parentheses work to push human events (mostly deaths) into the narrative margins; Eliot’s lilacs breed out of dead land far from human sight and civilisation and control; the autonomy of Ghosh’s nature is one main driver of plot in *The Glass Palace*. If we accept Ghosh’s claim that

It was exactly in the period which human activity was changing the earth’s atmosphere that the literary imagination became radically centred on the human (*Derangement* 66),

modernist writers can work against this environmentally damaging convention by moving away from egocentric narratives into ecocentric ones. If all three writers have used anthropocentric language to describe the actions of nature, it does not diminish the autonomy of nature or make nature a subset of the human, as “anthropomorphic language is the only medium readily available to the narrator” (Kostkowska 18) to represent these events. Rather, the very interchangeability of terms used to describe both human and nature’s agency suggests the equality of humans and nature. In this way, nature becomes the focus of the narration, and we no longer judge the plausibility of events from a human frame, but a natural frame.

By shifting the narrative focus away from an egocentric narrative to an ecocentric one, our bar for disbelief is lower. Environmental apocalypse from natural disasters have happened regularly during the course of human history; they are unlikely but not impossible. Apocalyptic events are no longer measured on a human scale of probability, but on the scale of natural disasters, which is understandable and possible. Modernist techniques therefore have the “ability to [represent] shock[ing] and disturb[ing]” (Storey 64) events without

diminishing the seriousness of its subject. The techniques of abstraction favoured by modernist writers therefore appear to me to be a rather apt mode for representing environmental apocalypse.

I want to end this thesis with a brief discussion of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), because the way Ghosh's econarrative brings together the themes of apocalypse and deep ecology makes the novel perhaps one of the most relevant modernist work of our time. A work deeply critical of the West's continued political and economic sway on Indian modernity, *The Hungry Tide* explores the apocalyptic consequences inflicted onto the most disenfranchised members of Indian society, as the country attempts to ingratiate itself into the modern (Western) global order. In the novel, Piya is an American cetologist who travels to a rural island village in the Indian Sundarbans, Lusibari, to study Irrawaddy dolphins. As her "Conradian expedition" (Hickling 26) takes her into the heart of the global south, Piya comes to learn of the ways in which India's modernisation lead to tragic human encounters with the many violent aspects of nature.

Apocalyptic natural events sit at the centre of *The Hungry Tide*. The novel is loaded with anecdotes and records of violent climatic events: the Sundarbans is lashed by cataclysmic seasonal tempests (147); powerfully destructive tidal surges occurs in the region with alarming regularity (286-87); and devastating cyclones, such as the one Piya encounters at the end of the novel (378-90), are annual affairs in the tide country. Volatile, untamed, and perennial, apocalyptic events such as tidal surges and cyclonic winds are presented in *The Hungry Tide* as structural, inherent aspects of nature.

However, *The Hungry Tide* goes on to suggest that it is Indian modernity that sets up the conditions for apocalypse, as modernisation exposed the poorest and most vulnerable of its society to the apocalyptic weather events of the Sundarbans. The people who have come to

live in the tide country are the most disenfranchised of Indian society. Many of those living in the Sundarbans were victims of colonial mismanagement, such as the Bangladesh refugees who had nowhere else to go after Mountbatten's ill-conceived and utterly hurried Partition of India was executed (118). Others have settled in villages like Lusibari because their poverty has driven them away out of India's developed urban centres to the tide country, where "hunger and catastrophe were a way of life... [as were] floods and storms" (51, 79). Indeed, *The Hungry Tide* suggests that the harshness of life in the Sundarbans was exacerbated another (neo)colonial imperative—tiger conservation projects, implemented by the Indian government "in order to curry favour with ... Western patrons" (301)—ignored the threat posed by tigers to the hapless residents of the Sundarbans. Dispossessed of the economic and cultural benefits of modernisation, the settlers of the tide country had little social mobility, and are forced to live in a part of the world which is violently hostile to human habitation.

However, the various forces of nature that are so inimical to the residents of the Sundarbans, and more broadly to human existence, seem rejuvenating for the environment when viewed from an ecocentric perspective: the daily sweeping ebb and flow of

[t]he tides reach as far as three hundred kilometres inland and everyday thousands of acres of forest disappear, only to reappear hours later. (7)

By representing the tide in the Sundarbans as resembling the respiratory activity of a living being, Ghosh's narrative seeks to imbue the ecosystem with rhythm and vitality. The earth is not dead insensate matter, but a vivified Gaia, dynamic, sensible, and as such, inherently valuable. The novel's ecological perspective would have us "rethink concepts of meaning and accident in relation to the non-human world, and to question the reductive and human centred frameworks that depict places in nature, often rich in narrative, as the product of meaningless coincidence" (Plumwood "Active Voice" 124).

Indeed, while Ghosh's genre choice in writing a historical fiction enables an intimate study the history and neo-colonial politics that led to the infelicitous settlement of the Sundarbans, the novel moves beyond the human story to takes on its ecocentric aspect when he "loads the pages of his novel with scientific and technical details about the ecosystem of the Sundarbans" (Weik 120), subverting the typically anthropocentric focus of storytelling. By juxtaposing human activity against a bricolage of newspapers clippings and objective chunks of scientific exposition that focus on the longer ecological history of the tide country. *The Hungry Tide* frames ephemeral human activity against what Ghosh describes as "the deep, deep time of geology" (181):

Some [islands in the Sundarbans] have lasted through recorded history while others were washed into being just a year or two ago. ...the currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily—some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before. (7)

The mutable geohistory of the Sundarbans, and indeed of the geological world, resist any cartographical efforts or any attempt to fit into an orderly human historical narrative. It precedes human settlement, documentation, language, and memory, and operates according to logic of renewal that precedes human rationalisation. It is activity has always, and will always take place, independent of the meanings humans might ascribe to it. Like Langston's Hughes' prehistoric rivers, Ghosh's presents the human habitation of the earth as merely part, and not centre, of the deeper history of the world.

Indeed, Ghosh is keen to emphasise the extent to which human culture and civilisation is dependent on the processes of nature. If the Sundarban's tidal action of terraforming seems peripheral to human history, Ghosh uses a documentary-like narrative voice to suggest that its

geo-history nevertheless has an invisible and largely unacknowledged, but crucial connection to modern Indian development:

When the tides create new land, overnight mangroves begin to gestate, and if the conditions are right they can spread so fast as to cover a new island in a few short years. ...

The mangroves were Bengal's defence against the bay... they served as a barrier against nature's fury, absorbing the initial onslaught of cyclonic winds, waves and tidal surges. If not for the tide country, [Bengal's] plains would have been drowned long before: it was the mangroves that kept the hinterland alive. (7, 286)

By turning the narrative gaze away from human activity to scrutinising nature's otherwise unacknowledged role in protecting human spaces (from its own unforgiving tendencies), *The Hungry Tide* credits geological and natural events for the past and continued existence of the coastal cities such as Kolkata. Even as apocalypse has unfortunately been part of the human encounter with the environment, so are we dependent on various seen and unseen, known and unknown, beneficent or deleterious, interactions with the natural world. Indeed, the span of human existence is intertwined with nature and its various processes. Ghosh's use of an ecocentric narrative sets up "the environment or bio-space as one in which human is part of the ecological and not outside or opposed to it" (Kaur 132), and reminds us that human history is constituted within a deeper natural one.

By presenting human history as one thoroughly enmeshed in the deeper natural one, the aesthetic of *The Hungry Tide* presents one narrative mode for contemporary writers to work with when they want to write about human encounters with nature (apocalyptic or otherwise). Ghosh's deployment of an ecocentric narrative balances the egocentric nature of storytelling with a respectful acknowledgement of nature's autonomy independent of

human's needs and wants. Here, then, is writing that is anti-traditional, in that it refuses conventional and cultural impulses to push nature into the narrative margins. This stylistic refusal to treat nature as insignificant white noise in the background of human existence is perhaps what makes *The Hungry Tide* a modernist environmental work of consequence.

Conclusion: Modernisms Beyond Our Comfort Zone

Doyle and Winkiel point out in the introduction to *Geomodernisms* that “the term [modernism] serves not as the centre around which ... projects get organized but as a contested and historical referent that suffers pressure from the affiliations, indifference, or antagonism of diverse twentieth-century writers and artists (5). It is the art of modernity, and modernisation is its primary impetus. By framing three different modernist texts against their modernity, this thesis aimed to demonstrate that modernism is indeed not a broad 20th century aesthetic movement based exclusively in Europe, but one with wide temporal and geographical reach.

Indeed, this thesis represents a preliminary way for us to explore the ways in which traditional models of modernism no longer fit as new modernisms spring out of industrialisation/ urbanisation/ modernisation around the world. Indeed, further research could explore not merely how modernist art is a response to modernity, but also how modernisms as aesthetic movements shape their corresponding age of industrialisation, modernisation and decolonisation.

The environmental approach to modernism which I have employed in this thesis is a fairly recent development in modernist studies. By drawing common thematic connections across different modernisms, we see the common anxieties modernising societies experience from the process of modernisation—in the instance of this thesis, a heightened awareness of nature’s independence from humans’ needs and wants. It is one of many new ways in which modernist critics are beginning to re-theorise our field as the conceptual, geographical, and temporal perimeters of the field grow. Modernism is still a work in progress, too early to be consigned as an academic model “into the museum and the academy” (Storey 64). Growing the field of modernist studies would require us to move beyond the present canon of

criticism, beyond Western modernism and its discourses. At times, this revisionism, straying so far from the canon of modernist scholarship, would make us uneasy. It might mean trawling through the old and newly published literature of modernising societies around the world, in Asia and Africa and South America, and situating these texts into a larger and more comprehensive modernism. It is library building, it will mean getting our hands dirty. As Susan Stanford Friedman puts it, “it means leaving the comfort zone for the contact zone” (Planetary 494).

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